

# **UNDERSTANDING THE EDUCATIONAL PARAPROFESSIONAL POSITION IN DISTRICT 39**

***A Report by the Wilmette Public Schools  
District 39 Community Review Committee (CRC)***

***Presented to the Wilmette Public Schools  
District 39 Board in June 2002***

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## A. Introduction/Overview/Reason for Studying this Subject

No one disputes that *the teacher* is the most important ingredient in our children's school day. But, there are times and situations when *an assistant*, working under the guidance and direction of the teacher, enhances the teacher's ability to teach and the students' ability to learn. In our district, people serving in this capacity are called "*Paraprofessionals*"<sup>1</sup> (or "parapros" for short.) In most districts in Illinois, paraprofessionals are hired to support teachers working with students who have special needs--in self-contained special education classrooms or in regular classrooms where the students with special needs are mainstreamed or in an included setting. In wealthier districts in Illinois and around the country, such as District 39 (D39), paraprofessionals are also hired to support teachers instructing in non-special education settings.

The use of paraprofessionals has grown in our district, even though the overall student population has remained relatively constant:

School Year/Category	Total # D39 Student Population	#/% of D39 Students with Special Needs/IEPs	# D39 Special Ed. Teachers	# D39 Special Ed. Parapros
2001-2002	3,435 (as of 12/2001)	505/15% (as of 12/2001)	31.5	67
1999-2000	3,434 (as of 9/1999)	476/13% (as of 12/1999)	28	50
# = % Increase	1 = 3/100ths%	29 = 6 %	3.5 = 12.5%	17 = 34%

As of the 2001-2002 school year, D39 employed approximately 100 parapros working with teachers. Of these, approximately 68% are assigned to work with students with special needs (39% in a K-4 setting and 29% in a 5-8 setting) and 32% are working in "other" types of settings in our schools. These include one parapros at each school for the resource center, computer lab, reading support and school building at large (new as of the 2000-01 school year.) In addition, each elementary school has a kindergarten parapros for each kindergarten classroom and several English as a Second Language (ESL) parapros who divide their time among the schools.

<sup>1</sup> There are several job titles, interchangeable with the term "Paraprofessional/Parapros", that all refer to the same position in a K-8 setting. These titles include: Educational Paraprofessional, Para-Educator, Paraeducator, Teaching Assistant, Classroom Aide and Instructional Aide.



In our district, paraprofessionals are hired for the school year and work between 6 and 7 1/2 hours each day when school is in session. The starting wage is between \$11.80 and \$12.90 per hour, depending on whether the employee has a high school or college degree, respectively. Wages, benefits and work rules are guided by the district's contract with a union called the Support Staff Council (SSC). **(See Section F for highlights of the contract.)** The SSC union includes all support staff in the district that are considered non-certified school personnel. In addition to paraprofessionals, the union contract covers secretaries, nurses, occupational therapists, food service workers, custodians, transportation workers and maintenance personnel. The union has about 200 members, of which approximately 50% are paraprofessionals. Annual union dues are based on how much an individual union member earns, but are about \$200 for each paraprofessional.

The SSC union contract does not differentiate the position of paraprofessional with any of the other positions, even though the paraprofessional position is the only job covered by the contract that helps deliver instruction to children. The contract does not provide a ladder of promotion or advancement for paraprofessionals based upon background, training or years of experience.<sup>2</sup> The minimum education requirement for the paraprofessional position, as with the other positions in the support staff contract, is a high school degree.

In the last three years, District 39 has implemented several initiatives aimed at improving the role of the paraprofessional.<sup>3</sup> These initiatives have included: A new four-year support staff contract starting August 1, 2001 with a raise in hourly pay and contribution by the district towards health benefits; a revised paraprofessional job description; clarification of supervision of paraprofessionals; development of criteria and procedures for paraprofessional staffing in special education; and implementation of a training program for new and ongoing paraprofessionals. Even with all of these positive changes, the rate of attrition of paraprofessionals is still about 50% annually.

The objective of our research was to obtain a picture of the current situation of paraprofessionals in our district as a foundation for future district

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<sup>2</sup> This is in contrast to our teachers' contract, which gives salary incentives to teachers with more experience and education. Instead, the SSC union has negotiated raises for all its members as a percentage increase for each year of the contract. For example, this year's raise is 3.15% for all members and last year's raise was 2.53%. D39 also has some discretion to increase the hourly rate for a paraprofessional with a special skill, such as the ability to use sign language fluently, if there is a child with that need.

<sup>3</sup> As laid out in the district's "Long Range Plan Goal #14 to "Review and Define the Role and Use of Paraprofessionals in Supporting Students and Staff."



decision-making. The hope is that the information gleaned can be used in efforts to better understand, recruit, train, support and retain our paraprofessionals. We engaged in four efforts. We conducted:

- 1) A written survey of our district's paraprofessionals.
- 2) A search of resources pertaining to paraprofessionals nationwide.
- 3) Informal phone/e-mail interviews with D39 administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals to learn what is happening with paraprofessionals in our district.
- 4) Informal phone/e-mail interviews with administrators in other districts to learn what is happening with paraprofessionals elsewhere.



## **B. Selected Findings From Our Research**

- **District 39 paraprofessionals are educated way beyond the norm in most districts. 85% of our paraprofessionals have undergraduate or master's degrees.<sup>4</sup>**
- **District 39 paraprofessionals are knowledgeable about education beyond the norm of most districts. 52% have a degree in education and/or a teaching certificate. 31% have taught in a public school at some point in their careers. 5% are retired teachers. 29% are currently working towards a teaching degree and/or teaching certification.**
- **District 39 paraprofessionals are mature adults. The average age is 40, with the largest portion of paraprofessionals (41%) aged 50-59.**
- **Only 31% of D39 paraprofessionals live in our district<sup>5</sup>, but the residency in the district of those who do averages about 20 years. And, this group tends to stay in the job longer than those living elsewhere.**
- **D39 paraprofessionals who attended newly launched in-service training sessions this year were generally positive about them.**
- **D39 paraprofessionals are still not satisfied with their hourly wages, even with the increases contained in the new SSC union contract that went into effect last year. They are, however, more positive about the contract's introduction of a district contribution to health benefits.**
- **There is a wealth of resource information about and for educational paraprofessionals that address many issues encountered by those who work in D39. Many information sources can be accessed through the Internet.**

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<sup>4</sup> In districts nationwide, most paraprofessionals have only high school degrees as their highest level of education. By contrast, in D39 only 1% of paraprofessionals have high school degrees as their highest level of education.

<sup>5</sup> Nationwide, 60% of paraprofessionals live in the district where they work. (NEA Report 1997)



## **C. Recommendations Based Upon Our Research**

- **Make a concerted effort to have *all* other educators in the district (not just those with whom paraprofessionals work) treat the paraprofessionals as "peers" so they feel respected, understood and appreciated for their contributions to educating D39 children. This may improve job satisfaction and retention of paraprofessionals at no added cost to the district.**
- **Carve out more time for paraprofessionals to collaborate and plan with the teachers. This will help provide the best instruction possible to students.**
- **Offer additional training to teachers how to supervise paraprofessionals more effectively and/or efficiently in the classroom. This will maximize the usefulness of paraprofessionals as valuable educational resources.**
- **Improve communication with paraprofessionals as part of the team, the school and the district. (Current communication is too reliant on the (already very busy) supervising teacher to be uniformly effective.)**
- **Investigate whether the impression is widespread among paraprofessionals that supervising children on the playground during recess is a "garbage assignment". If this impression is widespread, educate and support paraprofessionals in this task so that they realize it is a vital part of the school day in which children learn appropriate socializing skills.**
- **Consider the in-service topics suggested by paraprofessionals in future programming. Also, consider arranging for more interaction with paraprofessionals in different buildings (or even in different districts nationwide via the Internet) doing similar jobs to share tactics/learn from peers.**
- **To retain and motivate paraprofessionals, figure out a way to develop opportunities for promotion and advancement based upon experience, background and continued education. (This appears to be difficult within the parameters of the current support staff union's contract restrictions.)**



- **Evaluate the situation of special ed. paraprofessionals at WJH: Develop procedures, direction, guidance and modification that are more consistent with the scheduling and learning models of the junior high setting and age group.**
- **Give ESL paraprofessionals a different status, since most are functioning like teachers (and they are mostly certified.)**
- **Become known as a district that actively recruits teachers from its pool of paraprofessionals who are obtaining teacher credentials or who are already certified.**
- **Develop a paraprofessional recruitment campaign aimed at people living in the district who want to 1) work with children and 2) be on a schedule that meets their personal and/or family needs.**



## **D. Results of the Survey of Paraprofessionals in District 39:**

### ***Research Methodology:***

To query the D39 paraprofessionals, we developed a twenty-eight question survey<sup>6</sup> to highlight and evaluate issues that relate to paraprofessionals working with students in our district. To gather information, the survey included a mix of types of questions including ratings, multiple choice, open-ended questions and space for additional comments.

Prior to distribution of the survey, it was publicized to the paraprofessionals once via a notice in their mailbox inviting participation. The survey was distributed to 95<sup>7</sup> paraprofessional mailboxes in February 2002 at the district's six schools and collected two weeks later from return boxes placed in the school offices. Between the time of handing out and collecting the surveys, two reminder notices were distributed and signs were posted at each school office.

To ensure anonymity of respondents, they were not identified by name or school. Of the 95 surveys distributed to paraprofessionals' mailboxes, 59 were completed and returned which makes for a strong response rate of 62%.

### ***I. OVERVIEW OF RESPONSES BY SCHOOL AND TYPE OF PARAPRO:***

**Below are three charts comparing the numbers and percentages of district paraprofessionals versus respondents by school and type of parapro position.**

#### ***IA. RESPONSES BY SCHOOL:***

<b>SCHOOL</b>	<b># of District Paraprofessionals</b>	<b>% of District Paraprofessionals</b>	<b># of Survey Respondents</b>	<b>% of Survey Respondents</b>	<b>Response Rate</b>
<b>Central</b>	20	21%	15	25%	75%
<b>Harper</b>	16	17%	9	15%	56%
<b>McKenzie</b>	15	16%	11	19%	73%
<b>Romona</b>	13	14%	7	12%	53%
<b>Highcrest</b>	15	16%	9	15%	60%
<b>WJHS</b>	16	16%	8	14%	50%
<b>TOTAL:</b>	95	100%	59	100%	62%

<sup>6</sup> See copy of survey in Appendix.

<sup>7</sup> Although Ms. Alice Reardon, the D39 Human Resource Director, reported there were 100 educational paraprofessionals, when we distributed the surveys at each school, the count came to 95. So, the survey results are based on the 95 educational paraprofessionals at the schools who were given the survey.



**Comment:** The overall response rate to the survey is very strong at 62%<sup>8</sup>. Because of this, it is likely that the survey responses are reflective of the total population of paraprofessionals in the district. Respondents at two elementary schools (Central and McKenzie) are slightly over-represented in the survey, however.

**IB. RESPONSES BY TYPE OF PARAPRO POSITION:**

<b>TYPE OF PARAPRO</b>	<b># of this type in district<sup>9</sup></b>	<b>% of this type in district</b>	<b># of this type who responded</b>	<b>% of this type who responded</b>
Paraprofessionals working with special needs children in K-4	39	39%	24	41%
Paraprofessionals working with special needs children in 5-8	29	29%	14	24%
Other type of paraprofessional: School Building, Resource Center, Computer Lab, ESL, Reading or Kindergarten	32	32%	21	35%
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Comment:** By type of paraprofessional position, paraprofessionals working with special needs children in 5-8 are slightly under-represented in the survey results.

**IC. RESPONDENTS BY PART-TIME OR FULL-TIME WORK:**

<b>Work Amount</b>	<b>Full-time</b>	<b>Part-time</b>
<b>% of Respondents</b>	86%	14%

<sup>8</sup> This is the same as the response rate to the teacher survey conducted by the CRC in 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Source: Alice Reardon D39 Director of HR



## II. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS:

### IIA. GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

Gender	% of D39 Parapros <sup>10</sup>	% of Respondents
Female	89%	90%
Male	11%	10%
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Comment:** The parapros pool is primarily female and matched almost exactly to the respondent pool.

### IIB. MARITAL STATUS OF RESPONDENTS

Marital Status	% of Respondents
Married w/a spouse who works FT	60%
Single, never married	21%
Widowed, divorced, separated	6%
Married w/ a spouse who is not working	5%
Married w/ a spouse who works PT	4%
Married w/a spouse who is retired	4%
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Comment:** The majority of D39 parapros (60%) have a spouse who works full-time. But, 40% are single, widowed, divorced, separated or married to a spouse who is retired, works part-time or is not currently working. Benefits and a living wage may be more vital to this second group.

### IIC. AGE RANGE OF REpondENTS

Age Range:	21-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 or older	TOTAL
% of respondents	17%	10%	29%	41%	3%	100%

**Comment:** Seventy-three percent (73%) of D39 parapros, as represented by the survey respondents, are over 40 years of age. This suggests a mature group in terms of life experience prior to working in the district.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid



**IID. RESPONDENTS WHO LIVE IN D39**

<b>% Who Live in D39 (Average/ Median # of years lived in district)</b>	<b>% Who Do Not live in D39</b>
32% (19/21years)	68%

**Comment:** Although two-thirds of respondents do not live in D39, the one-third that do are long time residents with ~20 years living in the district. There might be an opportunity to actively recruit people who fit this profile as paraprofessionals in the district.

**IIIE. HOW MANY MILES/MINUTES RESPONDENTS LIVE FROM WORK**

<b># of miles</b>	<b>0-2</b>	<b>3-5</b>	<b>6-10</b>	<b>11-15</b>	<b>16+</b>
<b>% of respondents</b>	25%	22%	14%	16%	23%
<b># of mins</b>	<b>0-15</b>	<b>16-30</b>	<b>31-45</b>	<b>46-60</b>	<b>61+</b>
<b>% of respondents</b>	53%	22%	14%	9%	2%

**Comment:** Over half of paraprofessional respondents live six or more miles from work. Yet, 75% of paraprofessionals commute 30 minutes or less to work. This suggests that the paraprofessionals choose to work in D39 in part for convenience to home, considering that the average commute to work in Chicagoland is over 35 minutes.

**IIIF. HOW RESPONDENTS GET TO WORK**

<b>Car Alone</b>	<b>Mass Transit</b>	<b>Walk or Bike</b>	<b>Carpool</b>
88%	5%	5%	2%

**Comment:** Proximity to mass transit does not appear to factor into working in D39.

**III. EDUCATIONAL PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS:****IIIA. HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION**

<b>Highest level of Education</b>	<b>College Degree</b>	<b>Master's Degree</b>	<b>Some College</b>	<b>High School Graduate</b>
<b>% of respondents</b>	67%	18%	14%	1%

**Comment:** Eighty-five percent (85%) of paraprofessional respondents have a college and/or master's degree. This indicates an educated paraprofessional population that might have implications for the type of assignments and/or the methods of directing the paraprofessionals.



**IIIB. FAMILIARITY WITH TEACHING**

Percentage of respondents with a degree in education or a teaching certificate	Percentage of respondents who have worked as a teacher in a public school in the past	Percentage of respondents who are retired teachers	Percentage of respondents who are currently working towards a degree in teaching or teacher certification	Percentage of respondents who are not trained in education or teaching, but who are "very interested" in becoming a teacher
52%	31%	5%	29%	19%

**Comment:** That 1/2 of respondents have teaching degrees or certification and nearly 1/3 have taught in the public schools in the past, suggests a parapro population with a strong knowledge of education. That an additional 29% of respondents are working towards a teaching degree or certification may be an avenue to recruit teachers in the future. That nearly 1/5 of respondents are "very interested" to become teachers suggests an opportunity to cultivate their interest and retain them during their education.

**IV. WORK PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS:****IVA. IN HOW MANY DISTRICTS THEY HAVE WORKED AS A PARAPRO**

One	Two	Three	Four or more
87%	11%	2%	2%

**Comment:** The vast majority of D39 parapro (87%) have worked as parapro *only in our district*. In contrast, 75% of D39 teachers have worked as teachers in one to five districts *in addition to our district*. (Source: CRC Report 2001)

**IVB. HOW MANY YEARS AS A PARAPRO IN D39**

1 year or less	2-3 years	4-6 years	7-9 years	10 or more years
46%	19%	15%	8%	12%

**Comment:** That 46% of respondents are first year parapro corresponds with the district's HR Director's report that there is 50% turnover among parapro each year. Still there may be a way to look at the profile of the 35% who have been with the district for 4 or more years and try to actively recruit more parapro like that.



**IVC. WHAT THEY DID JUST BEFORE BECOMING A PARAPRO IN D39**

<b>I was a student</b>	<b>I was home parenting</b>	<b>I had another job</b>
8%	31%	61%

**Of those who had another job prior to becoming a parapro, the positions held fell into three main categories as follows:**

**Education:** Preschool or daycare teacher or aide (7 mentions), substitute teacher (6), classroom teacher (3), parapro elsewhere (2), language teacher (1), art teacher for disabled (1), camp director (1), textbook sales (1)

**Business:** Retail sales (3), administrative assistant/secretary (2), office manager/project coordinator (2), insurance claims (1), technical recruiter (1), patient rep (1), marketing consultant (1), investments (1)

**Service and Other:** Waitress (1), census field rep (1), artist (1)

**Comment:** People in education-related fields, clerical and sales seem to be a good target for recruitment of parapro. Also, Wilmette parents whose youngest children are in school full-time are good targets.



#### IVD. RESPONDENTS SATISFACTION WITH THEIR CURRENT JOB IN D39

Respondents were asked to rate how satisfied they were with several aspects of their jobs:

Aspect:	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	No Answer
Wages you earn	3%	24%	50%	15%	8%
Employee benefits:	5%	38%	34%	19%	4%
Personal Fulfillment from the job:	49%	48%	3%	---	---
Freedom to decide how to do the job:	28%	53%	19%	---	---
Job security:	33%	49%	9%	---	9%
Chances for promotion or advancement:	2%	24%	24%	18%	32% <sup>11</sup>
Opportunities for professional development and in-service training:	12%	45%	30%	5%	8%
Support from supervisor:	50%	32%	12%	2%	4%
Support from teachers:	43%	37%	16%	2%	2%

**Comment:** The paraprofessionals are most satisfied with the personal fulfillment from the job and the support from their supervisors and teachers with whom they work. They are less satisfied with their chances for advancement and opportunities for professional development. With the new contract, they are more satisfied with their benefits than with their wages. Since there is typically a high turnover of paraprofessionals, it might be interesting to survey paraprofessionals to determine at what level of wage they would be "satisfied" and/or whether when they leave D39 they are moving to jobs that pay more.

<sup>11</sup> Most wrote a comment that there is NO chance for promotion (although they would LIKE one, so the question doesn't apply.)



**IVE. WHAT ARE THEIR CAREER PLANS AS OF TODAY**

Become a certified teacher	Stay in my current job until I am eligible to retire	Stay in my current job until I must retire	Stay in my current job for a while as long as I like it	Find a job outside of education	Get a teaching job (already certified)	Seek a promotion within my current job classification	Seek a different job in D39	Seek a similar job in another district	Other
24%	24%	9%	9%	7%	6%	6%	6%	5%	4%

**Comment:** The percentages of paraprofessionals desiring to stay in the district reflect the close to 50% retention rate of paraprofessionals. Perhaps if there were a way to be promoted or advance, more paraprofessionals would be interested in staying in the district in the paraprofessional position and yearly attrition could be lowered. There may also be opportunities to actively recruit qualified teachers from the D39 paraprofessional pool to fill teacher vacancies, since nearly 1/3 report planning to get a teaching job or become a certified teacher in the future.

**IVF. AWARENESS OF THEIR FORMAL JOB DESCRIPTION**

Category:	YES	NO	Don't Know
Is there a written job description of your current job?	50%	33%	17%

Of the 50% (above) who know there is a written job description:	YES	NO	Don't Know
Could you get a copy of it?	65%	35%	----
Does it accurately describe the kind of work you do?	51%	17%	32%
Does it accurately describe the amount of work you do?	25%	32%	43%
Do you have input into changes to the written job description?	15%	28%	60%

**Comment:** Only half of the paraprofessionals know that there is a written job description of their position. Of those that know of the written job



description, half say it accurately describes the kind of work they do, but only one-quarter say that it accurately describes the amount of work they do. Perhaps the job descriptions need to be reviewed for accuracy and made available to all paraprofessional. Only 15% of respondents report they have input to change the written job description and 60% "don't know." This needs clarification also. According to the HR Director, the parapro job description was revised two years ago with input from representatives from the job category. However, individual paraprofessionals are not allowed to change the written job description.

## ***V. RESPONSE TO PARAPRO TRAINING AND IN-SERVICES 2001-2002***

### **VA. HOW MANY OF THE IN-SERVICES WERE RESPONDENTS AWARE OF:**

<b>ALL</b>	<b>MOST</b>	<b>SOME</b>	<b>NONE</b>
12%	22%	54%	12%

**Comment:** There were at least seven in-services or meeting available for paraprofessionals to attend between August and February, when the survey was distributed. Several of these in-services had enrollment limits of 15 participants. The majority of paraprofessionals were aware of "some" of the in-service programs, but not "most" or "all." Several paraprofessionals wrote on their surveys that they would have liked to attend specific offerings, but they never heard about them. Perhaps there is a better way to communicate the offerings to them to ensure that they learn about them.



**VB. PARAPRO REACTIONS TO THE IN-SERVICES THEY ATTENDED:**

Percentage of Respondents Who Attended	Name of Offering:	Expectations were: Very Well Met	Well Met	Met	Somewhat Unmet or Not Met
20%	Intro Class for New Paraprofessionals	23%	<b>42%</b>	25%	8%
7%	Day to meet the teacher s and learn about your student with special needs	25%	25%	<b>50%</b>	---
20%	September: Behavioral Techniques	8%	<b>56%</b>	18%	18%
22%	October: Curriculum Modifications	<b>31%</b>	<b>31%</b>	23%	15%
41%	November: Understanding Specific Disabilities	15%	<b>38%</b>	<b>38%</b>	9%
5%	December: Handwriting and Boardmaker	<b>33%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>33%</b>	---
20%	January: Communications and Autism	<b>50%</b>	40%	10%	---

**Comment:** It might be helpful if the district devises a feedback form to distribute to paraprofessionals after each in-service to get their impressions at the time they are fresh.

**VC. DID PARAPROS ATTEND OTHER WORKSHOPS OR IN-SERVICES**

NO	YES
80%	20%

**Comment:** Principals are using their discretion to send paraprofessionals to in-services other than the ones specifically for them. Of the 20% who attended other in-services, they reported attending the following: CPR, Easing the Teasing, ESL In-Service, ISAT, Reading Discovery, VWM(?), Alexandria (?).

**VD. OTHER TOPICS FOR IN-SERVICES THE PARAPROS SUGGESTED**

*The paraprofessionals were asked for other subjects helpful to their position they would like to see as in-services. Here is the list of topics arranged loosely by subject:*

**Behavior Management:** A workshop dealing with real bullies; Discipline in the classroom; Bipolar disorders, Oppositional/Defiant Disorder

**Special Education:** Physical adaptations; Explaining the IEP; How to avoid boredom or burnout working with only one child all the time; Job delegation when there is more than one paraprofessional in the classroom



**Curriculum Topics:** Anything related to ESL; Explaining ESL to all staff; Modifications for ESL; For the Resource Center Paraprofessionals--An overview of curriculum at each grade level to prepare better for the special projects

**Teaching Strategies:** Topics specific to helping at the Junior High Level (because the expectations are much different); Reading strategies

**Computer Training:** Technology; Computer skills; Specific software such as Filemaker, Photoshop, MS Office and Hyperstudio

**Health and Safety Training:** Basic First Aid, The Heimlich Maneuver, CPR

**Comment:** Consider these topics for future years.



**VI. THE PARAPROS WHO WORK WITH STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS' VIEW OF THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE TEACHER VERSUS THOSE OF THE PARAPRO:**

**VIA. Paraprofessionals who work with students with special needs were asked to look at a list of tasks and indicate who was primarily responsible for each--the paraprofessional, the teacher or both.**

**% RESPONDENTS SAYING THE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY IS:**

<b>TASK</b>	<b>TEACHER'S</b>	<b>BOTH</b>	<b>PARAPRO'S</b>
a. Identifying learning problems.	31%	<b>69%</b>	-----
b. Reviewing lessons.	19%	<b>68%</b>	13%
c. Selecting criteria for behavioral management objectives.	<b>52%</b>	48%	-----
e. Selecting instructional materials.	<b>53%</b>	47%	-----
f. Consulting with other professionals regarding a student.	41%	<b>55%</b>	4%
g. Lesson planning.	<b>58%</b>	42%	-----
h. Demonstrating materials or methods.	35%	<b>55%</b>	10%
i. Planning daily and weekly schedules.	<b>56%</b>	41%	3%
j. Assessing effective instructional techniques.	32%	<b>68%</b>	-----
k. Teaching lessons to the entire class.	<b>72%</b>	28%	-----
l. Assessing individual students.	<b>52%</b>	48%	-----
m. Administering tests.	41%	<b>52%</b>	7%
n. Monitoring tests.	22%	<b>72%</b>	6%
o. Scoring tests.	35%	<b>61%</b>	4%
p. Reporting to and meeting w/parents regarding student progress.	<b>53%</b>	47%	-----
q. Teaching small groups and individual students.	-----	<b>90%</b>	10%
r. Observing and recording data.	22%	<b>75%</b>	3%
s. Arranging room, learning centers and bulletin boards.	13%	<b>81%</b>	6%
t. Listening to students' problems.	3%	<b>94%</b>	3%
u. Evaluating student performance.	30%	<b>70%</b>	-----
v. Initialing requests for evaluation/reassessment of student.	<b>88%</b>	12%	-----
w. Participating in IEP meetings.	41%	<b>59%</b>	-----
x. Attending faculty meetings.	<b>77%</b>	23%	-----

(Adapted from Vass, S.F. & Steckelberg, A.L. (1991) Issues and Responsibilities in Utilizing, Training and Managing Paraprofessionals. Dept of Special Education and Communication Disorders, University of Nebraska.)

**Comment:** The above responses might be helpful to administrators and should be evaluated by them. Are the D39 special ed. paraprofessionals' assessments of who is responsible for what in the classroom the way the district wants it? If not, what needs to shift, why and how?



### **VII. WRITTEN REMARKS BY PARAPROS ON THE SURVEYS:**

The paraprofessionals were asked what they liked most about their job and what areas of their job that they would improve. Below are the common themes in their remarks. Respondents' actual survey quotes follow the themes. The quotes are arranged by type of parapro--*special ed. parapro in a K-4 setting, special ed. parapro in a 5-8 setting, and other parapro in a non-special ed. setting.* (Within the special ed. parapro, the quotes are also arranged by years of experience working as a parapro in the district.)

### **VIII. COMMON THEMES OF WHAT REpondENTS LIKE MOST ABOUT THEIR PARAPRO JOBS (BASED ON THE QUOTES THAT FOLLOW):**

- **Working with children**
- **Seeing children progress**
- **A diverse set of daily experiences**
- **A work schedule that fits their family or personal needs**
- **Working with supportive supervising teachers (*this comment was absent for parapro in the WJH setting.*)**

**Comment:** These characteristics of the job should be used in promotional materials to attract people to the position of D39 Parapro.

### **How the Parapro Describe What They Like Most About Their Jobs:**

#### ***Special Ed. Parapro in a K-4 setting with 10+ years experience in D39 wrote:***

"I enjoy associating with supportive adults for part of the day. Working with special needs children is challenging and provides diverse daily experiences. I like seeing my input into a child's successes and progress."

"I like the adults working in the classroom. I get great self-esteem and satisfaction from working with my SST because she gives me a lot of leeway and input. I like the satisfaction of seeing the academic and behavioral growth among our students, conquering to some extent their different problems, finding the ways to overcome them."

"I enjoy working with the children in the classroom."



***Special Ed. Parapro in a K-4 setting with 4-6 years experience in D39 wrote:***

"I enjoy the interaction with students and faculty. I enjoy seeing and participating in the growth of the students during the year. I also enjoy the challenge of adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of educationally challenged students."

"I like the kids, the hours and the distance from home."

"The most satisfying part of my job is on days when the child or children I've been working with finally understand what we've been working on and to see the pleasure in their faces and the relief that they can do it. Or, I like days when a child with behavior problems has it all together and can take part in a game and be successful at it."

"I get great satisfaction seeing positive results in the students I work with. I like having the time to talk with the classroom teachers while the children are in specials to create optimal learning opportunities for my students."

"I like creating inventive ways to get a point across to a student. When this works, I get tremendous satisfaction."

"It is most satisfying to see the individual growth in each child. I have worked with several different children though the years and have seen great growth in each."

***Special Ed. Parapro in a K-4 setting with 2-3 years experience in D39 wrote:***

"The best part of the job is working one-on-one with a special needs child. I get the most job satisfaction from making the student's school experience as full as possible."

"The most rewarding is when you are working with a child who is struggling and you help him to understand. Also, when you work with a teacher who is great at her job and respectful of you."

"I really enjoy the teacher I work with and the close contact with the kids."

***Special Ed. Parapro in a K-4 setting with 1 year or less experience in D39 wrote:***

"I adore kids! They make the world go round!! I am learning many things by being in a special education classroom. The teacher I work under is very helpful to me. They all give me great satisfaction. I am learning by helping!!!"



"I like how the teachers, OT, Speech and SST teacher treat me and respect me as if I am equal. They listen to what I have to say. I can also go to them with a concern about my student and get ideas to try."

"I have a great assignment--a wonderful teacher and great kids. What I enjoy most is the opportunity to work with all the students in the class in addition to my assignment."

"I like working in the special education setting with a small number of children and especially with the supervising teacher. Seeing the successes these children make--no matter how small, gives me the most satisfaction."

"I love working with kids."

"I love the children."

"I get the most job satisfaction from the opportunity to oversee all of the children in the self-contained classroom. Observing the students' growth from the beginning of the year--academically, socially and emotionally--is also rewarding. I am very pleased with what I see in D39--lots of creative learning. I am happy that a reading intervention program is in place and that there are lots of extras for students. I consider myself to be fortunate to be part of the D39 team. Thank you."

"The times when I actually teach are the most gratifying to me. I also enjoy helping support special projects that include research, writing, creativity and independence for students."

"I enjoy working one-on-one with a child or in small groups. I enjoy seeing a child progress--learn new things. I feel good when I know I have helped a child to learn and to help him feel good about himself."

"I am a 'teacher in training' so being exposed to a seasoned teacher is very helpful. I am most satisfied when I am involved helping the classroom teacher and working with students."

***Special Ed. Paraprofessionals in a 5-8 setting with 7-9 years experience in D39 wrote:***

"I very much enjoy working with students. In general, the lead teachers are good."

***Special Ed. Paraprofessionals in a 5-8 setting with 4-6 years experience in D39 wrote:***

"I like making a difference in needy kids' lives."



***Special Ed. Parapros in a 5-8 setting with 2-3 years experience in D39 wrote:***

"I like to go to my students' classes. I listen to the lesson, directions, instructions that the teacher gives. I know what the teachers expect from the students and this helps me help them."

***Special Ed. Parapros in a 5-8 setting with 1 year or less experience in D39 wrote:***

"I love working with a variety of children. They are great to work with. I learn a lot from them and love feeding them knowledge."

"This is a great job for pre-service teachers like myself. This position makes the educational process run smoother and benefits all students."

"I enjoy watching the growth of the students I work with. I also enjoy the feeling of knowing that I helped a student."

"I really enjoy working with children that have special needs. It means a lot to me to see them do well."

"I enjoy working with a variety of children whose skills and abilities vary. Trying to "connect" with a student and finding a successful way to instruct and convey an understanding of subject mater is very challenging, yet satisfying!"

"I like moving from class to class and working with all the students as well as my case load. I like the moment-to-moment changes that need to be made to help the kids."

"I enjoy seeing the faces of the children when they finally grasp a new concept."

"I very much enjoy helping my student improve skills. I also enjoy the time spent with his class as a whole, both with the other students and his other teachers."

"The motivation of the kids is a challenge, but quite rewarding. Working with children keeps you young at heart."

***School Building Parapros wrote:***

"I enjoy having a variety of work every day. I love being in a variety of classrooms and learning how different teachers operate. I also love that I get to try my hand at teaching and sometimes planning lessons and activities to do with kids. Finally, if I am going to make \$13/hour, I take satisfaction from doing what I consider an important job. That



satisfaction is enhanced because D39 is in my community. I feel I am doing good works at home."

"I like that the schedule matches my children's exactly, so that it does not interfere with my home life, which is my #1 priority."

***Resource Center Paraprofessionals wrote:***

"Working on the computer."

"Working with the children and watching them develop their skills and talents is the best part of my job."

"I like the great variety of the assignments and the opportunity to work with all the students and teachers."

***Computer Lab Paraprofessionals wrote:***

"I have nice co-workers and keeping up with technology and the Internet."

"I like working on computers and learning along with the kids. I like seeing a kid make progress who started out really floundering."

***English As A Second Language (ESL) Paraprofessionals wrote:***

"I love the children, working with them and seeing their progress."

"The kids bring new challenges each day with new insights into their cultures and learning processes. All aspects are positive."

"I enjoy seeing the students advance in their English fluency. Sometimes, I am able to work with them for three or more years and the changes are very dramatic. It is extremely rewarding and interesting."

"I love working with the ESL students because they are so eager to learn English and to find new friends. I also enjoy working in regular classrooms with the teachers. I feel the ESL program runs smoothly at my school."

***Reading Paraprofessionals wrote:***

"Working one to one or in small groups with children in reading. I love their energy and love to watch their progress."

"Working with the K, 1st, 2nd graders. Seeing the excitement of "reading better" in these kids. Also, having some flexibility with my schedule."

"I enjoy working with the children and helping them learn. It is satisfying watching each student make progress."



**Kindergarten Parapros wrote:**

"I love being with the kids and being a help to the teacher."

"I like being able to know the children well enough to help them do their best. Just being with the kindergarteners gives me great satisfaction."

"I like working with the children. I like that I am gaining enormous amounts of experience for when I become a teacher. I like working with my assigned teacher. This is a wonderful school district, full of wonderful people. I feel very lucky to work here."

"I like working with kindergarteners."

"I have a teaching degree and have always wanted a kindergarten classroom of my own. When I was hired as a kindergarten parapro in D39, I felt close to my ultimate goal. I have worked with younger teachers who have appreciated my knowledge and past experiences and have given me more freedom in my classroom responsibilities than the position really calls for. Also, with the increase in compensation, my parapro position had become a more realistic, livable one."

"I like the interactions with children the creative projects, working with great teachers and community spirit."

"I like it most when I'm able to offer some input to the curriculum, i.e. using my creativity to help the learning. I like when I work with students and they are able to learn a concept, e.g. letter sounds. I also enjoy seeing children's faces, the expressions when they are read to."

**VIII. COMMON THEMES OF WHAT ASPECTS OF PARAPRO JOBS THEY WOULD IMPROVE (BASED ON THE QUOTES THAT FOLLOW):**

- **Parapros want to be treated by other district educators as "peers"**
- **Improve understanding or appreciation of how much parapros contribute**
- **Better communication--include parapros as part of the team in conferences/IEPs**
- **Better communication--keep parapros in the loop via e-mail**
- **More time to collaborate with teachers, daily planning**



- **Make opportunities for promotion based on experience and background**
- **More interaction with those doing similar jobs to share tactics, learn from peers**
- **More salary and benefits**
- **More training of teachers how to supervise paraprofessionals better**
- **For special ed. paraprofessionals in junior high setting: give more direction and guidance**
- **For special ed. paraprofessionals in junior high setting: improve consistency of modifications in each class for students who go to different teachers for subjects**
- **For ESL paraprofessionals: Give them a different status, since they are functioning like teachers (and they are mostly certified.)**

**Comment:** These improvements to the paraprofessional job should be prioritized and then evaluated for whether/how improvements should be made, within what timeframe and how to measure and evaluate results. The overall goal should be to make the position serve children well and maintain job satisfaction for the paraprofessional at the same time.

#### **How Paraprofessionals Describe What They Would Like To Improve About Their Jobs:**

##### ***Special Ed. Paraprofessionals in a K-4 setting with 10+ years experience in D39 wrote:***

"In ten years of experience as a paraprofessional and as the parent of a special needs child, the most important factor of a successful inclusion experience is the ability of the general ed. teachers to communicate an enthusiastic acceptance of the included child and the aide to the classroom, the child and the aide. By presenting the aide to the class (and to the parents) as a peer, and by speaking to the class about the included child in terms of the ways the child is *the same as* the kids in the classroom--not about the differences--a child's acceptance is more likely. In addition, if the regular teacher works with the included child and the aide works with the regular class, there can be a reciprocal benefit to all involved."

"In our society, the amount of salary equals the amount of respect given to a person. Show me the money!"



"Many teachers have no idea how really important our job is. I would like more money, which would give us more respect. There is no possibility of promotion and no step-ups to increased salary. For several years I have added jobs in Before School Care, Summer School and Foreign Language Tutoring to increase my earnings."

"I handle the whole classroom and all the parapro kids under me when the teacher is not there. Decisions are mine, yet, if a sub is sent for the teacher, I do not receive the extra pay even if the sub Xeroxes all day and I am in charge because there is no way that the sub can do my teacher's job."

"The time, effort and emotional investment that I put into my work is not respected in the school community. Salary and benefits are good examples of how valuable I am. I have been a certified teacher the entire time I have worked in the district."

***Special Ed. Parapros in a K-4 setting with 4-6 years experience in D39 wrote:***

"I would like more time for collaborative planning with teachers."

"I would like more salary, higher income and step-ups. Parapros cannot live on this salary alone. The difference between what teachers and parapros earn is considerable."

"I would like to be included in meetings on the child that I am working with and kept up to date on what is being done or happening with the child. I am only informed what the teacher feels I need to know, if she has time to tell me."

"Sometimes to meet the needs of the children with IEPs, requires more than the minimum allotment of minutes on their IEP. The students really need more. I come in 20-30 minutes early each day to help the teacher. Sometimes a child needs more 1-on-1 than another."

"I like it when the teacher I work with respects my independence with children. When this doesn't happen, the job can get boring."

***Special Ed. Parapros in a K-4 setting with 2-3 years experience in D39 wrote:***

"Being a paraprofessional is an important job. We take much of the burden off the classroom teachers that allows them to focus on teaching. I believe our worth is underestimated and underpaid."



***Special Ed. Parapros in a K-4 setting with 1 year or less experience in D39 wrote:***

"I would like more interaction with other paraprofessionals, perhaps a regular meeting to see if we have the same needs, concerns and educational experiences. We can learn from one another. I would also like to be included more in daily planning of activities."

"I would like to see an overview of a bi-weekly lesson plan, not just for the regular classroom, but also for music (what songs will be taught) and gym (what games will be played) so I can talk to my student and give him a chance to warm up to what he will be doing."

"I am very satisfied with the job itself, however, there is a definite attitude problem among many teaching faculty in regard to how they treat parapros. Many teachers are very condescending and seem to have little respect or regard for parapros in general. Some will not even smile at me in the halls 7 months into the school year. I feel like parapros are the lowest on the food chain--ignored or even treated rudely."

"I strongly recommend a building meeting for all staff, including parapros, at the beginning of the school year. This year, parapros were at a meeting at MEC during our school's first meeting. Consequently, we were never introduced, nor did we meet anyone other than who we work with."

"The main aspect of my position I would change would be to work with fewer students. I currently work with six students in two separate classrooms as well as in the special ed. class. No one person should be under such stress to try to be in two places at one time. This is not fair to the six needy children who deserve more from the district. Each class of three children should have their own parapros. I am the only parapros with so many children and feel I am doing the work of two people while being compensated (poorly) for one person. It is almost humanly impossible to do this and also grade papers and Xerox, for the classroom teachers."

"It is difficult to get parapros to work in D39 and stay because of the salary and benefits. The administration needs to take a better look into exactly what special ed. parapros do. Some distinction and compensation should be made between special ed. parapros and others. Also, I think raises should be made with each year of employment. Some Special Ed. parapros are really co-teachers and should be paid at least a first year's teacher salary. With such incentives, quality people will apply to the district, stay longer and give the special needs children the best possible people to work with."



"I want more respect from those who aren't assistants. Paraprofessionals should have more involvement and a say as team members. They should be present at conferences and for IEP meetings."

"For paraprofessionals who want to continue education, tuition should be reimbursed or covered in part or in full."

"I would like the opportunity to participate in the IEP meetings pertaining to the students I work with. If that is not possible, the SST should go over the IEP with each paraprofessional."

"Teachers tell me that D39 does not hire teachers from their paraprofessional ranks. From MEC I hear differently, but think the impression of not hiring from within should be actively changed."

"I would like to teach more and photocopy less. I find endless photocopying to be a waste of my skills and energy. I do not mind grading."

"There sometimes seems to be a lack of communication with the other support roles such as SST, OT, Speech and Language, and paraprofessionals. This could be improved if we were given access to e-mail within the district and included in distribution rather than relying on a teacher or someone else to remember to give us the information verbally. I would also like improved salary. "

***Special Ed. Paraprofessionals in a 5-8 setting with 7-9 years experience in D39 wrote:***

"Because so much is expected of the teachers by the administration without support (IEPs, Wilson, teaching, parent calls, etc) our paraprofessional job becomes a catch-all and we're asked to do things which by law we are not responsible for and should not be doing. Special Ed is not a business. It's not just about students being "covered", but because of the administration's position, that's what it becomes. There is almost too much freedom with the paraprofessional position because there is a lack of lesson plans, direction and support. We need to think of the child first and not stretch out the home base teachers to such a degree that they leave on a regular basis. Check out the turnover in the home base at WJHS. It's astounding."

"The working conditions are hard--I work 7 1/2 hours with out a break. I would like to see pay differentials and the paraprofessional to be a certificated position. I would also like to see more recognition of paraprofessionals by the administration and staff."



***Special Ed. Parapros in a 5-8 setting with 4-6 years experience in D39 wrote:***

"1) In a 7-hour day, everyone should have at least two 15-minute breaks to go to the bathroom, etc. 2) I would like to see paraprofessionals recognized as members of the teaching community by this district. 3) I would like to see job descriptions that are followed and where expectations and salary are correlated. 4) We are entirely self-directed, there is no direction to teachers how to supervise parapros and many are left with both planning and teaching. If this is the case, we are not adequately trained or paid for what we do. 5) Considering that the parapro is the main contact with the special ed student, delivering the majority of his education, how can the parapro *not* be included in the IEP meetings? 6) Parapros should be strictly directed assistants and should never be planning, executing or evaluating students' education on their own. However, in reality, parapros are currently undirected, most are unqualified and they are not adequately paid for the scope of teaching they actually do. The rate of turnover of these parapros is quite alarming and extraordinary. What is needed are certified teachers who collaborate and assist teachers, especially in special ed, and are qualified to plan, execute and evaluate a student's education. These teachers would still be in the category of assistant with the regular teacher ultimately responsible for grading, laying out the school year, knowing the curriculum and planning units around it, selection of materials, etc, etc. Clearly the assistant teacher would fall under a different pay scale as their workload and responsibilities would be greatly reduced from that of a regular teacher. BUT, the pay scale should be significantly higher than the current "office worker" pay scale given to the current parapros. Perhaps with committed professionals partnering with the teachers, with jobs that are both interesting and well paid, the revolving door of poorly prepared parapros could be shut down. Even though there are currently parapros who do wonderful jobs, it is just by luck that they work here, but they don't stay."

***Special Ed. Parapros in a 5-8 setting with 2-3 years experience in D39 wrote:***

"I would like to work more independently, not have my work checked. I would also like my position to be more appreciated by the teachers and the students. I would be happy to have a promotion within my job classification."

***Special Ed. Parapros in a 5-8 setting with 1 year of experience or less in D39 wrote:***

"I would try and improve how the "consequences" I give are distributed among students."



"I think the role of a parapro should be expanded for those who are in teacher certification programs. For example, I would like to have the freedom to substitute teach when the homeroom teacher is out sick. I would also like parapro to make more money--not as much as a full-time teacher, but enough to live on."

"I would love to have a more definite grasp of expectations in general, not just D39 expectations, but also parental and teacher expectations. The benefits package is also lacking. Mandatory Union and IMRF membership seems quite stringent and should be optional."

"I would like at least one planning period with my SST. I would like to be able to attend more training offered by the district, but my schedule and caseload needs don't permit it. I would like to stay with one group/team rather than move between teams or grades. I would like the Administration to evaluate the heavy workload of the SSTs to decrease turnover in the Special Ed departments. I would like some type of promotion or advancement for the classroom parapro."

"I am not satisfied with the support from the teachers in disciplining the students. If you want to retain paraprofessionals, you will have to increase pay and provide some benefits. To bring in more professional people, you will need to make sure your teachers support the parapro."

"I feel a lot of positive support and appreciation from both the SST and classroom teachers, but I don't always receive the level of assistance that is necessary to help my student handle his schoolwork. I feel that a more thorough evaluation of his modification needs to be maintained throughout each unit of study (for example, social studies, science and language arts) would be helpful. I wonder whether there could be a standard set of modified materials for an entire grade level. This would make everyone's job so much easier and ensure a positive experience for these students who deserve the social benefits of being in the regular classroom while at the same time needing help with a challenging curriculum. I would also like to see improvement of communication between all teachers involved with the student to make the job more manageable."

"I would like to work in groups more."

***School Building Parapro wrote:***

"Outside of the teachers whom I help, I don't think a soul in the district knows what I do, cares, or even knows my name. In a nutshell, there is little recognition (which may be a lost opportunity for the district) and that is a bit de-motivating." (D39 parapro 2-3 years)



"The district has a tremendous resource in parents who want to be involved with education and share the same schedule as their children. These parents generally don't mind not making lots of money, because their alternative is, frankly, to stay home! I don't believe these parents will be long-term employees of the district, but I'd tap them for a few years. After all, as long as schools are in business, parents are a renewable resource!" (D39 parapro 2-3 years)

***Resource Center Parapro wrote:***

"I would like to be included more often in meetings with other parapro and teachers." (D39 4-6 yrs)

"I would like more respect from other adults in the building." (D39 4-6 yrs)

"I would like more time to plan the activities with the teacher. I would also like more time to learn more computer programs to be more helpful to students." (D39 1yr)

"I would have liked an orientation to the school system, its policies and a curriculum overview when I started." (D39 1yr)

***Computer Lab Parapro wrote:***

"In the resource center and the computer lab, if the teacher is absent and the district gets a substitute, often the sub is not knowledgeable of the subject and the sub assists while the parapro teaches. If a sub cannot be found, the parapro teaches the classes alone for an extra \$10/half day. I am happy to help out, but sometimes feel like the lowest paid staff is being taken advantage of: The RC and Computer room parapro have also taught in the regular classroom. The office parapro regularly teaches in classrooms. The reading parapro teaches. The ESL parapro prepares and teaches all her curriculum. (D39 7-9 yrs)

***English As A Second Language (ESL)Parapro wrote:***

"The ESL parapro job description needs to be elevated to "teaching staff" level. I attend Open House, E.S.L. Parent Conferences, E.S.L. staffings. I teach, plan and assign grades for one class totally plus observe four Language Arts and Social Studies classes and design lessons that clarify/augment/enhance their lessons. I keep an eye out for social/emotional issues at home and school and in the American culture. I supervise the Image (?) testing for new and current students. I am available to staff during the fall as the 5<sup>th</sup> grade ESL graduates scramble between foreign language class and returning to ESL. I write report card-type letters during reporting periods for the report cards. I keep personal files on current and past students containing past tests and other relevant information. I tape myself reading text or supplementary



books for student use. I modify tests or texts for student use. I provide an atmosphere of "accepting warmth" which will hopefully allow each ESL student the opportunity to increase his knowledge of English as well as subject areas." (D39 parapro 2-3 years)

"I would like to be paid a teacher's salary because I have certification and do all the work of a classroom teacher." (D39 parapro 10+yrs)

"I don't enjoy traveling between buildings. It is hectic and I can't plug in socially in any building. Also, I can't bring all of my materials to each building. Finding appropriate teaching space has been an ongoing challenge. This is exhausting." (D39 10+ yrs)

"Have more cooperation from classroom teachers in helping ESL students." (D39 parapro 7-9 years)

"Have a different status than parapro for ESL teachers." (D39 parapro 7-9 years)

**Kindergarten Parapros wrote:**

"More communication with the classroom teacher." ((D39 Parapro 10+ years)

"I would like to be treated as a professional rather than an "aide." I have a B.A. in Elementary Ed and feel like a second class citizen here. I am as professional and intelligent as the teachers, yet my opinion rarely counts. Parapros do a lot of the "garbage work (i.e. playground, cafeteria and bus duty) and have fewer chances for job satisfaction. In the past, the lead teacher has used my ideas and passed them off as her own. Working through lunch prevents us from having lunch with the teachers. Since we do not attend faculty meetings, I feel as though I don't know what is going on in my building. I feel left out. This is a good job for this stage in my life, but I'm not proud of my job. I don't feel parapros get the respect they deserve. Yet, you'd have trouble running the schools without them." (D39 Parapro for 7-9 years)

" As kindergarten parapros, we could really use a lunch period longer than 1/2 hour. With no other breaks during the day, it can be exhausting." (D39 Parapro 1 year)

"I think some early childhood seminars for 1<sup>st</sup> timers would be helpful just to help prepare to handle issues appropriately." (D39 Parapro 1 yr)

"I would like more small group staff meetings for problem solving and curriculum development." (D39 Parapro 1 yr)



"I would like a little more guidance about the "how-to's" of dealing with unruly students or students who don't want to participate. If there were a "sounding group" to explore issues with, this would be helpful." (D39 Parapro 1yr)

"I would like the teacher or principal to offer me some feedback after observation." (D39 Parapro 1yr)

"I wish there were more job security for my position, but it is hard because the number of kindergarteners is not fully known until school starts. It is hard because you build a team with your teacher and then risk having it be dismantled because there may not be enough students." (D39 Parapro 1yr)

***Reading Parapros wrote:***

"I would like to get together twice a year with all the other reading parapros to discuss what we are doing, etc." (D39 10+ yrs)

"I would like more steps for advancement within the parapro ranks and more salary for parapros who are certified teachers." (D39 10+ yrs)

"I would like more space to work with the children. Sometimes I've had to work in the hallways and I've felt that because I'm not "the teacher" I'm not as important--so I can work in the hallway." (D39 2-3 years)

"Provide reading parapros w/more professional development courses in reading.  
(D39 2-3yrs)

## **E. Resources Pertaining to Parapros in School Settings**

There is a great deal of information available about educational paraprofessionals. Most of it is used in the university curriculums of special education teacher training programs. This is because special education teachers are the people who most often manage the roles and responsibilities of parapros in classrooms and/or with students in their districts.

Internet sites and articles provide a good starting place to learn about the parapro role and some of the current subjects that are important to paraprofessionals and the school districts that hire them. These subjects include training, job satisfaction, compensation issues, career development and advancement. Below is a list of a few parapro resources our CRC Sub-Committee feels would be helpful to D39 constituent groups:



- 1) "Considering Paraeducator Training, Roles, and Responsibilities" by Diane Carroll; TEACHING Exceptional Children Journal Nov/Dec 2001 pp.60-64 (Also available on line at: [http://journals.cec.sped.org/EC/Archive\\_Articles/VOL.34NO.2NO.VDEC2001\\_TEC\\_Article9.pdf](http://journals.cec.sped.org/EC/Archive_Articles/VOL.34NO.2NO.VDEC2001_TEC_Article9.pdf) )

This is a good introduction to many aspects of hiring and training paraprofessionals including interviewing, orientations, information sharing, meetings, team skills, inclusion skills, facilitating interpersonal/social skills, daily living skills and community skills. There is a good list of references at the end of the article.

- 2) <http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/paraprep/links.html>

This website is the Paraeducator Training site of the University of Vermont. It lists at least a dozen organizations and websites for paraeducators, including sites that provide information about learning disabilities, minority language projects and paraeducator resources.

- 3) <http://www.recruitingteachers.org/become/paraprograms.html>

This website, which is concerned with the nationwide shortage of teachers, discusses how paraeducators can become a future source of teachers and discusses how to structure a good paraeducator-to-teacher program.

- 4) <http://www.nrcpara.org/articles/Article1.htm>

This website discusses the training and mentoring system for paraprofessionals provided by BOCES, the Board of Cooperative Education Services in eastern Long Island, N.Y.

- 5) [http://www.special-ed-careers.org/research\\_library/paraeducators.html](http://www.special-ed-careers.org/research_library/paraeducators.html)

This site provides a list of resources about paraeducators.

- 6) <http://www.nea.org/esp/resource/vtpara.htm#Demographic>

This site provides the results of a 1997 survey of Vermont paraeducators.

- 7) <http://www.nrcpara.org/bibliography/career.htm>

This is the bibliography of the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals.



- 8) *Paraeducators as Partners: Building a Team for the Inclusive Classroom* Lombardo(Ed).LRPPublications.

This guide provides suggestions on how school districts can utilize the expertise of paraeducators in inclusive classrooms to their fullest extent. The various sections of the manual address the roles of paraeducators and how districts are adapting to these changing roles according to IDEA 97 [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amended in 1997], appropriate paraeducator training and retention procedures and the suggestions for utilizing paraeducators in inclusive settings. In addition, the manual provides an overview of litigation and suggests how districts can utilize this information to provide appropriate services and guidelines in their district.

- 9) <http://www.d65.k12.il.us/hr/humanresources.htm>

This is the website for the human resources of Evanston District 65. On the far right column on the opening web page are two sub-sites: One is the Teacher Assistant Salary Schedule and another is the Support Staff Benefits for 10-month Employees

- 10) <http://certificated.lausd.k12.ca.us/ladder/pilots.htm>

This is a website of the Los Angeles United School District and its Career Ladder for Para Educators.

- 11) <http://www.paraeducator.com/>

This is a website to foster learning for paraeducators in South Dakota. Through it, the state's paraeducators also have access to a Washington State website called "Paraeducator Community" where paraprofessionals and teachers can browse pertinent news, share lessons, examine training opportunities, discuss issues and shop at the Paraeducator Store.

- 12) <http://www.lrconsulting.com/>

This is the website for a paraeducator consultant/author of instructional materials relating to paraprofessionals including:

A training program called: Paraeducators: LifeLines in the Classroom, Developed by Mary Lasater, Marlene Johnson and Mary Fitzgerald. Katy, Texas: LRConsulting, 1996\*\*\*. This is a five module instructional series that provides an overall introduction to



basic topics and key issues related to special education along with activities, overheads, handout, and educational resources. The modules are: 1) Defining the Role of the Paraeducator, 2) Celebrating Similarities: Students with Disabilities, 3) The IEP Process: Role of the Paraeducator, 4) Supporting the Instructional Process, and 5) Behavior Improvement Strategies.

A manual called: Triplicity: Administrator's Guide to Facilitating the Partner Teacher/Paraeducator Partnership. This manual helps administrators determine the needs of students; select the paraeducator to meet students' needs; mentor and evaluate the paraeducator; and facilitate the partner teacher and paraeducator partnership.

- 13) [http://www.nea.org/nea\\_today/0105/esp.html](http://www.nea.org/nea_today/0105/esp.html)

This website contains an article about a district whose paraprofessionals switched unions and negotiated a contract that included reimbursement for teacher education courses and methods of advancement within the category of paraprofessional.

- 14) <http://www.nichcy.org/pubs/newsdig/nd27txt.htm>

"WHO'S TEACHING OUR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES?" A news digest from August 1997 of NICHCY (the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities) P.O. Box 1492 Washington, DC 20013 E-mail: [nichcy@aed.org](mailto:nichcy@aed.org) URL: <http://www.nichcy.org>

This website contains a 27-page article that describes the job of a special education teacher and a special education paraprofessional.



## **F. Synopsis of Interviews with A Few Administrators, Parapros and Teachers in our district and other districts**

### **1. Interview with the D39 Substitute Coordinator of Teachers and Parapros.** *(This person is responsible for arranging for substitutes in our district every day and has been in this position for over 5 years.)*

- a. The most difficult problem for Sub caller is finding subs for paraprofessionals and Special Education teachers
- b. Most calls are for Parapros who need subs
- c. Problem with Parapros that make finding Substitutes for them difficult:
  - No regularly scheduled breaks
  - Often no lunch breaks
  - Have difficult students to work with
- d. When filling needs for Subs, fill regular teachers first, then parapros
- e. This year has been easier to find subs probably because of the current high rate of unemployment

### **2. Phone Interview and e-mail with Dr. Tara Manning, Superintendent, District 90 (River Forest, IL)**<sup>12</sup>

"We treat our instructional aids (same thing as your parapros) very similar to our teachers, except they're not organized into a union of any kind. Our teachers belong to the IEA, but that's the only group that does. Our aides go to all staff development meetings that teachers do, because they're in the classroom too. There's a value system here that the instructional aides are a part of the classroom and working directly with children, so they get all the same instructional material and training that teachers get. It makes a huge difference in our instructional aides. They're treated with

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<sup>12</sup> We looked at this district for two reasons: 1) We had heard that their special ed. parapros were organized differently from in D39. We had heard that in D90, a group of parapros is assigned to a group of students with similar special needs. Individual parapros rotate between the students they are supporting. This helps to alleviate traumatic transitions when a parapro is absent and/or when a student moves to another grade. (although this was not how the superintendent described it to us.) In our district, a parapro is assigned to a specific student or group of students. 2) Their parapros are not part of a union.



respect, with great efforts made to include them and make them feel important."

1. How do you recruit, train and compensate your paraprofessionals? What staff is involved in recruiting and training?

*We frequently hire instructional aides who have applied to teach in our district. Excellent substitutes are recruited for full time aide positions as well. They are interested since aides receive the same health insurance benefits as our teaching staff and we frequently hire teachers from our aide pool. Our aides are included in most of our in-district staff development programs provided for the instructional staff (includes teachers and appropriate administrators). We find it difficult to fill instructional aide positions in the same manner we post teaching position vacancies. Frequently, the most effective recruiting is by word of mouth by our staff. Building principals interview applicants and recommend the final candidate or candidates to me. They often invite the teacher who will work most closely with the aide to participate in the process. I interview all aide candidates before I recommended them to the Board of Education for employment. Our instructional aides work 180 days. Their salary for this school year is \$17,850. They are entitled to two personal days and 10 sick days the first three years of their employment. After three years they receive twenty sick days and two personal days each year.*

2. How are your paraprofessionals organized and used to support children with special needs.

*Some of our instructional aides are assigned to special education teachers and work with the children assigned to that teacher in an instructional and "whatever is needed" capacity. These aides may spend a significant amount of time in the regular classroom with a child of special needs. Other times these same aides may be working in the special needs teacher's assigned teaching space with an individual child or with a group of children. Other instructional aides may be assigned to one specific child according to that child's IEP. This aide's schedule coincides with the student schedule. In-district staff development for these aides may not mirror the regular education staff if there is a special program developed for the special needs instructional staff but most likely would coincide with the*



*staff development program designed for teachers of students with special needs. From time to time we will secure the services of an expert regarding a unique exceptionality presented by one or more of our children to provide staff development to our staff. Appropriate instructional aides are included. If an aide is hired to work with a specific child whose special needs are primarily physical, that aide is still included in all staff development activities since our primary purpose is teaching and learning.*

3. Is this support handled differently in elementary, middle and jr. high settings?

*No*

4. What tools do you use to evaluate the success of your parapro programs?

*Our instructional aides are evaluated by their building principal with MAJOR input from the classroom teacher. This formal evaluation is annual. There is a three-month probation period at the onset of employment. Our aides usually fall into three categories.*

- a. *Classroom aide hired due to an exceptional class size. This is usually due to last minute enrollments in the beginning of the year*
- b. *Classroom aides assigned to teachers of children with special needs.*
- c. *Instructional aides assigned to specific children with special needs*

5. Do you have turnover and absentee problems with your parapro?

*No*

6. Are you aware of any other districts with similar or different models of organizing parapro?

*Frankly, I have not completed any studies regarding this topic nor am I familiar with the specific models used by my colleagues.*



3. **Phone Call Interview with District 109 (Deerfield, IL) –  
Director of Human Resources**<sup>13</sup>

1. How do you recruit, train and compensate your paraprofessionals?  
What staff is involved in recruiting and training?  
*We recruit from our vacancy listings and advertising. Last year, we had the teacher assistants go through a training session at beginning of year, through special services. Their training goes on all year long to meet the specific needs of kids. If they work with autism we give them autism training. Our assistants are paid an hourly wage, and are part of the educational support union.*
2. How are your paraprofessionals organized and used to support children with special needs?  
*Some assigned to special education teacher; some assigned one on one, some on rotating scheduling. The biggest thing we look for is flexibility-it might be that an assistant works with one kid in morning and then another kid in afternoon. Organization is done at building level dictated by needs of building.*
3. Is this support handled differently in elementary, middle and junior high settings?  
*No*
4. What tools do you use to evaluate the success of your paraprofessional programs?  
*Our assistants are observed and evaluated within first 90 days and evaluated one year after that.*
5. Do you have turnover and absenteeism problems?  
*Turnover was at 60%, but we've seen less turnover since 9/11.*
6. Are you aware of other districts with similar or different models of organizing paraprofessionals?  
*Like all districts, we scramble for paraprofessionals until they are all hired.*

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<sup>13</sup> We were referred to D109 by D39's incoming superintendent, Max McGee because of their use of paraprofessionals as tutors in their reading intervention program.



4. **E-mail from Pam Kaufman, District 109 coordinator for the Reading Intervention Program.**

I do not do any of the hiring (though I wish I did have some input and perhaps will in the future), as this is the domain of the Director of Human Resources.

I am the trainer and supervisor for the tutors, who are all classified (support) staff members. We have 11 primary grade tutors and 4 intermediate grade tutors. Of the 11 primary grade tutors, 4 are part-time. All of the primary grade tutors use the Project Success (formerly Project Prevent) program. I have been using the Project Success program for 6 years and worked closely with Barbara Kaufman and Betty Johnson who were formerly at the Reading Clinic at National- Louis University. The intermediate grade tutors use "Soar to Success" an intervention program published by Houghton-Mifflin. They also work with the students in math, using the Math Trailblazers program materials to support classroom teaching.

Each fall we have 2-4 new tutors. Many people use this position as a starting point to a teaching job. However, we do have a core group - 6 tutors - who are happy with the position and return each year. To my knowledge, no one has ever left the job because they were unhappy with the position. Rather, they leave because they want more monetary compensation. Our tutors are paid an hourly wage on a scale based on the support staff union criteria. They also receive benefits from the school district, including 100% compensation for continuing education tuition. Because the pay is not a significant amount of income for some of our tutors (around \$10/hour), especially those working part-time, there are some attendance issues, but so far nothing that has negatively impacted our program.

While I supervise, advise and support the tutors, I do not have an administrator certificate and I do not evaluate them. Their evaluators do ask me for input, however.

5. ***We interviewed a few D39 Parapros and teachers prior to developing our survey and here is what we learned:***

1. **Other than compensation & benefits, what do you feel are the 5 major issues that you would like to see changed & how would you like to see them changed?**

- Same hours for all parapros. We have different starting and ending times.



- Unless you need to be with your child outside during recess, you should take turns outside just like the teachers. Now we go outside for all the recesses.
- Better understanding of teachers and what is expected in the classroom
- More training (i.e., workshops)
- Hiring paraprofessionals that are qualified for the specific position (i.e., matching the job requirements & qualifications of the paraprofessionals) This is difficult because of the general shortage of good paraprofessionals.
- However, the age level, subject matter & grade level must be taken into consideration. Again, the shortage of paraprofessionals becomes a problem.
- Training – There is “in service” training for basic administration functions. But the real training is needed in how to interact with students in the classroom. The teachers do not have the time or resources to train the paraprofessionals. The issue is “Administrative training vs. classroom interaction”.
- Compensating the paraprofessionals on days when the teacher is absent and the paraprofessional actually does the teaching, not the substitute. This is often done, as the paraprofessional knows the routine and subjects being studied.
- Many paraprofessionals are so booked solid during the day that they get no breaks. Unlike the classroom teachers, paraprofessionals may have to accompany a student to all his/her special duties.
- I feel strongly that paraprofessionals should be “matched” with teachers as well as the students when making the assignments during the summer. It is a very close relationship and it really helps if both are on the same page.)

**2. What do you feel are the 5 major issues that the teachers would like to see changed with the Paraprofessionals & how would you like to see them changed**

- Hiring paraprofessionals that are qualified for the specific position (i.e., matching the job requirements & qualifications of the paraprofessionals) This is difficult because of the general shortage of good paraprofessionals. The District 39 administration starts the process, but the principal is involved in the final decision.
- Age level, subject matter & grade level must be taken into consideration. Again, the shortage of paraprofessionals becomes a problem.



- Training – There is “in service” training for basic administration functions. But the real training is needed in how to interact with students in the classroom. The teachers do not have the time or resources to train the paraprofessionals. The issue is “Administrative training vs. classroom interaction”.

**3. If District 39 administration does not take ownership of paraprofessionals, what do the teachers think that they should be doing or is it strictly left to the individual teacher or school principal?**

- Advancement & future opportunities as teachers for the paraprofessionals. Why would someone want to be a paraprofessional, if there was no chance for advancement?

**4. Do you speak with other Paraprofessionals at other schools in District 39.**

- We do casually speak with each other about issues, but depending on one's assignment, individual opinions may vary.
- I talk to some paraprofessionals in my school and a few times at workshops to other paraprofessionals. Some of them feel the same way & that is where I am getting my information from. They also have stronger issues & problems than I have. More training.

**5. What are your thoughts about the compensation and benefit program in District 39? How does it rate with other districts?**

- I feel good that we have a program. I think they are working with everyone so that they benefit from it.
- I don't know the exact figures regarding the compensation of other districts. However, many paraprofessionals are highly educated individuals and I feel that they should be compensated more for their contribution to the classroom and with the students whom they work with.

**6. What are 5 most positive issues that you find about working at your school that make your job enjoyable and prepare you for future opportunities or advancement?**

- We have some great teachers that appreciate our work and help with the students
- Very understanding principal
- Excellent support team



- We are able to go to workshops that are offered
- There are many positives about working at McKenzie. First and foremost is the warm and friendly staff. Also, our principal is an excellent role model to all around her. One of her greatest strengths is the respect that she shows everyone. She truly appreciates the work her staff does and she supports them always. Another positive in this school is the strong family support when problems arise. Also, depending on the teacher that one is assigned to work with, the day can be very rewarding as well as fun.
- I feel strongly that paraprofessionals should be "matched" with teachers as well as the students when making the assignments during the summer. It is a very close relationship and it really helps if both are on the same page.

**7. How do you feel about supervision of paraprofessionals?**

- I feel that the supervision of paraprofessionals is fine. We really don't need much supervision, as we are always with the teacher.

**8. How do you feel about training or mentoring of paraprofessionals?**

- Good idea
- I feel the district trains the paraprofessionals adequately. Sometimes, though, I'd like to be exposed more to some of the same training as the teachers get, such as writing workshops, Trailblazers, etc...

**9. Were you given a job description from District 39 when you were hired?**

- I was given a very vague job description by my principal when I was hired – not by the district.

**10. Does the job description basically fit your "day to day" job functions & activities. If not, why not?**

- My job description fits any general category referring to the paraprofessional's duties. However, each assignment is so different that there has to be flexibility.

**11. If there is a new superintendent next year, what are the 2 biggest things that you want changed?**

- I would like the new superintendent to look into increasing the monetary compensation to paraprofessionals. I would also like the paraprofessionals to have the option of not



being in the union, as I have yet to see how we really benefit from it.

## **G. Highlights of the D39 Support Staff Council Union Contract**

*The union contract is a 60 page document in effect from August 1, 2001-July 31, 2005. Highlights of this contract include:*

The contract covers all D39 educational support personnel *excluding* the following:

Superintendent's Secretary; Secretary to the Administrator for Personnel and Operations; Secretary to the Administrator for Curriculum and Instruction; Payroll Clerk; Personnel Secretary; Controller; Transportation Supervisor; Supervisor of Maintenance of Custodial Services; Any Administrative, Managerial, Supervisory, Confidential and Short-term employees as defined by the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Act.

- I. Selected Union Rights as specified in the contract
  - A. The union has the right to use the building for meetings
  - B. The union has the write to use district equipment such as telephones, computers, etc.
  - C. The union has the right to bulletin board space in each building for posting information
  - D. The Board of Education will deduct union dues from pay checks of members if requested to do so
  - E. The union will be provided a list of all bargaining unit employees no later than August 1<sup>st</sup>
  - F. The union will be supplied with public information concerning the financial position of the district
  - G. The union president has the right to address the board at scheduled intervals
  - H. The union president has the right to meet quarterly with the Superintendent to discuss matters of concern
  - I. All employees covered by the agreement but not members of the union, will pay their fair share of costs and services rendered by the union.
- II. Seniority
  - A. Defined at the length of continuous service as an employee in a position or positions covered by the agreement



- B. If there are layoffs or decreases in the number of employees covered the agreement, the least senior employee shall be laid off first
- III. Each employee will be given a performance evaluation at least once a year
- IV. Any claim by the Union or an employee that there has been a violation, misinterpretation or misapplication of the terms of the agreement shall be a grievance. There are three levels of grievance: supervisor, superintendent, and binding arbitration. The cost for the final level will be shared equally by the Board and the Union
- V. No employee covered by the agreement will be disciplined without being given the reasons for such discipline in writing
- VI. Employees are entitled to the following leaves:
  - A. Sick Leave - 15 days per year. Unused sick leave will accumulate up to 300 days - for personal illness or serious illness or death in the immediate family
  - B. Personal Leave - 2 days for business which cannot be conducted outside the school day
  - C. Bereavement Leave - 5 days per year for death in the immediate family
  - D. Jury Duty - without loss of pay. If duty goes over 10 days, employee will remit the jury duty stipend to the district
  - E. Inclement Weather Leave - If the school where the employee works is closed due to inclement weather, they shall not suffer a loss in pay for tardiness of one hour or less.
  - F. Leave of Absence - Employee may take an unpaid leave not to exceed 1 yr
  - G. Family Medical Leave - 12 weeks of unpaid leave for the birth, adoption, or placement of foster care of a child or due to a serious medical condition of the employee's spouse, child or parent.
- VII. Holidays
  - A. 12 month employees get 14 paid holidays
  - B. Religious holidays (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) are holidays without loss of pay for 12 month employees if they fall on Monday through Friday
  - C. If any of the 14 paid holidays fall on a weekend, the superintendent will select an alternate holiday
  - D. Any employee required to work on a holiday, will receive holiday pay plus 1 1/2 times the regular salary



VIII. Vacations for 12 month employees will depend on the number of years of service in the position

IX. Salary (See Appendix B of Agreement)<sup>14</sup>

X. Fringe Benefits

- A. Longevity Allowance of \$225 applied to annual salary after 10 yrs service
- B. Board will provide in-service training
- C. If required to take a physical by the Board or the State of Illinois, the Board shall reimburse the employee for the cost of the exam
- D. If required to use their own car on school business, the employees will be compensated at the IRS rate.
- E. Employees retiring at age 55 or older may continue the group medical insurance at their own cost. The Board will pay up to \$150 a month towards premium for individual insurance for employees retiring after 8 years of full-time service with the District
- F. Any employee using less than 3 sick and/or personal days in a six-month period will be eligible for a bonus of \$150 each period.
- G. Group hospitalization, major medical and dental insurance plans will be made available to all eligible employees. The Board will pay \$600 toward the premium for individual medical care coverage. (This amount will increase to \$1200 for 2002, \$1850 for 2002, and \$2500 for 2004)

## H. Wrap-up and Conclusion

This report provides a snapshot of the current situation of the educational paraprofessionals working in District 39 and resources available to enhance and support their work in school settings. This information should serve as a foundation for future district decision-making in efforts to better understand, recruit, train, support and retain our paraprofessionals.

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<sup>14</sup> Note: Appendix B of the Agreement is **not** attached to this report.



## Appendix: Parapro Questionnaire

### DISTRICT 39 CRC SURVEY OF PARAPROFESSIONALS IN THE DISTRICT



Dear District 39 Paraprofessional,

**Your input is very valuable!** You are cordially invited to fill out this confidential paraprofessional survey developed by the Understanding Paraprofessional and Substitute Issues Sub-Committee of the District 39 Community Review Committee (CRC). We care a lot about you and the work that you do as a paraprofessional and we want the district to know what you consider important. The survey is a bit long because we want to be thorough. It will take 10-20 minutes to fill out. If you have more comments than space for a given question, feel free to continue on the back of the questionnaire or on a separate sheet of paper that you attach to this document. (Please remember to write the number of the question to which your comments pertain.)

A high response rate will ensure that all paraprofessionals' views are represented as part of our study of the topic. A written report will be formally presented to the District 39 Board of Education and Administration in June. (Last year, our CRC group conducted a similar voluntary survey of teachers and we obtained a response rate of 62%. We are hoping for an equal or better response rate from the paraprofessionals!)

The survey responses will be tabulated confidentially and anonymously and will be reported as a group. Consequently, please do not put your name anywhere on the survey. If you misplace your questionnaire and need a replacement, contact our sub-committee chairman at (847)-853-8538 or [czsolnay@msn.com](mailto:czsolnay@msn.com). **Please return the completed survey questionnaire to a return box in the office of any District 39 school by Friday March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2002.**

Thanks in advance for your consideration, opinions and input!

Sincerely,

The Understanding Paraprofessional and Substitute Issues Sub-Committee of the CRC

*About the CRC:* The CRC is the independent research arm of the District 39 Board of Education. It is comprised of volunteer representatives from the PTA/PTOs, faculty, administration, caucus and community members-at-large. Each year, the CRC studies topics of importance to the school district. This year's topics are: Understanding Issues of Paraprofessionals and Substitutes, Curriculum Differentiation and Community Service/Character Building/ Civic Responsibility for Students. Participation in surveys or interviews by the CRC is voluntary. The President of the CRC for 2002 is Stephen Thompson who can be reached at (847) 251-7089 or [Sthompson@nl.edu](mailto:Sthompson@nl.edu).

Now, please turn to the first page of the survey.



**Please mark an "X" on the line next to your answer:**

**1) What type of paraprofessional position do you have in D39 this year.**

\_\_\_\_\_ Paraprofessional working with special needs children in a K-4 setting

## Paraprofessional working with special needs children in a 5-8 setting

\_\_\_\_\_ Other Type of Parapro (Check which kind: \_\_\_\_\_ School Building \_\_\_\_\_ Resource Center  
 \_\_\_\_\_ ESL \_\_\_\_\_ Computer Lab \_\_\_\_\_ Kindergarten  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Reading \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_)

2) Is your position this year: \_\_\_\_\_ Full-time \_\_\_\_\_ Part-time

**3) How many years have you been a paraprofessional *anywhere*:**

1 or less    2-3    4-6    7-9    10 or more

4) How many years have you been a paraprofessional *in D39*:

1 or less    2-3    4-6    7-9    10 or more

5) Including District 39, in how many school districts have you worked as a paraprofessional:

\_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_ 4 or more

6) Do you live in the D39 school district:        No        Yes (How long:       )

7) How do you *usually* commute to school \_\_\_\_\_ Public Transportation (Which kind(s): \_\_\_\_\_ "L"

\_\_\_\_\_ bus \_\_\_\_\_ Metra) \_\_\_\_\_ Car alone \_\_\_\_\_ Carpool \_\_\_\_\_ Walk or bike \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

8) How many miles do you live from the school in which you work:

     0-2         3-5         6-10         11-15         16-20         21+

9) How many minutes is your average commute *one-way* to school each day:

\_\_\_\_ 0-15      \_\_\_\_ 16-30      \_\_\_\_ 31-45      \_\_\_\_ 46-60      \_\_\_\_ 61+

**Please continue on the next page.**



10) Is there a written job description of your current job?

\_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Yes *If "Yes", please answer the following:*

- a) Could you get a copy of this job description if you wanted it? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Don't know
- b) Does this job description accurately describe the kind of work you do? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Don't know
- c) Does this job description accurately describe the amount of work you do? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Don't know
- d) Do you have input into changes to this written job description? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Don't know

11) Please describe what you like most about your job. What aspects of your work give you the most job satisfaction?

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12) If you could improve an aspect of your job to make it more satisfying, what would you improve?

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13) Which **ONE** of the following **BEST** describes your career plans as of today?

- \_\_\_ Stay in my current job until I am eligible to retire
- \_\_\_ Stay in my current job until I must retire
- \_\_\_ Seek a promotion within my current job classification
- \_\_\_ Seek a job within D 39 with a different job classification
- \_\_\_ Seek a similar job to what I have now, but in a different school district
- \_\_\_ Become a certified teacher
- \_\_\_ Find a job outside of education
- \_\_\_ Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

Please continue on the next page.



14) Please put an "X" in the column that best describes how satisfied are you with each of the following aspects of your current paraprofessional job in D39:

Aspect:	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
a) Wages you earn:				
b) Employee benefits:				
c) Personal fulfillment from the job:				
d) Freedom to decide how to do the job:				
e) Job security:				
f) Chances for promotion or advancement:				
g) Opportunities for professional development and in-service training:				
h) Support from your supervisor:				
i) Support from teachers:				

15) What is your *highest level* of education: ☐ high school degree ☐ some college  
☐ college degree ☐ Master's or professional degree ☐ PhD

16) Have you worked in a public school district as a teacher in the past:  
☐ Yes (how many years ) ☐ No

17) Are you a retired teacher: ☐ Yes ☐ No

18) Do you have a college degree in teaching or teacher certification: ☐ Yes ☐ No

19) Are you *currently* working towards a degree in teaching or teacher certification  
☐ Yes ☐ No

20) (Answer this question only if you answered "no" to 17, 18 and 19 above) How interested are you in training to become a teacher: ☐ Very Interested ☐ Somewhat interested ☐ Not very interested  
☐ Not at all interested

21) Immediately prior to your job as a paraprofessional in District 39, what were you doing:  
☐ I was a student ☐ I was home parenting  
☐ I had another job as a  Other:

Please continue on the next page.



22) Below is a list of questions regarding paraprofessional training that has occurred this school year in D39. Please answer and offer feedback to help with future planning:

a) Did you attend the "Introduction Class for New Paraprofessionals" that was held the day before school started: ☐ No ☐ Yes *If "Yes", please answer the following:*

i. How well did it meet your expectations overall? Were your expectations:  
☐ Very Well Met ☐ Well Met ☐ Met ☐ Somewhat Unmet ☐ Not met

ii. Did the course provide you with enough information about your job/role as a paraprofessional: ☐ Yes ☐ No  
 (If "No", what additional information would have been helpful to you \_\_\_\_\_)

iii. Did the course provide you with enough information to understand different disabilities: ☐ Yes ☐ No  
 (If "No", what additional information would have been helpful to you: \_\_\_\_\_)

iv. Did the course provide you with enough information about working with teachers and instruction practices: ☐ Yes ☐ No (If "No", what additional information would have been helpful to you: \_\_\_\_\_)

v. Did the course provide you with enough information about general special education information and IEPs: ☐ Yes ☐ No (If "No", what additional information would have been helpful to you \_\_\_\_\_)

b) Did you attend "An optional 3-day class in August" where you were able to meet with the regular classroom teacher and special education teacher with whom you would be working to learn about and prepare for the special education student with whom you would be working: ☐ No ☐ Yes *If "Yes", please answer the following:*

i. How well did it meet your expectations overall? Were your expectations:  
☐ Very Well Met ☐ Well Met ☐ Met ☐ Somewhat Unmet ☐ Not met

ii. Did the Optional 3-day class in August provide you with enough information on the topic: ☐ Yes ☐ No (If "No", what additional information would have been helpful to you: \_\_\_\_\_)

c) Did you attend the September in-service on "Behavioral Techniques": ☐ No ☐ Yes *If "Yes", please answer the following:*

i. How well did it meet your expectations overall? Were your expectations:  
☐ Very Well Met ☐ Well Met ☐ Met ☐ Somewhat Unmet ☐ Not met



ii. Did the Behavioral Techniques in-service provide you with enough information on the topic: ☐ Yes ☐ No (If "No", what additional information would have been helpful to you: \_\_\_\_\_)

d) Did you attend the October in-service on "Curriculum Modifications and Adaptations":

☐ No ☐ Yes *If "Yes", please answer the following:*

i. How well did it meet your expectations overall? Were your expectations:

☐ Very Well Met ☐ Well Met ☐ Met ☐ Somewhat Unmet ☐ Not met

ii. Did the Curriculum Modifications and Adaptations in-service provide you with enough information on the topic: ☐ Yes ☐ No (If "No", what additional information would have been helpful to you: \_\_\_\_\_)

e) Did you attend the November in-service on "Understanding Specific Disabilities":

☐ No ☐ Yes *If "Yes", please answer the following:*

i. How well did it meet your expectations overall? Were your expectations:

☐ Very Well Met ☐ Well Met ☐ Met ☐ Somewhat Unmet ☐ Not met

ii. Did the Understanding Specific Disabilities in-service provide you with enough information on the topic: ☐ Yes ☐ No (If "No", what additional information would have been helpful to you: \_\_\_\_\_)

f) Did you attend the December in-service on "Handwriting and Boardmaker":

☐ No ☐ Yes *If "Yes", please answer the following:*

i. How well did it meet your expectations overall? Were your expectations:

☐ Very well met ☐ Well met ☐ Met ☐ Somewhat Unmet ☐ Not met

ii. Did the Handwriting and Boardmaking in-service provide you with enough information on the topic: ☐ Yes ☐ No (If "No" what additional information would have been helpful to you: \_\_\_\_\_.)

g) Did you attend the January in-service "Communications Strategies with a Focus on Autism":

☐ No ☐ Yes *If "Yes", please answer the following:*

i. How well did it meet your expectations overall? Were your expectations:

☐ Very Well Met ☐ Well Met ☐ Met ☐ Somewhat Unmet ☐ Not met



ii. Did the Communications Strategies and Autism in-service provide you with enough information on the topic: ☐ Yes ☐ No (If "No", what additional information would have been helpful to you: \_\_\_\_\_)

h) Did you participate in one or more "On-the-spot Support and Training Consultations" to help you, as the paraprofessional, work with a particular aspect of a special needs student to which you are assigned:

☐ No ☐ Yes If "Yes", please answer the following:

i. How well did it meet your expectations overall? Were your expectations:  
☐ Very Well Met ☐ Well Met ☐ Met ☐ Somewhat Unmet ☐ Not met

ii. Did the "on-the-spot" support and training consultation provide you with enough information on the topic: ☐ Yes ☐ No (If "No", what additional information would have been helpful to you: \_\_\_\_\_)

i) How many of the above in-services were you aware of whether you attended them or not?  
☐ All ☐ Most ☐ Some ☐ None

j) Did you attend any other in-services or workshops this year through the district that are not listed above?

☐ No

☐ Yes (If "yes", which one(s) \_\_\_\_\_)

How well did it/they meet your expectations overall? Were your expectations:  
☐ Very Well Met ☐ Well Met ☐ Met ☐ Somewhat Unmet ☐ Not met

Please continue on the next page.



23) Are there other topics for future in-services that would be helpful to you in your specific position as a paraprofessional: ☐ No ☐ Yes (Your suggestions: \_\_\_\_\_)

24) What is your age range: ☐ 21-29 ☐ 30-39 ☐ 40-49 ☐ 50-59 ☐ 60 or older

25) What is your marital status: ☐ Single, never married ☐ Widowed, divorced, separated  
☐ Married with a spouse who ☐ works full-time/ ☐ works part-time/ ☐ is not employed /  
☐ is retired

26) What is your gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

**ANSWER QUESTION # 27 ONLY IF YOU ARE A PARAPROFESSIONAL WHO WORKS WITH SPECIAL ED STUDENTS, ALL OTHER PARAPROFESSIONALS SHOULD CONTINUE WITH QUESTION #28.**

27) For paraprofessionals who work with special ed students, below is a list of task or roles that take place on behalf of students in the classroom. Read each task and indicate whose responsibility each is by putting an "X" in the appropriate column. IF you think the teacher and paraprofessional could share the role, place an "X" in column marked "BOTH", but make an arrow towards the person who has the primary responsibility:

TASK	TEACHER	BOTH	PARAPROFESSIONAL
a. Identifying learning problems.			
b. Reviewing lessons.			
c. Selecting criteria for behavioral management objectives.			
e. Selecting instructional materials.			
f. Consulting with other professionals regarding a student.			
g. Lesson planning.			
h. Demonstrating materials or methods.			
i. Planning daily and weekly schedules.			
j. Assessing effective instructional techniques.			
k. Teaching lessons to the entire class.			
l. Assessing individual students.			
m. Administering tests.			
n. Monitoring tests.			
o. Scoring tests.			
p. Reporting to and meeting w/parents regarding student progress.			
q. Teaching small groups and individual students.			
r. Observing and recording data.			
s. Arranging room, learning centers and bulletin boards.			
t. Listening to students' problems.			
u. Evaluating student performance.			
v. Initialing requests for evaluation/reassessment of student.			
w. Participating in IEP meetings.			
x. Attending faculty meetings.			

(Adapted from Vass, S.F. & Steckelberg, A.L. (1991) Issues and Responsibilities in Utilizing, Training and Managing Paraprofessionals. Dept of Special Education and Communication Disorders, University of Nebraska.)



28) Do you have any additional comments to share?

☐ No

☐ Yes

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**This ends the survey!**

**Paraprofessionals: Thank you very much for your time and input!  
Please fold and staple or clip the survey and deposit it in a return  
box in any District 39 school office by Friday, March 15, 2002.**



