

Maine Education Technicians:
Reported Perceptions of Preservice
Preparation, Supervision, and Ongoing
Developmental Training Needs

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Purpose of the Study

- Investigate the perceptions of Maine Education Technicians regarding their preservice preparation, supervision, and ongoing developmental training needs.
- Review what Maine is doing regarding the NCLB and IDEA 2004 requirement that paraprofessionals/education technicians be highly qualified, adequately trained and supervised in the performance of their duties. .

Current Status of Maine Education Technicians

- In the Fall of 2008 the Maine Department of Education had 5430 paraprofessionals or education technicians endorsed as working in Maine public schools.
(approximately 2025 sped teachers)
- These educational technicians were classified in three categories:
 - Education Technician I (n=1368),
 - Education Technician II (n=1776),
 - Education Technician III (n=2286).
 - (Each category maintained educational standards and job limitations)

Why So Many Ed. Techs?

- The demand for more cost effective service delivery models as the number of students with disabilities involved in special education has increased.
- Complexities and demands of NCLB and IDEA 2004, which require increased higher learning standards and academic performance for all students,
- The efficiency of scale as it relates to student/teacher ratios when dealing with low incidence disabilities in rural areas..
- The belief that when properly trained and supervised; ed. techs. can provide an efficient and cost effective way for supporting students with disabilities.

On-going legal and ethical issues

- Least qualified individuals often have primary teaching responsibilities for the most challenging students.
- The most complex teaching strategies are often implemented by untrained education technicians.
- Education technicians often lack academic qualifications and competencies for the performance of their duties.
- Special education teachers are often untrained, undertrained, or are hesitant to direct or supervise paraprofessionals. (Brown, Farrington, Ziegler, Knight, & Ross, 1999; Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Giangreco & Broer, 2003; Mueller 2002;; Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2001; Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & MacFarland, 1997; Marks, Shrader & Levine, 1999; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay & Stahl, 2001).

What does the literature say?

- Prior research has shown that few technicians nation wide have had much formal training in instructing students with disabilities, and further that they generally have received minimal supervision (Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Etscheidt, 2005; Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002).
- I wanted to see if that were the case in Maine.

What does the IDEA say?

- IDEA 2004 requires that states ensure that all personnel needed to provide special education services are adequately prepared and trained and, in addition, that paraprofessionals be appropriately supervised (IDEA 20 U.S.C. 1412(a) (14)).
- IDEA addresses the issue of personnel standards by requiring states to address identified needs for inservice and preservice training to ensure that personnel, including paraprofessionals, possess the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the needs of students with disabilities.
- IDEA regulations offer minimal guidance and direction as to what constitutes appropriate training and supervision to local schools.
- How this requirement was to be met was essentially left up to the individual states.

What is happening nation wide

- States such as Minnesota, Utah, Vermont and Wisconsin have developed specific exemplary models for preservice and inservice training as well as requirements for the supervision of paraprofessionals.
- Many states mandate the completion of a formal certification programs as a condition for licensure.
- Standards for most states, including Maine, are not clear and are not necessarily competency based.

How does Maine stack up?

- Maine has certification standards for three levels of special education paraprofessionals who are called *Educational Technician I, II, III*. (State of Maine. n.d.) .
- All three levels contain, (sic. minimal) education requirements, permitted responsibilities, and supervision requirements.

Educational Technician I

<u>Requirements</u>	Permitted Responsibilities	Required Supervision
Hold a high school diploma or GED.	<p>(a) <i>Review and reinforce learning previously introduced by the classroom teacher or appropriate content specialist, or assist in drill or practice activities;</i></p> <p>(b) <i>Perform non-instructional, non-evaluative functions;</i></p> <p>(c) <i>Assist in the preparation of instructional materials;</i></p> <p>and (d) <i>Provide classroom management functions.</i></p>	<p>(a) <i>Be assigned instructional duties that are directly supervised by the classroom teacher or appropriate content specialist in the classroom;</i></p> <p>or (b) <i>Serve under general administrative supervision when performing non-instructional student-related duties</i></p>

Education Technician II

Requirements	Permitted Responsibilities	Required Supervision
<u>Educational Technician II:</u> document a minimum of 60 credits of approved study in an educationally related field; or, for career and technical education authorization, document a minimum of two years of paid applied employment within the field of assignment.	<i>(a) Perform all of the duties of an Educational Technician I; and (b) Introduce new learning preplanned in collaboration with the classroom teacher or appropriate content specialist.</i>	<i>a) Meet with the classroom/program teacher or appropriate content specialist and receive direction on a regular basis, whenever possible on a daily basis; (b) Perform short-term instruction in small groups under the direct supervision of the teacher or appropriate content specialist in the classroom; or (c) Conduct one-on-one or small group instruction with indirect supervision.</i>

Education Technician III

Requirements	Permitted Responsibilities	Required Supervision
<p><u>Educational Technician III</u>: document a minimum of 90 credits of approved study in an educationally related field; or, for career and technical education authorization, document a minimum of three years of paid applied employment within the field of assignment.</p>	<p><i>(a) Perform all of the duties of an Educational Technician I or II;</i> <i>(b) Introduce new learning preplanned in consultation with the classroom teacher or appropriate content specialist; and</i> <i>(c) Supervise small groups of students in community-based programs.</i></p>	<p><i>(a) Meet with the classroom/program teacher or appropriate content area specialist and receive direction, whenever possible on a twice weekly basis; or</i> <i>(b) Perform short-term instruction in small classes or in community-based programs with indirect supervision</i></p>

CONCERN

- None of the educational requirements stipulate any knowledge or competencies in the area of special education which could lead one to conclude that often the least qualified personnel are often in a position of providing the majority of instruction and related services to students presenting the most complex learning challenges.

Study Method

- A mailing list of the public school K-12 education technicians was obtained from the Maine Department of Education.
- The questionnaire was mailed to a random sample of 750.
- After one month 258 paraprofessionals returned completed questionnaires for a return rate of 34%.

Study Limitations

- As with most survey research a concern is with the generalization of the findings.
- In this instance the question of how generalized are the opinions of the sample respondents reflective of the population of the education technicians in Maine?
- The sample return approximated the total population percentage in regards to the level of certification Tech I-II-III with a higher percentage return rate for Tech III.

Comparison



Type	Population Frequency	Percent	Sample Frequency	Sample Percent
Tech1	1358	25.1%	57	22.1%
Tech2	1776	32.7%	59	22.9%
Tech3	2286	42.2%	142	55.0%
Total	5420	100.0	258	100.0

Survey Instrument

- Basic demographics including training, experience, and current role and responsibilities
- Perceptions of the extent and usefulness of supervision and performance evaluation by regular education and special education teachers;
- Perceptions of paraprofessionals regarding their current knowledge level required to perform their duties; and
- Perceptions of paraprofessionals regarding their current and recent training - along with their perceptions of current major training needs.

Basic Demographics

Category	Number	Percentage of Respondents (%)
Gender		
Male	40	15.5%
Female	218	84.5%
Total	258	100%
Age		
20-29	24	9.3%
30-39	38	14.7%
40-49	86	33.3% = 76%
50+	110	42.7% =
Total	258	100%
Level of Education		
High School	29	11.2% = 34.2%
Non Degree College	62	24.0% =
Associate Degree	60	23.3%
Bachelor Degree	98	38.0%
Graduate Degree	9	3.5%
Total	258	100%

Current Maine Certification			
Technician I	57	22.1%	
Technician II	59	22.9%	
Technician III	142	55.0%	
Total	258	100%	
Years Experience as Technician			
1 year	18	7.0%	
2 years	31	12.0%	
3 years	19	7.4%	
4-6 years	51	19.8%	
7-9 years	55	21.3%	53.9%
10+ years	84	32.6%	
Total	258	100%	

Preservice Preparation

Level of Adequacy	Technician I	Technician II	Technician III	Total
Very Poor	3 (5.3%)	1 (1.7%)	12 (8.5%)	16 (6.2%)
Poor	9 (15.8%)	10 (16.9%)	22 (15.6%)	41 (16.0%)
Fair	18 (31.6%)	13 (22.0%)	31 (22.0%)	62 (24.1%)
Good	19 (33.3%)	19 (49.2%)	45 (31.9%)	93 (36.2%)
Excellent	8 (14.0%)	6 (10.2%)	31 (22.0%)	45 (17.5%)
Total	57 (100%)	59 (100%)	141 (100%)	257 (100%)

Frequency and Effectiveness of Supervision and Instructional Consultation:

- Both Federal and State regulations mandate that paraprofessionals be appropriately supervised in the performance of their duties.

Frequency of Performance Evaluation

Frequency	Technician I	Technician II	Technician III	Total
Weekly	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (.7%)	1 (.4%)
Twice Monthly	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (.7%)	1 (.4%)
Monthly	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Quarterly	1 (1.8%)	1 (1.7%)	1 (.7%)	3 (1.2%)
Semi-annual	4 (7.0%)	5 (8.5%)	9 (6.3%)	18 (7.0%)
Annual	29 (50.9%)	33 (55.9%)	71 (50.0%)	133 (51.6%)
Never	23 (40.4%)	20 (33.9%)	59 (41.5%)	102 (39.5%)
Total	57 (100%)	59 (100%)	142 (100%)	258 (100%)

Frequency of Consultation on Direct Student Instruction

Frequency	Technician I	Technician II	Technician III	Total
Daily	16 (28.1%)	21 (35.6%)	37 (26.1%)	74 (28.7%)
Weekly	21 (36.8%)	18 (30.5%)	43 (30.3%)	82 (31.8%)
Twice Monthly	0 (0%)	3 (5.1%)	13 (9.2%)	16 (6.2%)
Monthly	6 (10.5%)	4 (6.8%)	6 (4.2%)	16 (6.2%)
Quarterly	5 (8.8%)	1 (1.7%)	7 (4.9%)	13 (5.0%)
Semi-annual	1 (1.8%)	2 (3.4%)	4 (2.8%)	7 (2.7%)
Annual	1 (1.8%)	1 (1.7%)	7 (4.9%)	9 (3.5%)
Never	7 (12.3%)	9 (15.3%)	25 (17.6%)	41 (15.9%)
Total	57 (100%)	59 (100%)	142 (100%)	258 (100%)

Helpfulness of Consultation on Direct Student Instruction*

Degree of Helpfulness	Technician I	Technician II	Technician III	Total
Not Helpful	2 (4.0%)	1 (2.0%)	5 (4.3%)	8 (3.7%)
Somewhat Helpful	5 (10.0%)	3 (6.0%)	17 (14.5%)	25 (11.5%)
Helpful	19 (38.0%)	17 (34.0%)	45 (38.5%)	81 (37.3%)
Very Helpful	14 (28.0%)	17 (34.0%)	34 (29.1%)	65 (30.0%)
Extremely Helpful	10 (20.0%)	12 (24.0%)	16 (13.7%)	38 (17.5%)
Total	50 (50.0%).	50 (100%)	117 (100%)	217 (100%)

I Have Received the Necessary on the Job Training in Working with my Students:

Level of Perception	Technician I	Technician II	Technician III	Total
Strongly Disagree	3 (5.3%)	0 (0%)	4 (2.8%)	7 (2.7%)
Disagree	7 (12.3%)	7 (11.9%)	25 (17.6%)	39 (15.1%)
Uncertain	5 (8.8%)	6 (10.2%)	18 (12.7%)	29 (11.2%)
Agree	25 (43.9%)	29 (49.2%)	74 (52.1%)	128 (49.6%)
Strongly Agree	17 (29.8%)	17 (28.8%)	21 (14.8%)	55 (21.3%)
Total	57 (100%)	59 (100%)	142 (100%)	258 (100%)

During last 12 months how many clock hours of Inservice Training Have you Received

Clock Hours of Inservice	Technician I	Technician II	Technician III	Total
None	3 (5.3%)	4 (6.8%)	22 (15.6%)	29 (11.3%)
1-2 Hours	10 (17.5%)	8 (13.6%)	19 (13.5%)	37 (14.4%)
3-6 Hours	8 (14.0%)	9 (15.3%)	13 (9.2%)	30 (11.7%)
7-9 Hours	5 (8.8%)	7 (11.9%)	16 (11.3%)	28 (10.9%)
10+Hours	31 (54.4%)	31 (52.5%)	71 (50.4%)	133 (51.8%)
Total	57 (100%)	59 (100%)	142 (100%)	258 (100%)

Open ended question on perceived training needs

• Dealing with behavior, emotional and social challenges.	164	43.4%
• Issues dealing with special education rules	30	7.9%
• Use of technology and adaptive equipment	30	7.9%
• Reading Instruction	27	7.2%
• Math Instruction	26	6.9%
• Autism	26	6.9%
• Communication skills	21	5.5%
• Motivation strategies	19	5.0%
• Dealing with stress	16	4.2%
• Written Language instruction	14	3.7%
• <u>First aid</u>	5	1.4%
• Total	378	100%

Summary: Demographics

- Demographics: Maine is no different
 - In 2001 a National survey conducted by SPeNSE found that the typical special education paraprofessional was a 44-year-old female with 6.5 years of experience.
 - The findings of this survey found that 84% to be female over the age of 40 with 53.9% having more than 6 years experience.
 - From my experience , one could speculate that for many of these individuals it is a secondary income for the family and complements the schedule of mothers with school age children.

Summary: Supervision

- It NCLB and IDEA require that paraprofessionals be formally supervised by qualified licensed professionals.
- Study results indicate that many participants (39.5%) reported that they never have had a performance evaluation.
- These findings are similar to those of Gerber et.al. (2001) and Wallace (2003) suggesting that even with the strong wording of NCLB and IDEA that little has changed in the last seven years.
- With the current emphasis on student progress and the accountability of instructional programs it is imperative that as key players in the academic programs for students that education technicians be closely supervised in the performance of those duties.
- This might be particularly important in those schools where full inclusion is practiced and the special education teacher functions as a case manager overseeing the activities of many paraprofessionals who work with students in the regular classroom.

- Education technicians must not only be supervised in the performance of their duties, they must also be guided and consulted in the nuances of instruction of students with disabilities.
- Findings of this study indicate 15.9% responded that they never had consultation on the direct instruction of students with a the special education teacher.
- If that is true then one could question if those students receiving much of their educational program from education technicians that are being minimally supervised or evaluated by the special education teacher are receiving an appropriate educational program.

Training

- IDEA 2004 stipulates that paraprofessionals may assist in the provision of special education only if they are *appropriately trained and supervised* (20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)(14)(b)(iii)).
- IDEA does not provide specific guidance in what is deemed appropriate.
- IDEA states that *the qualifications must be consistent with any state approved or state-recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the professional discipline in which those persons are providing special education or related services* (20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)(14)(b)(ii)).
- Many states have established competency guidelines for entry level certification and continued training for paraprofessionals while others like Maine have minimal qualifications often associate with post secondary courses or passing a standard examination such as PARAPRO.

- Neither of these strategies indicate competency in instructing students with disabilities.
- This study found that 46.3% of the respondents indicated that their perceptions of the adequacy of their initial training was *very poor to fair*.
- When asked about additional training 29.1% of the participants indicated they were *uncertain to strongly disagree* on whether or not they had received the necessary training to work with their current students.

- The literature has historically called attention to fact that education technicians are not adequately trained to support children with disabilities (Deardorf, Glasenapp, Schalock, & Udell, 2007; Downing, Ryndak, & Clark 2000; Etscheidt, 2005, Fenner, 2005; Pickett, Likens, & Wallace 2002, Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001).
- A question is what should the training consist of and how should it be delivered.
- A number of states, (Utah, Iowa, Rhode Island, Washington, Wisconsin, Colorado, and Minnesota) have developed comprehensive, validated preservice and continuing training programs designed specifically for paraprofessionals.
- Most of the training models were based on the Competencies for Paraprofessionals developed by the Council for Exceptional Children.

Immediate Training Need

- Current Education technicians have identified dealing with behavior, emotional and social challenges as the number 1 training need.

Conclusions

- The need for competent special education technicians will increase with the demand for academic accountability fueled by the reforms of NCLB and IDEA 2004.
- The public education community cannot deny that special education technicians have become an important part of the education of students with disabilities.
- As with special education teachers, special education technicians must be able to demonstrate basic competencies recognized in clearly defined standards.
- Education Technicians are frequently given responsibilities for which they are not adequately trained which begs the question of whether or not the least qualified school instructional personnel are being used to provide primary instructional supports for students with the most complex educational challenges.
- Findings of this study suggest that many special education technicians may not be receiving adequate preservice and inservice training and supervision in the performance of their duties.

Conclusions Cont.

- The role of the special education teacher is becoming more complex as the accountability factors in the student's educational program increases.
- As these responsibilities increase the role of the special education technicians will become more demanding.
- As their role increases assurances must be made that they are appropriately supervised.
- It is clear that IDEA requires that they must be supervised; what is not clear is what represents adequate and appropriate supervision.
- Historically special education teachers have not had adequate training in supervision.

Conclusions Cont.

- Some unanswered question.
 - Does Maine have standards to insure that special education technicians have the skills and competencies required to work with students with disabilities?
 - Do special education technicians have adequate and appropriate preservice and inservice training opportunities?
 - Are special education teachers prepared to supervise and perform adequate and appropriate supervision with special education technicians?

Next Steps

- At a minimum it is suggested that Maine Certification for Education Technicians be reviewed to ensure that specific basic entry level competencies are developed based upon standards similar to those from the Council for Exceptional Children.
- Community College and University of Maine systems develop programs specific to special education technicians.
- LEA's establish provide ongoing professional development opportunities to insure a consistent level of quality instructional services to students with disabilities. **This could be done on a regional basis.**

Next Steps

- This will require an outlay of resources and commitment of time for training of not only the technicians but of the special education teachers.
- The end result will unquestionably be better services for students with disabilities.

Recommendations/Discussion

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