OBSTACLES IN PURSUING TEACHER CERTIFICATION OF

PARAPROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES IN A TEXAS URBAN SCHOOL

DISTRICT

A Record of Study

by

CARRIE ODEN MARZ

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2006

Major Subject: Educational Administration

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Approved by:

Co-Chairs of Committee,	Luana Zellner
	David Erlandson
Committee Members,	Bryan Cole
	Elizabeth Foster
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ABSTRACT

Obstacles in Pursuing Teacher Certification of Paraprofessional Employees in a Texas

Urban School District. (May 2006)

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School districts across the country are faced with teacher shortages in critical need areas such as special education and bilingual education. Further complicating this shortage is the movement to augment the existing teaching force with minority teachers in order to more closely reflect the changing demographics of the student population. Many states/districts have turned to alternative routes to teaching certification as the answer to expedite the recruitment of teachers. A largely untapped resource for new teachers can be found among the talented paraprofessional employees already employed within the school districts.

Paraprofessional employees working in today's classrooms offer a wealth of classroom knowledge and experience in these potential teachers. Districts seeking to recruit these employees as potential students need information on how to support and promote the hiring of teachers representative of minority groups that reflect the demographic composition of the student population.

The primary purpose of this study is to identify the obstacles faced by

paraprofessionals in a large urban school district who aspire to become certified teachers by pursuing a bachelor's degree. Using naturalistic inquiry techniques, paraprofessionals wishing to become teachers completed questionnaires and participated in individual interviews. The data were examined and categorized using qualitative techniques in order to identify recurrent and common emerging themes where community colleges and universities can work to increase their support of these students and where school districts can increase levels of supports.

DEDICATION

The road to a doctoral degree is long and hard. As a working mother and graduate student, I could not have arrived at my goal without the unfailing support of my family. My husband, Ray, believed in my ability to achieve throughout the highs and lows of the journey. Even when I felt that I would never arrive at the ending point, he pushed me on and helped relieve me of so many responsibilities so that I could dedicate more time to my studies. My two children, Allison and John, never complained about the time that was taken away from them and showed their pride in my achievements through their writing and through their acceptance of my academic responsibilities. My parents, John and Janeen Oden, taught me the importance of education and, through example, exemplified the dedication and diligence imperative to success in obtaining advanced degrees. And finally, thank you to my grandmother, Leona Morrison Oden, who shared with me her beliefs in the necessity for women to achieve and to improve themselves.

As one of the participants in my interviews said, "I've Stepped Out" to achieve a lifelong goal. But, without the support of my wonderful family, it could never have become a reality.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with sincere respect and deep admiration that I thank the members of my Committee. Dr. Luana Zellner served as my guide and mentor. She supported me unfailingly throughout my educational experience at Texas A&M University and encouraged me every step of the way. Dr. David Erlandson, with his kind ways and limitless patience, shared his passion for naturalistic inquiry. He led me, through example, down the path of becoming a scholar. Dr. Bryan Cole opened my eyes to the importance and responsibility of engaging in scholarly research. His input allowed me to engage in reflective thought and to review my study objectively in order to enhance and clarify key elements. Dr. Elizabeth Foster served as example by teaching me indirectly to persevere through hardship and never give up.

I wish also to thank Dr. John Hoyle. From the beginning of my studies at Texas A&M University, he stressed the importance of continuing the Aggie tradition of excellence and the responsibilities of scholarship demanded through the Aggie legacy.

Another member of the academic community who guided me through this journey was Dr. Sandra Harris of Lamar University. Her belief in my ability to accomplish this goal afforded me a guardian angel throughout the process. I thank her for her example of excellence in teaching during my master's program at Stephen F. Austin State University and her continued interest in my success during my doctoral program.

I have been fortunate to have been guided by a team of scholars who shared their dedication and passion for research. I have learned much more than simply the

methodology of research. I have enjoyed the collegial atmosphere of educators dedicated

to the improvement of our profession.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

School districts across the country are faced with teacher shortages in critical

need areas such as special education and bilingual education (Fluckiger & Thompson,

2000, Berry, 2004). Further complicating this shortage is the movement to augment the

existing teaching force with minority teachers in order to more closely reflect the

changing demographics of the student population (Fluckiger & Thompson, 2000,

Andrews, Miller & Evans, 2003). Many states/districts have turned to alternative routes

to teaching certification as the answer to expedite the recruitment of teachers. A largely

untapped resource for new teachers can be found among the talented paraprofessional

employees already employed within the school districts (Eubanks, 2001, Brandick, 2001,

Post et al, 2002). However, many challenges face these potential teachers on their path

to a bachelor's degree. As adult students, they are faced with unique barriers to

education as the struggle to compete side by side traditional students in the classroom.

Many of the paraprofessional may come from backgrounds in which their parents did not

have college degrees. These first generation students face unique obstacles as they

struggle to navigate the intricacies of the college admissions and registration processes.

In an effort to meet the needs for minority teachers and teachers in areas of

critical shortage, states/districts across the country are examining alternative routes to

teacher certification and licensure programs for educators. Seeking to lessen the

disparity between the numbers of ethnically minority students and teachers, alternative

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The style and format for this record of study follow that of the *American Educational Research Journal.*

certification programs for paraprofessional employees have developed. Through such programs, universities and school districts form partnerships which allow employees to continue their employment while going to school. Frequently, financial support and academic assistance are provided (Steeley, 2003). Steeley (2003) found that through such alternative programs to teaching certification, 21% of the participants were from underrepresented populations, while only 13% of the students represented minority groups in traditional programs. The students completing the alternative programs were found to be more likely to work in more racially diverse districts with 89% of alternatively certified teachers choosing diverse districts. Students from traditional programs chose more diverse districts only 67% of the time.

Recruiting New Teachers, Inc., a division of the National Teacher Recruitment Clearinghouse, (National Teacher, n.d.), provides a rationale for the continuing recruitment of paraprofessional employees as teachers:

The nearly 500,000 paraeducators who already work in schools represent an ideal source of prospective teachers. Paraeducator-to-teacher programs are important because they:

- Expand the pool of potential teachers from underrepresented groups.
- Bring mature individuals with classroom experience into the teaching profession, especially in urban areas and critical-need fields, such as special education and bilingual education.
- Attract highly motivated individuals who tend to stay in the

profession and foster high expectations for their students.

- Make higher education more accessible and more affordable

(National Teacher Recruitment Clearinghouse, n.d.)

The face of the undergraduate student in the United States has undergone a gradual change. In 1970, there were 2.9 million high school graduates and 8.6 million college students. In 2000, there were only 2.8 million high school graduates and 15.1 million college students (Aslanian, 2001). Aslanian (2001) found that 60% of the institutions participating in her study attributed the growth in college and university enrollment to increases in adult participation in undergraduate programs. In 1970, 2.4 million undergraduate college students were over the age of twenty-five. In 2000, that number increased to 6.5 million, reflecting a 170% growth in enrollment of adult students with 65% of these students being female (Aslanian, 2001).

By recruiting paraprofessionals as future teachers, districts can tap valuable sources of professionals with classroom experience as well as draw from an employee pool representing varied minority groups. The district in this study has chosen to support initiatives which encourage paraprofessional employees employed within the district to seek teaching degrees.

Statement of the Problem

The need for qualified teachers representing marginalized populations in urban settings is rising. Paraprofessional employees working in today's classrooms offer a wealth of classroom knowledge and experience in these potential teachers. Districts seeking to recruit these employees as potential students need information on how to

support and promote the hiring of teachers representative of minority groups that reflect the demographic composition of the student population.

Paraprofessionals considering pursuing teaching degrees face a multitude of obstacles. This study explores the obstacles identified by paraprofessionals through the use of interviews and questionnaires. An understanding of the obstacles is necessary in order for districts and colleges to successfully implement programs designed to support and educate paraprofessionals seeking teaching certification.

Design of the Study

This study adopted a naturalistic qualitative inquiry process, drawing on the frameworks of qualitative case study research (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Habenstein, 1970; Payne, 1951; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). It sought to provide an understanding of the challenges faced by educational paraprofessional employees seeking bachelor's degrees in order to obtain teacher certification.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to identify the obstacles faced by paraprofessionals in a large urban school district who aspire to become certified teachers by pursuing a bachelor's degree. The research will also identify recurrent and common emerging themes where community colleges and universities can work to increase their support of these students and where school districts can increase levels of supports.

Research Questions

The study will address the following questions:

(1) What are the obstacles identified by paraprofessional employees considering teacher certification?

(2) What support mechanisms can school districts provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

(3) What support mechanisms can colleges and universities provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

Significance of the Study

School districts across the country are looking to the pool of paraprofessional employees as a potential source of certified teachers whose ethnicity could mirror that of the student population. In a survey of districts considering paraprofessional-to-educator programs, the need to expand the pool of potential teachers of color was the reason most frequently (79%) named as creating interest in such programs (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996, p. 24). Districts seeking to close the gap in racial composition between teachers and students need information on strategies to support and promote the academic growth of paraprofessionals seeking teaching degrees.

Assumptions

(1) The researcher exercised fairness in the collection and analysis of the data collected in interviews and questionnaires.

(2) The participants answered honestly to all the questions presented to them in this study.

(3) The interpretation of the data is an effective reflection of the context and the relationships explored in the study.

Limitations

Findings from this study may not be generalized beyond the school district participating in the study.

Operational Definitions

Adult Learner: Adult learners are students enrolled in institutions of higher education who are age 25 or more.

Demographic Characteristics: Demographic characteristics include age, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

First Generation College Student: A student who enters college and whose parents did not attend college.

Non-traditional Student: A student with one or more of the following characteristics; married or divorced, a parent, returning to college after a lapse in time or career, or entering college for the first time, but not right after high school graduation.

Obstacles – Events in life which make the pursuit of a college degree challenging.

Paraprofessional Employee – An employee working in a school district as an educational or clerical assistant.

Purposive Sample – A sample of a population chosen for relevance to the research questions.

Teacher Certification – Fulfillment of the requirements to teach in Texas schools, including the attainment of a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university.

Underrepresented Populations – Ethnic groups within the student population which are not represented equally compared to the overall demographic composition of a district.

<u>Urban School District</u> – In this study, an urban district is one geographically located near a large metropolis and having more than 50,000 students.

Overview of the Chapters

The record of study is divided into five major units or chapters. Chapter I contains an introduction, a statement of the problem, a purpose of the study, the overall design of the study, the significance of the study and definition of terms. Chapter Ii contains a review of the literature. The methodology and procedures followed are found in Chapter III. Chapter IV contains an analysis of the data collected in the study based on the naturalistic paradigm. Chapter V contains the researcher's summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As adult students, paraprofessionals bring a wealth of knowledge from life experiences into the college classroom. However, many of them may be the first to attend college in their families and may not have the practical knowledge of the college environment necessary to navigate the intricacies and strict requirements within the registration and enrollment systems. The literature reflects a growing body of knowledge of the unique needs of adult and first generation learners. The literature also reports varied attempts at forming paraprofessional to teacher programs as well as alternative routes to teacher certification. The growing need for qualified teachers in urban settings has compelled school districts and universities to seek alternative sources and programs for qualified teacher candidates.

This chapter presents a review of the literature to address the research questions. The literature review includes five sections. The first section outlines the unique characteristics and needs of adult undergraduate students. The second section provides a discussion of the characteristics of undergraduate students who are first generation students, or the first in their family to attend college. The third section examines the research focused on educational paraprofessionals as students in the college setting. The fourth section presents information about existing programs providing alternative routes or programs for teacher certification. The fifth section explores the needs of urban schools for qualified teachers, the teacher shortage, and the disparity between the ethnic make up of the student body and the teaching force.

Adult Learners

College and university enrollments across the country reflect a growing percentage of adult participation in higher education. Over the past three decades, the number of students over the age of 25 enrolled in higher education has increased from 28 percent of all students in 1970 to 45 percent in 2000 (Aslanian, 2001, p. 4). Adult students enrolled in four year institutions participating in federal financial aid Title IV program represent 34 percent of the total enrollment while the student population under the age of twenty-five is 63 percent of the total enrollment. In two year institutions participating in the Title IV programs, 44 percent of the students are adults over the age of twenty-five, while 54 percent of the enrolled students are under the age of twenty-five reflecting a growing number of older students enrolling in public institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Adult students are considered to be nontraditional students because the majority of adult students fit one or more of the criteria identified by the U.S. Department of Education (Choy, 2003). Choy reported on the findings of a national study of college students financed by the federal government and reported by the U.S. Department of Education. Nontraditional students often delay enrollment and begin college studies more than a year after high school graduation. They frequently are enrolled part time for at least a portion of the academic year and may work at a full time job during enrollment. Nontraditional students, because of employment status, may be considered financially independent in determining eligibility for financial aid. Nontraditional students may have family commitments, such as a spouse or children. Nontraditional

students frequently may not have a traditional high school diploma, but rather have obtained a GED or may have not finished high school. They are also more likely to choose a two year college than a four year institution.

Based on statistics gathered from the National Center for Educational Statistics and other studies in the field, Kasworm, Polson, and Fishback (2002) outline the following characteristics of adult learners.

Adults represent meteoric growth in college enrollment and participation.

Adult students currently represent ethnic and racial percentages of enrollment that are somewhat similar to those of younger college students.

Adult students typically have major family responsibilities.

Adult students are more likely to be part-time college students.

Adult students are more likely to combine full-time work with collegiate studies.

Adult students are more likely to be first generation college attendees.

Adults are more likely to come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Adults are more likely to be reentry students and to have experienced other collegiate institutions and academic programs.

Adult students have a different resource base for financing college attendance.

Adult students report their highest issue and most stressful concern is their financial fragility in supporting college attendance.

Adult students receive similar, if no higher, grade point averages in

comparison to young students.

Adult college freshman typically enter college with lower high school

grade point averages and lower class rankings in high school.

Adult students reflect uneven prior academic subject preparation when

compared to younger students.

Adult students report higher levels of satisfaction with the academic

experience in comparison with younger students (p. 5-11)

Kasworm, Polson, and Fishback recommend that colleges and universities gather

information about potential and current adult students in order to more fully meet

their unique needs.

Choy (2002) defined three groups of nontraditional students. The first group is

considered minimally nontraditional because the students in this group have only one of

the nontraditional characteristics identified by the U.S. Department of Education.

Students are considered to be moderately nontraditional if they meet two or three of the

characteristics, and highly nontraditional if they meet four or more of the characteristics.

During the school year 1999-2000, 73 percent of all undergraduates met one or more of

the criteria as a nontraditional student based on information from the National

Postsecondary Student Aid Study. Choy found that "financial independence was the

most common nontraditional characteristic (51 percent), followed by part-time

attendance (48 percent), and then delayed enrollment (46 percent)" (Choy, 2002, p. 2-3).

Nontraditional students are more likely to be employed while seeking a degree

and may consider themselves primarily employees with the role of student serving a secondary role.. Choy (2002) found that over two thirds of nontraditional students saw their first role as an employee rather than student. Choy found the following:

> Among traditional students, 30 percent did not work while enrolled, and another 67 percent worked but still considered themselves to be primarily students. The remaining 3 percent considered themselves primarily employees who enrolled in school. In sharp contrast, 67 percent of highly nontraditional students and 37 percent of moderately non traditional students considered themselves primarily employees. Even minimally nontraditional students were more likely than traditional students to consider themselves primarily employees (10 versus 3 percent). (p. 7)

Choy found some benefits to working and attending college concurrently. Of the group of students who considered themselves primarily students and who worked while going to school, 26 percent found working to be a help with the coursework and 55 percent felt that working helped prepare them for a career. Highly nontraditional students were the most likely to see working as a benefit. Disadvantages to working and attending school were limits to class schedules (39 percent), limited choice of classes (33 percent), limited number classes per semester taken (39 percent), and limited access to campus resources (30 percent), such as the library.

In a longitudinal study focused on degree-seeking students' persistence after three years, nontraditional students were found to be more likely to have discontinued their education.

Among students seeking a bachelor's degree, 50 percent of highly

nontraditional students were no longer enrolled (for any degree) 3 years

later, compared with 12 percent of traditional students. Similarly, among

those seeking an associate's degree, 62 percent of highly nontraditional

students left without any degree, compared with 19 percent of traditional

students. Even minimally nontraditional students seeking a bachelor's or

associate's degree were more likely than their traditional counterparts to

leave (Choy, 2002, p. 12-13).

In another government study centered on bachelor's degree-seeking students'

persistence after five years, nontraditional students were found to be more likely to

abandon their education after one year. Traditional students discontinued their education

during the first year at a rate of 14 percent while nontraditional students left at a rate of

27 percent. (Choy, 2002).

Nontraditional students are more likely to choose a college that is "readily accessible,

relevant to current life needs, cost-effective, flexible in course scheduling, and support of

adult lifestyle commitments" (Kasworm, 2003, p. 7). Adult students also seek colleges

that are considered prestigious or offer specialized degree programs. Adult students are

more likely than younger students to attend college part time and seek programs that will

mesh with their work schedules. Adult students seek college programs that will support

their family commitments:

Adult undergraduates value family-supportive collegiate environments

because 57 percent of them are married and 53 percent are supporting

dependents other than a spouse. In particular, the responsibility of children has been both a major inspiration and a major deterrent to participation. Currently, about 25 percent of twenty-four- to twenty-nine-year-olds, 69 percent of thirty- to thirty-nine-year-olds, and 58 percent of forty-year-old and older adults students are parents with dependent children. In addition, 29 percent are single parents, most of whom are women between the ages of thirty and forty (Kasworm, 2003, p. 8-9).

Kasworm (2003) identifies three motivating factors for adults to attend college; personal transitions and changes, proactive life planning, and a combination of the two. Personal transitions and changes may include "divorce, children entering school, a recent job loss, or a denied job promotion due to the lack of a college degree" (p. 6). The changes in the adult life make the pursuit of a college degree to be viewed as necessary for improvement or updating of skills. Adults engaging in pro-active life planning may have spent several years researching available programs and strategizing through comparison of programs before actually enrolling in classes (p. 6). Adult students with a combination of these two motivators were more likely to be students who had previously attended college and who believed that a college degree would "confer prestige and a higher social class standing" (p. 6).

In an examination of current adult learning theories, Ross-Gordon (2003) makes some recommendations for practice for colleges and universities. Based on the premise that adult learners are strong, self-directed learners, it is suggested that institutions allow input from the students in setting goals, selecting learning strategies, and assessment. It

is also important to recognize the relationship between life experiences and learning and to incorporate these qualities into teaching and learning. Ross-Gordon also posits that it is critical to recognize the cognitive development of adult learners does not halt with age and must be fostered.

Ross-Gordon states that many adult learners enter the educational realm after a life-changing experience. This factor supports the need for counseling for students, both academic and personal. Many adult students are members of marginalized racial groups and the cultural conflict inherent in the traditional conflict must be recognized and addressed. Because of a need to form relationships with the institution of higher education, adult students must be provided with outlets for forming emotional connections to the campus environment possibly through counseling.

Ross-Gordon recognizes that institutions must reconsider and redesign course designs and instructional activities in order to allow the students opportunities for learner-centered and teacher-centered learning experiences. Consideration must also be made for newly-returning learners who often require additional emotional support to overcome the initial fear of embarking on a college career. Adult students need a level of understanding by professors of the unique needs and situations. Ross-Gordon recommends that institutions "recognize that many [adult learners] return to college studies with trepidation about their abilities to be successful learners in the academic setting" (p. 50).

Richter-Antion (1986) identifies six qualitative differences between adult and younger students. First, adult students come to the university setting with "a clear

purpose in mind" (p. 59) whether it be a personal or professional goal. They have made a conscious choice to attend school. Older students may be attending college for career advancement or dissatisfaction with current job status. Younger students may be attending school due to family or peer pressures, or simply because attending college is the next "logical step" (p. 59). Second, adult students are more likely to be financing their college career themselves, while younger students frequently receive support from parents or financial aid. A poignant example is given by Richter-Antion in that younger students may be pleased when a professor fails to come to class, while an adult student feels cheated. Adults have chosen to use their income to finance an education in lieu of a vacation or other major purchase. Adult students seek value for their money and have high expectations of the educational institutions.

The third factor presented is that adults frequently have more time commitments in their lives with work and family responsibilities. It is less likely that younger students will work full-time while attending college. The responsibilities faced by adult students often necessitate that adult learners put those family and work commitments before those required by coursework. For example, if their child is ill, the adult learners have the responsibility of caring for the sick child which overshadows their responsibilities as students.

A fourth factor is that of the different perspective adults bring to the classroom based on their life experiences. Content of courses is viewed through an alternate lens when an individual has had some personal experience within the content. Younger students are less likely to challenge theories and content because they have less life

experience. Younger students tend to unconditionally trust the content of a course or lecture, while an adult student may question it based on personal or professional experiences.

The fifth factor proposes that adult students are of varying ages and are at varying stages of their lives. Adult lives are not stagnant, but rather change along with major life changes and periods of stability or instability causing a variance in the social, emotional, and pedagogical needs in the classroom. In contrast, younger students are in a well defined developmental stage of post adolescence and have similar needs. While generalization about the needs of younger students is possible because of these similarities, generalization about the needs of adults students is often challenging due to the fact that their stages in life differ greatly from one adult student to another.

The final factor identified by Richter-Antion (1986) is the concept of "social acceptability" (p. 61). According to Richter-Antion, younger students are following a traditional timeline for college attendance. Adult students may find that the role conflict formed by the knowledge that social mores support that older students are in conflict with the traditional life path of adults. Conflicting priorities of home and family versus academic obligations may cause inner unrest within the adult student.

Richter-Antion recommends that institutions recognize that adult students are not inherently better or worse than younger students, but rather are simply different. The author suggests that faculty members be exposed to adult learning theory and the special characteristics of adult students. Student services and meetings of campus organizations can be scheduled to encourage adult utilization and participation. Traditional

components of university life can be adjusted to more closely meet the needs of adult students. For example, specialized scholarships can be established for adult students. Richter-Antion also suggests a "Family Day" in addition to a "Parent Day" (p. 61).

Hadfield (2003) suggests that institutions view modifications to traditional institutional activities as a form of customer service designed to meet the needs of adult students while ensuring continued enrollment and competitive advantages for institutions.

> What, then, is the solution to the problem of attracting and retaining adult learners? To solve this problem, we need only look at how leaders in business and industry achieve excellence. They have learned that in the twenty-first century, the strategy that will set a business apart from the rest and the competitive advantage that will give them the greatest chance for success is customer service. Except for the quality of our academic offerings, excellence in customer service is the single most important factor in determining the future success or failure of our programs for adult learners, now and for the foreseeable future. …customer satisfaction is the key to attracting and retaining adult students. "Customer" is exactly how adult learners think of themselves, and they hold our institutions of higher education accountable for providing paid-for results and educational experiences that make a difference in their lives (p. 19).

Hadfield suggests that if colleges and universities adjust their views of their roles

to more closely mirror the views of adult students. They need to recognize these

students as customers and that satisfied customers generate further business.

Carney, Crompton, and Tan (2002) conducted a study of forty-two female

students enrolled at a university in Canada. Twenty-one of the students were between the

ages of 18 and 22 and were classified as the traditional student group. The remaining

twenty-one students were between the ages of 35 and 44 and were classified as the

nontraditional student group. The students completed a demographic questionnaire, an

anxiety inventory, a depression scale, and a social support measure. The purpose of the

study was to examine the relationship among social support, psychological functioning,

and academic performance in traditional and nontraditional female students.

Although the nontraditional students were found to have more stressors in their

lives, they performed academically better than the traditional students and showed no

difference in their psychological functioning. The nontraditional students were also

found to have fewer sources of "instrumental and emotional support" p. 147 than

traditional students, but were equally satisfied with their support systems. The authors

posited that "these unexpected findings could be due to a self-selection process whereby

more self-efficient, motivated, and committed individuals are more likely to choose to

return to school" (p. 149).

Carney- Crompton and Tan presented some possible strategies for educational

institutions to use to meet the needs of nontraditional students. The authors suggest that

institutions offer orientation classes to help new students through the stressful initial

stages of enrollment and registration. Another factor for institutions to consider is the flexibility of the structure and the delivery of courses. Distance education and online courses combined with traditional class structures must be offered at times that are feasible for a nontraditional student. A final consideration proposed by the authors is for institutions to reconsider their admissions criteria using indicators which may more directly predict the collegial success of nontraditional students than standard college entrance examinations.

In a national study of adult students (Aslanian, 2001), 1,500 adult students were interviewed by telephone. The study focused on the challenges faced by students in pursuing a degree, backgrounds of the students, their lifestyles, transitions and trigger events, fields of study, selection of a provider based on services and location, and the number of credit hours attempted each semester (p.9-10). Results were further grouped into results into adults students enrolled in undergraduate programs and adult students enrolled in graduate programs. The following results reported pertain to adult undergraduate students only.

Aslanian compiled her demographic data to create a picture of the typical undergraduate student.

The typical (median) undergraduate student is 38 years old, female, and white. She is married, and her total family income is $46,500. She is employed full time in a professional position and has two to three years of college. She resides in suburban communities and small cities rather than in central cities and rural areas. The population base of her ares of

residence is 44,000 (p. 31).

In conjunction with the College Board, Aslanian compiled statistics to investigate the characteristics of undergraduate adult students. This investigation revealed some patterns in the characteristics of adult undergraduate students. The researchers found that 45 percent are age 40 and older, 65 percent are female, 87 percent are white, 66 percent are married, and 79 percent are employed (p. 31).

Aslanian examined the reasons why adults return to school and found that 82 percent of the participants indicated that their job or career was the reason for continuing their education. Adults seek education in order to obtain new skills and knowledge that will help them advance or improve their job position. Aslanina found that 66 percent of undergraduate adult student attended college part time. Forty percent of this part time group took only one course each semester and 24 percent took two courses each semester. Aslanian posits that these characteristics necessitate that colleges and universities investigate alternative methods of delivery, i.e. online courses, accelerated course, weekend courses, to more adequately meet the needs of the adult undergraduate learner.

Fairchild (2003) explores the multiple roles filled by adult learners. She states that adult learners frequently are employed full time, care for children or other relatives, and serve roles as community leaders or volunteers. Fairchild posits that adult learners are seeking a return on their investment in education and possess a serious, focused attitude toward their studies. Fairchild (2003) presents three types of barriers faced by adult learners; situational barriers, dispositional barriers, and institutional barriers.

Situational barriers faced by adult learners include responsibilities to the student's children. Adult women students with older children are more likely to complete their education without interruption. Students with young children face the additional financial burden of paying for childcare. Tuition and educational cost create additional financial strain in families struggling to meet daily financial obligations. Situational barriers are also derived from the responsibilities of employment which may conflict with educational requirements (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002, Fairchild, 2003).

Dispositional barriers concern the role conflicts students experience as they struggle to meet the requirements and obligations presented by the multiple roles they play as employee, family member, and student. The incessant worrying about one role while performing another leads to role contagion, which limits the adult student's ability to cope may cause feelings of overload. Students with strong family support are more likely to overcome these additional stresses (Home, 1998; Terrell, 1990, Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002, Fairchild, 2003).

University office hours, lack of appreciation for real life experiences, and lack of connection to traditional students can contribute to institutional barriers. These barriers exist in the traditional structure of the college and universities shaped to meet the needs of traditional students (Fairchild, 2003).

Wheaton and Robinson (1983) classify the barriers faced by adult students as external and internal. Internal barriers are those presented by the guilt experienced in role conflict and the guilt involved in placing personal educational needs above familial

needs. Other internal barriers include lack of self confidence and lack of decision making skills. The authors identify external barriers as admissions testing, financial aid constraints for part-time students, child care, and increasing family demands on time.

Cross (1980) defines nontraditional students as "adult part-time learners who carry full-time adult responsibilities in addition to their study" (p. 627). Cross recommends that colleges and universities carefully analyze the needs of these students and predicts that meeting the needs of nontraditional students will be a deciding factor in the success of future enrollments. Cross recommends the government become involved and create educational information centers to guide nontraditional students in making the transition into college.

Cross' recommendations are supported in a qualitative study from Kent State University focused on the needs of adult students (O'Connor, 1994). Using a case study approach, the author investigated the needs of adult students in order to make recommendations for change within traditional universities. Twelve adult students participated in ninety minute sessions to describe their experiences at the university and to recommend modifications which would help future adult students.

Students interviewed indicated positive experiences as adult students seeking bachelor's degrees in the counseling and advising they received to support their re-entry into college. Suggestions to the university made by the participants were to make the hours for university services more user-friendly to part-time students, maintain flexibility in the scheduling of required classes, make professors cognizant of the specialized needs of students who balanced outside commitments and schooling, and

establish a reduction of fees for activities in which they were not able to participate.

The researcher also compiled a profile of the adult student. He found the adult student was "pragmatic and determined" (p. 86).

> The adult students demonstrated exceptional organizational skills and
> self-discipline. As parents, employees, and students, they had to manage
> their time and priorities efficiently. Because of their various roles and
> because they financed their own education, the adult students were very
> grade conscious. …Despite the numerous obstacles in their lives at and
> away from the university, all concurred they were willing meet these
> challenges to complete their education. …Setting and achieving an
> important goal in their lives appeared to be an intrinsic reward (p. 86).

At Northern Arizona University, a specialized course is offered to meet the unique needs of the adult student returning to school. In a course meeting two hours a week for seven weeks and worth one credit hour, new students receive vital information about the intricacies of the college system, the functions of university offices, and available student services. The objective of the program was to foster "personal empowerment" in the students within a system (Lintner, 1997, p. 24). Students are provided with detailed information about the course content, a map of the campus, information about athletic events, a free pass to a football game, a comprehensive listing of counseling and advising services and workshops, and other general information about campus events and services. Representatives from various departments, such as advising, career counseling, financial aid, made presentations to the students. The author

recommends that universities consider the needs of the adult students in future planning.

> …what may arguably be the most influential and pressing issue to spur
>
> change on the college capus is student demographsic, and, in particular,
>
> the tremendous growth in adult student enrollment. The nontraditional
>
> student will continue to influence, through their sheer numbers, the
>
> design and delivery of courses and services on the American college
>
> campus. Their unique set of needs and expectations must be recognized
>
> and addressed by faculty and school administration alike (p. 24).

Parson (2001) reports the effects of a study skills class offered to new students in conjunction with their entry level classes at Ivy Tech State College, a two year institution in Indiana. Of the 174 students studied, 117 students taking a writing class did not participate in the study skills class. Of these non-participatory students, only 47 percent of the students returned for the fall semester. However, of the 57 students taking the study skills class along with a writing course, 70 percent of the students returned in the fall. The participation in the reading class was even more dramatic with 42 percent of the non-participatory students returning in the fall and 83 percent of the study skills participants returning.

First Generation Students

First generation students are those who are the children of parents who never attended college (McConnell, 2000; Rodriguez, 2003; Van T. Bui, 2002). Adult learners are more likely to be the first in their family to attend college. Kasworm, Polson, and Fishback (2002) found that 55 percent of all adult students are first generation students,

while only 44% percent of younger undergraduate students reported being first in their family to attend college.

First generation students face many obstacles to beginning college careers. Many students have been found to have lower college entrance exam scores than their non-first generation peers. In a recent study of college entrance exams and college grade point averages (GPA) the researchers found that college entrance exams may not be an accurate predictor of success for first generation students and that a strong correlation was observed between students' abilities to self-regulate their learning and first semester GPA. Students' expectancy of success levels had a stronger correlation to a higher grade point average than the test scores (Ting, 2003; Nauman, Bandolos, & Gutkin, 2003).

Ting (2003) identified two-hundred fifteen first-generation students entering into college for the first time at a public university in the southeastern United States. Of the students in this study, 74 percent were white and 35 percent were students of color. Using a standard predictor of success for college students, the Non-Cognitive Questionnaire (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1983 in Ting, 2003), the students were tracked using their grade point averages for their first three semesters in college and their enrollment status after four years. Also considered in the study were the students SAT scores and the Admission Index calculated for enrolling students by the university. Based on the result of this study, traditional factors such as SAT and Admission Index were accurate predictors of the success of first generation white students, but were not good indicators for success for first generation students of color. The non-cognitive variables from the Non-Cognitive Questionnaire appeared to be a more accurate predictor of success for all

first generation students. Indicators considered in this analysis were demonstrated community service experience, involvement in campus activities, leadership experience, positive self-concept, and the articulation of long term goals.

Nauman, Debora& Gutkin (2003) studied a sample population of first generation and non-first generation students in a university foundations class. The sample size was 155. Using ACT scores and data collected from the researcher-created Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire, the researchers found that while ACT scores did show significance in GPA's for first generation students, a stronger predictor of success were the self-regulated learning variables such as expectancy for success, goal-setting, The recommendations of the researchers are that colleges continue to consider college admissions test scores in the admissions process for first generation students, but also consider non-cognitive variables as predictors of success.

Van T. Bui (2002) studied sixty-four students enrolled in a specialized program at a large university for first generation students. The program provided academic counseling, peer counseling, and tutoring. The students were compared to other freshmen students coming from families with college experience. Using a questionnaire, the researchers gathered background information, reasons for attending college, and information about their first-year experiences. Van T. Bui found that first generation students are more likely to be from a minority ethnic group, to feel less prepared for college, to have a greater fear of failure, and to worry more about school finances. The first generation students were "First-generation students were more likely to be ethnic minority students, to come from a lower socioeconomic background, to speak a language

other than English at home, and to score lower on the SAT than were the other students"

(Van T. Bui, p. 5).

Van T. Bui found that first generation students' reasons for attending college

gave higher importance that the other group of students to bringing recognition or honor

to their families, to making financial gains for their family, and to gaining respect or

status. Students coming from families with college experience were more likely to

pursue college to move out of the parents' home or because other family members had

attended college. First generation students often require more flexibility in scheduling

classes as they are more likely to hold jobs, be married, or to have children (Van T. Bui,

2002).

The first year college experiences of the two students groups in the study by Van

T. Bui differed in that first generation students were more likely to have a fear of failure

in college, felt less prepared for college, worried about finances, felt more of a need to

study, and felt they knew less about the college environment. However, first generation

students are less likely to seek help in these areas through school counselors, depending

rather on middle class role models such as peers or mentors. In a qualitative student of

first generation graduates, Rodriguez (2003) found that this reluctance or absence of

seeking assistance can often result in a lack of a thorough understanding of preparation

and admissions procedures as well as the obtainment of formal plans for degree

completion.

Rodriguez' study focused on success stories of first generation students.

Rodriguez found that many successful first generation students had experienced, at some

point in their academic career, being singled out as special by some school adult, such as a teacher. This special status also could be given by family members who early on recognized the academic aptitude of the student and chose to voice this recognition. Rodriguez also observed that many of these students experienced a sense of "positive naming" (p.19) where someone in the student's life actively sought to mentor the student and to seek to develop the student's potential. She relates the story of a successful pastor and college professor who was recognized early in his rural community for his skill in delivery of mini-sermons as he stood on a crate. This student heard throughout his childhood that he was special and that someday he would be a preacher, although he came from a poor family with uneducated parents. Students from the most challenging backgrounds are often seen to overcome enormous odds because their community or a special teacher simply believed in their abilities and repeatedly reinforced this belief.

First generation students are often lacking in family support (Rodriguez, 2003; Ting, 2003; Benmayor, 2002; Phinney & Haas, 2003). Families of first generation students are often unable to clearly understand the level of commitment required in attending and persisting in college. First generation students are more likely to work full time and their families may not understand the priorities these students must set towards their coursework (Inman & Mayes, 1999). These families are frequently unable to assist the student in navigating the complicated structures within the college environment, such as admissions or financial aid.

Inman and Mayes (1999) studied 5, 057 first time community college students. Of the total sample group, 91.4 percent were first generation students. The students were

asked to respond to a survey addressing self-efficacy, goals, family responsibilities, and knowledge about the college. The researchers found that first generation students are more likely to be older and female, and to have financial dependents. Very often these obligations outside the classroom bring geographical and financial constraints upon the students, making them more likely to choose a college that is convenient and less costly rather than a college more tailored to their academic needs. First generation students tend to take fewer credit hours per semester than other students and are more likely to drop out of school after one semester. General characteristics found in the Inman and Mayes study were that first generation students are less prepared academically and psychologically for college, come from poorer families than other students, and are frequently returning from the work force, thus moving from an area in which they possess a high degree of competence, through their employment, to one of low competence, in the academic setting, as they begin college careers.

A two year study by Pascarella, Wolniak, Peirson and Ternezini (2003) examined the effects of academic and non-academic levels of involvement of first generation students. The researchers conducted their studies in five community colleges in five different states. The researchers examined data collected from the National Study of Student Learning during the first three data collections points for the longitudinal study. The sample size was 144 and the students responded to twenty-one measures of the students' academic and non-academic experiences in college. These researchers found that there is a strong positive effect on persistence and success in college with increased involvement in academic activities such as study groups or active engagement in

classroom activities by first generation students. Non-academic involvement was also found to correlate with academic success, but first generation students were less likely to be involved in any type of extra-curricular activities. First generation students are less likely to begin their academic careers in a selective institution (Pascarella, Wolniak, Pierson & Ternezini, 2003). Geographical constraints and financial challenges are often contributors. First generation students are more likely to attend a two year college with lower tuition costs in some cases because they may not yet meet the academic requirements of a four year institution. First generation students often require more flexibility in scheduling classes as they are more likely to hold jobs, be married, or to have children (Van T. Bui, 2002).

Benmayor (2002) shares a similar story of the effect of positive naming by families or communities. Benmayor reported on the products from an oral history class focused on first generation students. Benmayor is a professor at a newly founded university in southern California. The majority of the student population is Hispanic and first to attend college in their families. She shares the case study of a student whose parents were poor, migrant workers. While the boy is working in the broccoli fields alongside his family, a call comes through on the walkie-talkie of the supervisor that the boy has been accepted in college. This news is immediately greeted with cheers and joy by all present. The experience remained with the student as he pursued his degree because he felt a cultural and moral obligation to succeed. Benmayor (2002) calls this "cultural citizenship" which organizes an individual's set of beliefs and values on where they fit in their culture (p. 98). In her conclusion and recommendations for further study,

Benmayor stresses the need for colleges and universities to become cognizant of the needs of first generation students and the necessity for support and understanding of the unique characteristics of the students.

Many adult and first generation college students reflect ethnic diversity. The U.S. Department of Commerce in 1996 identified the minority population as 34.5 percent of the total student population and was projected to be over 50 percent by 2035. The National Center for Education Statistics in 2001 found that only 13.5 percent of United States teachers were minorities (in Eubanks, 2001).

Alternative Routes to Certification

Due to the increasing teacher shortage across the United States, many different approaches have been implemented in attempts to recruit paraprofessional employees as teachers. The sensibility behind this approach lies in the fact that paraprofessionals have experience in classrooms and they often are individuals of color who can add diversity to the teaching force (Recruiting New Teachers, Inc., 2000, p. 3).

In an extensive study of paraprofessional to teacher programs across the country, Haselkorn and Fideler (1996) identified the typical instructional delivery methods offered to paraprofessionals as students. Models with paraprofessionals enrolled in classes with other teacher education students occurred in 70 percent of the responding programs. Teachers served as mentors to the paraprofessionals in 51 percent of the programs. A cohort model, with a core group of students moving as one through the program, was present in 42 percent of the programs. Distance learning was the method of delivery in 13 percent of the programs and self-paced courses made up 7 percent of

the programs (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996, p. 51).

To encourage paraprofessionals to continue their education and to seek teaching degrees, the Los Angeles Unified School District has an established a paraeducator career ladder system. The participants move through a matrix of levels based on their current level of education and teacher-related performance activities which are observed and assessed. The students receive job advancements as they move through the matrix as well as reimbursements for tuition. The students are grouped into clusters of 15 to 20 paraeducators to form cohort groups. These groups meet every other month to share experiences and to listen to invited speakers. Another important support mechanism is the establishment of on-campus college advisors who are familiar with cohort guidelines and requirements. These advisors also provide career counseling. Additionally, the district has worked with local adult education colleges to provide tutoring and classes to assist students in passing the California certification exam, the California Basic Education Skills Test (McGowan & Brandick, 1998).

Clewell and Villegas (2001) outlined six traits of successful paraprofessional education programs:

- Strong collaboration between local school districts that employs paraeducators and a nearby university that provides the coursework and academic support for participants.

- A recruitment and selection process that gives an active role to partnering school districts.

- Teacher preparation admissions criteria that blend traditional and nontraditional measures.

- Teacher preparation curriculum that fits the needs of program participants. This includes changing when and where courses are offered, such as at the school site or on weekends. It also includes a teacher preparation curriculum with emphasis on cultural diversity and on valuing the strength and capacity that urban students bring to the learning process.

- Comprehensive academic and social support for participants.

- Tuition and other financial assistance.

A national program started in 1994 is the Pathways to Teaching Careers, which is funded from a grant from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. Paraprofessionals, uncertified teachers, and former Peace Corps volunteers are recruited into this program which provides scholarships for students to attend teacher preparation programs with a focus on urban education. In exchange, participants must work in a disadvantaged school for at least two years after graduation (Blair, 2002). This program has had a rate of 90 percent retention through graduation of students, as compared to the average 30 percent average retention rate nationwide in teacher preparation programs (Bradley & Archer, 1997). In addition, "Pathways alumni evaluated by independent assessors prior to certification and after two years on the job received higher ratings from administrators

and scored higher on standardized exams than did educators from more traditional backgrounds" (Blair, 2002, p. 9). The Pathways to Teaching Careers programs focuses on recruiting minority teachers and provides support for these teachers including "financial aid, child care services, assistance with transportation costs, academic refresher courses and instruction in speaking standard English" (Career Program, p. 8).

Clewell and Villegas (1999) examined the Pathways to Teaching Careers Model and found the model utilizes a strong partnership between institutes of higher education and the school districts employing the paraprofessionals. During the recruitment phase, school districts played an active role in establishing both traditional and nontraditional selection criteria. Another strength found in the model is that academic, social, and financial supports were created to ensure the retention of students.

Clewell and Villegas also reported a very ethnically diverse participation group among the paraprofessionals. Of the 757 total paraprofessionals included in the study, 17 percent were white, 61 percent were African American, and 13 percent were Hispanic. Adjustments to the teacher education curriculum were made to address effective teaching in multicultural classrooms.

Graduates from the Pathways to Teaching Careers were tracked and data were collected by surveying the principals employing the graduates. The principals were asked to respond to questions addressing instructional planning, classroom environment, instructional delivery, and professionalism. The principals reported that the graduates were effective teachers with no area receiving less than a 4.06 on a five point Likert scale.

In an extensive study of the characteristics of paraprofessional to teacher programs in thirty states, Recruiting New Teachers, Inc. (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996), reported that three quarters of the programs involved in the study served urban areas. The most frequent reason given for establishing a paraprofessional to teacher program was the need for recruitment of teachers of color with 79 percent of the programs reporting this need. The participants were mostly women, 87 percent, and mostly from underrepresented ethnic groups, 77 percent. Models for the programs included 70 percent in which paraprofessional attended classes with other teacher education students. Forty-two percent of the programs reported that paraprofessionals moved through the program as a cohort of learners and 51 percent reported the establishment of some form of mentorship for the aspiring teachers. The authors recommended further study of the retention in the field of the graduates of nationwide programs as well as an analysis of the critical components of the paraprofessional to teacher programs.

In a qualitative study examining the value of recruiting bilingual paraprofessionals as future teachers, Flores, Keehn, and Perez (2002) conducted case studies of paraprofessionals as well as teachers recruited from Mexico. The authors determined that these teachers offered a deep understanding of the needs of the bilingual students. In addition to this, the teachers possessed strong Spanish language skills. The authors also suggested that colleges and universities consider the needs of these culturally unique students in planning curricula and appointing facilitators for classes.

In a similar study by Genzuk, Lavandez, and Krashen (1994), the researchers found that by recruiting Hispanic paraprofessionals as future teachers, school districts

would be able to provide teachers who are competent in the home language to ensure adequate literacy development in younger children and that these teachers would serve as positive cultural role models for all students. These authors recommend that colleges and universities establish class schedules which mesh with the paraprofessionals' work schedules. School districts and institutes of higher education must also investigate possibilities for provide some level of financial support as well.

Urban Schools

Urban school districts across the United States are experiencing shortages of teachers, especially in the areas of special education, bilingual education, mathematics, and science. In a study of teacher supply and preparation challenges in urban schools (Urban Teacher, 2000), 97.5 percent of the participating districts indicated an immediate need for special education teachers, 67.6 percent indicated an immediate need for bilingual teachers, 95 percent for high school mathematics teachers, and 97.5 percent for high school science teachers. Urban school districts have employed a number of strategies to recruit teachers including "alternative certification (65%), sponsoring job fairs (65%), offering on-the-spot contracts (62.5%), online job-finding services, and monetary incentives" (p. 11). The study also identified a lack of teachers of colors in urban settings. The responding districts indicated that 36% of the teachers in these districts were teachers of color in contrast to a 69% population of students of color.

Villegas and Clewell (1998b) conducted a study of the ethnicity of participants in the Pathways to Teaching Careers program. This program focused on recruiting teachers from nontraditional sources such as emergency-certified teachers, paraprofessional

employees, and Peace Corps volunteers. Of the 905 paraprofessionals recruited into this

program as future teachers, 60 percent were African American, 11 percent were

Hispanic, and 18 percent were white. The authors posited that program designs such as

this could recruit a larger number of teachers of color to teach in urban schools than

traditional programs.

Thompson and Smith (2005) examined a program designed to produce teacher

candidates with a broad range of experiences in urban settings. Students in this program

participated in field-based coursework in urban settings, and internship in an urban

school before the student teaching experience, and one student teaching experience in an

urban school. Data from surveys were examined and the participants responded that they

felt the program prepared them for future teaching experiences. The participants also

indicated that the cohort model used in the program enabled them to form a support

group which extended not only into teaching practices and experiences, but also into the

students' personal lives. Strengths of this program to train urban teachers were the

opportunities to spend extended time in urban settings, the support found from the

mentors, and the overall high scores of the participating students' Praxis test scores. A

weakness of the program, as identified by the participants, is the need to ensure that

participating schools are models of success rather than schools with negative climates.

Yasin (1999) identifies the greatest need for teachers over the next decade to be

in urban schools. He projects that over 700,000 additional urban teachers will be needed

within the next ten years. Yasin states that urban school districts have difficulties with

retention of teachers as experienced teachers move into wealthier, suburban school districts.

Howard (2003) credits the high numbers of teacher shortages in urban areas as a "lack of the most essential resource to overcome academic underachievement: a full array of qualified teachers. Because of the current dearth of teachers, students in urban and low-income areas are more likely than any other group of students to come into contact with under-prepared and non-certified teachers" (p. 143). Howard gives several reasons for the current teacher shortage including the retirements of baby-boomer teachers, the increasing student population, smaller class sizes, and teacher attrition.

Howard recommends the recruitment of teachers of color to provide diverse role models to all students. He posits that students living in a multicultural society must have experiences and interactions with teachers of diverse ethnicity to be fully prepared to function in society. Students of color must also be provided with role models, especially in urban settings.

As baby-boomers continue to retire, Howard predicts an increasing teaching shortage. As positions in suburban schools become more readily available for new and experienced teachers, the shortage of highly qualified candidates in urban areas will continue to grow. Howard suggests that school districts work to improve overall working conditions in their schools and to ensure strong leadership in the schools. Also, higher salaries, pay incentives, and the establishment of alternative certification programs could generate a large urban teaching force.

Urban schools face huge, growing shortages of qualified teachers. Alternative sources of teachers must be examined to ensure that children in urban districts are provided with a quality education.

Paraprofessional Employees as Students

Identified in the literature are five principal barriers to education for paraprofessional employees; financial barriers, academic limitations, social barriers, employment issues, and institutional barriers (Recruiting New Teachers, Inc., 2000; Eubanks, 2001; Genzuk, 1997; Genzuk, Lavadenz, & Krashen, 1994).

The financial barriers for paraprofessionals rise from the simple fact that these employees do not receive salaries which are adequate to cover the additional cost of tuition and other expenses. Unfortunately, there are few grants available to these employees. Instead, they must take out student loans to pay for expenses and many are reluctant to obtain additional debt (A Guide for Developing, 2000; Eubanks, 2001; Genzuk, 1997; Genzuk, Lavadenz, & Krashen, 1994).

Academic barriers are also of great concern to paraprofessional employees considering college. Many of these applicants may have been out of school for many years and need remediation and/or additional support to meet the academic requirements for college entry. Also, if the employee has not been accustomed to academic discourse, it may be necessary for the employee to augment his or her vocabulary. Many paraprofessionals are from minority families, and, while this is an additional point of their attractiveness of them as teachers, minority groups have traditionally had lower pass rates on college entrance exams and certification tests in this country (A Guide for

Developing, 2000; Eubanks, 2001; Genzuk, 1997; Genzuk, Lavadenz, & Krashen, 1994).

Major social barriers to these employees are family responsibilities, cultural obligations, and time management. Many women have expressed dismay at the sense of being pulled many directions as they struggle to meet family, job, and academic obligations (A Guide for Developing, 2000; Eubanks, 2001; Genzuk, 1997; Genzuk, Lavadenz, & Krashen, 1994).

Paraprofessional employees also must overcome barriers within their school districts. In order to attend the appropriate classes, the employees must be able to have some flexibility in their time schedules. To complement this, paraprofessionals must also overcome the last barrier, the institutional barrier. Universities and colleges must be willing to offer classes at different times and locations. Both of these barriers can be addressed through collaboration between the districts and the institutions of higher education (Eubanks, 2001; Genzuk, 1997; Genzuk, Lavadenz, & Krashen, 1994).

Summary

The obstacles faced by paraprofessional employees seeking teaching certification reflect the challenges faced by adult students and first generation students. Colleges and universities today must be cognizant of the distinctive needs of these students as they schedule and design courses for aspiring teachers. Alternative routes to certification must be implemented to augment the teaching force, especially in high needs areas such as special education, bilingual education, and urban education. Paraprofessionals represent a largely untapped resource for qualified teachers. Paraprofessionals often

come from diverse backgrounds which are often similar to those of the students.

Programs to assist paraprofessionals in attaining teaching certification will not only

alleviate the imbalance of ethnicity among teacher and student groups, but could also

provide an abundant source of urban educators.

       The primary purpose of this study was to identify the obstacles faced by

paraprofessionals who aspire to become certified teachers by pursuing a bachelor's

degree. In addressing the first research question about obstacles faced by

paraprofessionals seeking teacher certification, the literature reveals that many of these

paraprofessionals face not only the distinctive challenges of the adult undergraduate

learner, but also many of the paraprofessionals are first generation students without the

knowledge about the college setting and the support systems from their families

(Aslanian, 2001; Benmayor, 2002; Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Choy, 2002;

Eubanks, 2001; Fairchild, 2003; Fishback, 2002; Hadfield, 2003; Home, 1998; Inman &

Mayes, 1999; Kasworm et al, 2003; Kasworm, 2002; Linter, 1997; McConnell, 2000;

Nauman et al., 2003; Parson, 2001; Pascarella, et al., 2003; Phinney & Haas, 2003;

Richter-Antion, 1986; Rodriguez, 2003; Ross-Gordon, 2003; Terrell, 1990; Ting, 2003;

Van T. Bui, 2002; Wheaton & Robinson, 1983). The literature shows that

paraprofessionals employed in public school districts face financial barriers, academic

barriers, social barriers, district barriers, and institutional barriers (Recruiting New

Teachers, Inc., 2000; Aslanian, 2001; Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Choy, 2002;

Clewell & Villegas, 1999; Cross, 1980; Eubanks, 2001; Fairchild, 2003; Genzuk et al.,

1994; Genzuk, 1997; Kasworm, 2003; Linter, 1997; Richter-Antion, 1986; Wheaton &

Robinson, 1983).

In addressing the support mechanisms which could be provided by school districts in research question two, the literature reflects that districts must consider the needs and characteristics of adult and first generation students. Only with carefully tailored programs for mentorship and guidance coupled with an understanding of learner needs will districts be able to provide the financial, scheduling, and emotional support which will enable the paraprofessionals to successfully complete their college degrees. Successful programs frequently reflected a cooperative effort between school districts and colleges to provide programs for paraprofessionals (Recruiting New Teachers, Inc., 2000; Benmayor, 2002; Clewell & Villegas, 2001; Genzuk et al., 1994; McGowan & Brandick, 1998; Yasin, 1999).

The need for support mechanisms from colleges and universities in research question three is reiterated in the literature. Colleges must reexamine existing programs and services with an understanding of both adult and first generation undergraduate students. Programming must include affirmations of the value of the paraprofessionals' experience in the classroom as well as schedules which coordinate with their work schedules (Aslanian, 2001; Benmayor, 2002; Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Choy, 2002; Clewell & Villegas, 2001; Cross, 1980; Eubanks, 2001; Fairchild, 2003; Fishback, 2002; Flores et al., 2002; Genzuk et al., 1994; Hadfield, 2003; Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996; Home, 1998; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Kasworm et al, 2003; Kasworm, 2002; Linter, 1997; McConnell, 2000; Nauman et al., 2003; Parson, 2001; Pascarella, et al., 2003; Phinney & Haas, 2003; Richter-Antion, 1986; Rodriguez, 2003; Ross-Gordon,

2003; Terrell, 1990; Ting, 2003; Van T. Bui, 2002; Villegas & Clewell, 1986; Wheaton

& Robinson, 1983).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In this investigation of the obstacles faced by paraprofessionals seeking teaching degrees and the support systems needed for the paraprofessionals, the naturalistic paradigm was selected in order to more fully portray the individual stories and journeys faced by the paraprofessionals. The naturalistic paradigm "emphasizes understanding and portraying social action from the point of view of social actors. It emphasizes that this kind of understanding can be forthcoming only from firsthand, eyewitness accounts of 'being there'. It aims at faithful, authentic reproduction or representation of others'; ways of life" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 173). The study used quantitative data to reflect the richness and depth of the experiences of the paraprofessionals, partnered with quantitative data to form a general description of the demographics of the paraprofessionals involved. This combination of data allowed the researcher to paint a picture of the individuals involved which could not emerge with quantitative data alone.

Selection of the Naturalistic Paradigm

The research study was conducted using a naturalistic inquiry model to identify obstacles faced by paraprofessionals seeking teaching certification and the support mechanisms needed to meet the needs of these adult students. "The naturalistic paradigm assumes, however, that there are multiple realities, with differences among them that cannot be resolved through rational processes or increased data. In fact, extended inquiry along a priori paths will result in a greater divergence of data; convergence comes only as the interrelationships between all the elements of the reality are seen.

Because all of the 'parts' of reality are interrelated, an understanding of the 'whole' can begin with a holistic investigation of any portion of it. By 'understanding the whole' we refer to a working comprehension of the interrelationship that gives definition to it" (Erlandson, et al., 1993, p. 14). The design of a naturalistic study is not completely established at the start of the study, but emerges as data are collected and analyzed, and the context becomes more fully understood.

This research study attempts to form an understanding through the divergence of data presented in the exploration of the research questions using naturalistic techniques. "There are multiple constructed realities that can be studied only holistically; inquiry into these multiple realities will inevitably diverge (each inquiry raises more questions than it answers) so that prediction and control are unlikely outcomes although some level of understanding (verstehen) can be achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37).

Data Collection

Conditions of Entry

An application for conducting research in the school district was completed by the researcher. Permission was granted to conduct the study by the Director of Planning and Research for the Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District located near Houston, Texas.

Population

The population of this study included purposive sample of paraprofessional employees in the Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District. Cypress-Fairbanks I.S.D. is the third largest school district in the state of Texas and is located on the

northwest side of Houston, Texas. In 1975, the student population of the district was 90% white and 10% from other ethnic groups. For the 2005-2006 school year, the student population is projected to be 46% white, 33% Hispanic, 12% African American and 9% Asian. This dramatic change in ethnicity amongst the student population combined with rapid growth contributes to constant efforts to fill teaching vacancies with highly qualified teachers.

All paraprofessional employees (1,272 in 2003-2004 school year) in the district were invited through email to attend an informational gathering of area colleges and universities for paraprofessional employees interested in attending college to become a teacher. At this presentation, the employees were given information about subsequent sessions and to join a networking group of paraprofessional employees attending college. Reminders and updates about each session were sent to the paraprofessionals through the email system. Over a three year period, further sessions were offered at least five times each academic year. Area colleges and universities presented information about programs, admissions, registration, and financial aid to the participants.

Eight individuals who attended at least two of the staff development sessions were asked to participate in interviews. The researcher met with the paraprofessionals at a location of their choosing. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and the individuals had opportunities to make clarifications or elaborations.

Procedures

Over a three year period, the researcher facilitated staff development opportunities for paraprofessional employees. The participants were encouraged through

team-building exercises and structured conversational icebreaker activities to foster

relationships with other paraprofessionals in the district who were interested or currently

attending college. The sessions were offered throughout the school year. Representatives

from area colleges and universities presented information related to attending college to

the paraprofessionals. Ninety-three paraprofessional employees participating in the

networking groups and informational sessions were assured of confidentiality and given

detailed instructions for completing the research instrument (Appendix A). A

questionnaire developed by the researcher was utilized to gather information about

demographics and general information about academic goals and challenges (Appendix

B). Questionnaire responses were anonymous and the researcher designated one member

of the participating group to collect the questionnaires to ensure confidentiality. Ninety

of ninety-three participants responded to the questionnaires. The questionnaire addressed

questions about demographics, academic goals, and areas of certification interest. Data

collected from the questionnaires were entered into SPSS and descriptive statistics were

generated. Data from the questionnaire were used to construct a generalized

understanding and to guide the researcher in the formation of initial interview questions.

Personal interviews are an integral component of naturalistic research. The

researcher chose the interviewing technique in order to fully examine the motivations

and determination of the participants in their desire to become teachers. Dexter (1970, in

Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 268) describes an interview as "a conversation with a

purpose". Lincoln & Guba (1985) describe the purposes for doing an interview as:

…obtaining *here-and-now constructions* of persons, events, activities,

organizations, feelings, motivations, claims, concerns, and other entities;

reconstructions of such entities as experienced in the past; *projections* of

such entities as they are expected to be experienced in the future;

verification, emendation, and extension of information (constructions,

reconstructions, or projections) obtained from other sources, human and

nonhuman (*triangulation*); and verification and emendation, and

extension of constructions developed by the inquirer (*member checking*)

(p. 268).

The researcher used the data collected in the interviews to shape a portrait of the

participants which "blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to

capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational

life" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. xv).

Participants in the sessions were asked to fill out a volunteer form to be

interviewed by the researcher (Appendix C). From the pool of volunteers, potential

participants for interviews were chosen from paraprofessionals who had attended at least

two of the informational sessions. Due to the prolonged engagement of the researcher

with the paraprofessionals, the researcher was able to select eight individuals who

represented a cross section of the general characteristics of the paraprofessionals as

determined by the quantitative data collected through the use of the questionnaire.

The paraprofessionals were contacted by telephone and asked to schedule individual

interviews all agreed to be interviewed. The participants were eager to share their stories

and complied readily with requests to meet in person. The researcher interviewed two

additional paraprofessionals, but the data collected from these interviews was not

included in the study due to the fact the one participants did not consider teaching to be

her first career goal and the other already had a bachelor's degree and was simply

seeking teaching certification.

The interviews were semi-structured with an outline of starting questions

(Appendix D). The initial questions were formulated through an examination of the data

collected through the questionnaire. As the interviews proceeded, the researcher asked

for elaboration or clarification through reflective questioning and the adoption of an

informal conversational style. Participants were allowed to guide the interview through

their own elaboration. The researcher served as a guide of the discussion allowing the

extraction of data from the participant without interpretation by the researcher.

Interviews were conducted in locations convenient to the participants at their

choice. All occurred in some sort of restaurant and were audio taped. All interviews

were conducted by the researcher.

Prior to each interview, the procedures for member checks were explained to

each participant. Participants were assured of confidentiality (Appendix A). The

objectives of the study were explained. The researcher knew all of the participants prior

to the interviews as they had all participated in the district staff development sessions

offered to all paraprofessionals in the district over the preceding three years. Interviews

were audio taped with the signed, informed consent of the participants. The taped

interviews were transcribed and information was categorized by similarities of critical

incidents. Further interview topics were focused on the emerging themes of previous interviews.

Interviews with district level administrators were conducted to gather historical and factual information about district support for initiatives focused on teacher recruitment, costs involved in teacher recruitment and retention, and district goals in the area of the recruitment of paraprofessional employees as teachers. An outline of general questions was used with each administrator (Appendix E).The researcher used reflective journaling techniques to provide thick descriptions of these interactions. Interviews were scheduled and conducted with the Superintendent, the Associate Superintendent for School Administration, the Director of Ancillary Personnel, the Senior Director of Staff Development, the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, and Assistant Director of Human Resources. Administrators answered the prescribed set of questions.

Instrumentation

The researcher served as the primary instrument for gathering data. The naturalistic paradigm promotes the use of the human as the primary instrument because "it would be virtually impossible to devise a priori a nonhuman instrument with sufficient adaptability to encompass and adjust to the variety of realities that will be encountered; because of the understanding that all instruments interact with respondents and objects but that only the human instrument is capable of grasping and evaluating the meaning of that differential interaction; because the intrusion of instruments intervenes in the mutual shaping of other elements and that shaping can be appreciated and evaluated only by a human; and because all instruments are value based and interact

with local values but only the human is in a position to identify and take into account (to some extent) those resulting biases" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 40-41).

Quantitative data addressing the issues in research question number one were collected through a questionnaire developed by the researcher and given to paraprofessional employees participating in an informational district staff development session. This instrument gathered information about student goals toward attending college and their basic levels of involvement in their coursework. It also explored the educational background of the subject and his or her family. The researcher formulated questions to be used in personal interviews with subjects to gather information for individual case studies based on emerging data from the instrument. Further data were collected for research question number one through multiple individual interviews with paraprofessionals. Each participant was given the opportunity after the interviews to review a transcript of the interview and to correct or clarify any point the participant chose.

Further data addressing research questions number two and number three were obtained through interviews with school district, community college, and university personnel.

Data Analysis

There were three phases to the data gathering process. The first phase began in October, 2004 with the facilitation of staff development sessions including the completion of the questionnaire developed by the researcher. After a period of six months, the data were examined and recorded in the computer statistics program SPSS.

The descriptive data generated allowed the researcher to formulate initial questions used in interviews in phase two. After three months, the researcher moved into phase three, which was the continuation of the categorization of data and the identification of emerging themes.

The data gathered were examined through the use of naturalistic, qualitative techniques as well as quantitative techniques. Prolonged engagement has already been established through the researcher's involvement in paraprofessional staff development activities over the past three years. Data analysis was ongoing throughout the study. Journal entries by the researcher were examined and organized using emergent category destination strategies. This examination of data was conducted in three phases.

Phase One

For the first phase beginning in October, 2004, the researcher conducted district staff development courses offering information about college admissions procedures and financial aid. The researcher identified potential participants for interviews by analyzing enrollment sheets for the staff development sessions from current offerings and past sessions with similar topics. A reflective journal was utilized to record interactions and the experiences of the researcher. Peer debriefing through meetings with the schools district's Senior Director of Staff Development served to test working hypotheses, analyze the use of materials, and provide guidance to the researcher. Contact was documented on contact summary sheets based on examples from *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods* (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Phase Two

After a period of approximately six months, the researcher moved into phase two and examined the data and through that examination formulated emerging themes. Critical-incident techniques was used to record data and to unitize them into categories as described in *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry* (Erlandson et al.,1993). The information derived from this examination guided further study. Further interview questions were formulated as working hypotheses were begun. Learning and themes derived from these data moved the researcher in to the next phase. Peer debriefing continued. Participants in the study were provided with opportunities for input and clarification through member checking techniques.

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher into Microsoft Word documents. Interviews with prospective teachers were comprised of two parts. The first structured part focused on questions directly based on the research questions of this study. During the second unstructured portion of the interviews, participants had the opportunity to share additional information about their experiences. Participants were overtly aware of the nature and the purpose of the interviews. Interviews met the framework of naturalistic inquiry method further because the interactions between the researcher and the participants could best be described as a "depth interview" (Masarki in Lincoln & Guba, 1985) because the interviewer and the participants had a peer relationship. This relationship was enhanced by the prolonged engagement provided by the multiple sessions in which the participants and the researcher interacted through district staff development, casual conversations, email

communication, and interviews.

Interviews with district personnel were structured interviews with questions formulated by the researcher. Identical sets of questions were used in each interview in order to provide a cross-departmental comparison of the current viewpoints and policies in place in regards to the consideration of paraprofessionals as future teachers.

Following each interview, a transcription of the interview was shared with each participant and each participant was provided with the opportunity to provide clarification or correction through member checking. "Member checking provides for credibility by allowing members of stakeholding groups to test categories, interpretations, and conclusions" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 142). Participants responded through hard copies edited by the individual or by emails. It was each participant's choice as to the response method.

Miles and Huberman (1984) outline a procedure for reflection after field contacts through a contact summary sheet. Contact summary sheets were designed by the researcher based on examples by Miles and Huberman. Each contact sheet was completed as quickly as possible after each interview and transcription. Emerging data were used to guide further interactions with each subject as well as with subsequent contacts with additional subjects.

Phase Three

Data gathered in phases one and two were examined to determine additional topics and questions for interviews and to continue the categorization of the data. Phase three repeated data collection strategies similar to those in the second phase. The

working hypotheses were revised and reformulated as themes emerged. Data collected at this point were used to test the working hypotheses. Trustworthiness was established by prolonged engagement, persistent observation, through open communication between the researcher and the participants, member checks, reflective journals, and audit checks. Quantitative data gathered through the questionnaires and district information will be used to triangulate the study. Connections among individual constructions were established through the application of the Hermeneutic-Dialectic Process (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 124-125).

Contact summaries, field notes, and transcripts were unitized with incidents recorded on index cards. Unitization of data includes the identification of critical incidents through reflection and review of the data (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Erlandson et al. (1993) describe the unitization of data as "disaggregating data into the smallest pieces of information that may stand alone as independent thoughts in the absence of additional information other than a broad understanding of the context" (p. 117).

Following the unitization process, data were organized into categories using a process outlined by Erlandson et al. (1993) called emergent category designation. In this process, units of data are reviewed and sorted into "categories of ideas" (p. 118). The researcher as a primary instrument of research and the researcher's own experiences become prominent as the data are grouped and identified into categories. "It is possible that no other scholar would discover the same categories" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 118).

Using the data gathered by a questionnaire designed by the researcher during the

staff development sessions facilitated in the Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School

District, the researcher examined the descriptive statistics generated through the use of

SPSS. A total of ninety participants responded to questions about demographic

backgrounds, career goals, certification interests, family educational levels, and

obstacles to degree attainment. Summative quantitative data were unitized and

categorized in accordance with naturalistic paradigm techniques and incorporated into

the emerging themes. Further study was guided by the emergence of critical incidents

identified in quantitative data using qualitative techniques.

Trustworthiness

In order to meet the requirements of naturalistic inquiry, trustworthiness was

maintained through naturalistic techniques designed to ensure credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Erlandson, et al. 1993).

"Credibility is a trustworthiness criterion that is satisfied when source

respondents agree to honor the reconstructions" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985. p. 329).

Techniques to ensure credibility include prolonged engagement, persistent observation,

triangulation, and member checks. The researcher established prolonged engagement by

consistently offering opportunities for staff development for paraprofessionals interested

in becoming teachers over a three year period. Prolonged engagements is "the

investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the 'culture,' testing

for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents, and

building trust" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). During this period, the researcher was

also available to the paraprofessionals by telephone or email for further assistance in completing the initial steps toward college enrollment.

Based on observations during prolonged engagement, the researcher was able to identify emerging themes and to focus on them during subsequent interactions with the paraprofessionals utilizing the technique of persistent observation. The purpose of persistent observation is to identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304). The exploration of the emerging themes was documented in reflective journals as well as on contact summary sheets.

A third technique for ensuring credibility used by the researcher was triangulation. Triangulation is accomplished by examining the data "by using different sources, different methods, and sometimes multiple investigators" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 307). Interviews with district personnel involved in human resources and staff development provided opportunities for the researcher to augment and confirm the data collected through personal interviews with paraprofessionals. Interviews were taped and transcribed and shared with both the district personnel and the paraprofessionals. . Data from the questionnaires were also utilized as confirmation of the data collected through interviews and through feedback forms at the staff development sessions.

Member checks were also used after each interview. In a member check, the researcher "solicits feedback from respondents on the inquirer's findings" (Schwant, 2001, p. 185). The participant received a transcribed copy of the interview and was given the opportunity to provide correction, clarification, or elaboration.

Transferability was ensured through the use of thick description both in journaling and in contact summary sheets. In thick description, "the researcher collects sufficiently detailed descriptions of data in context and reports them with sufficient detail and precision to allow judgments about transferability" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 33).Interviews were also audio taped and transcribed by the researcher.

Dependability was established both through the use of credibility techniques and the use of peer debriefing. The researcher collaborated with the Senior Director for Staff Development to discuss the ongoing progress throughout the study and to identify areas for further exploration. The Director also assisted with confirmability by reviewing the researcher's ongoing data collection and providing constructive feedback. An audit trail was created through the reflective journals, the cumulative data, the taped interviews and transcripts, and the member check information were filed.

This chapter presented a detailed outline of the procedures used in the examination of the obstacles faced by paraprofessionals seeking teaching certification and the support mechanisms desired or established. Chapter IV provides a thick description of the researcher's interactions with the paraprofessionals as well as portions of the interviews. Pseudonyms are used to protect confidentiality. Chapter V includes a summary of the research findings, recommendation and conclusions.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to report the findings and results of the study of the obstacles faced by paraprofessionals in a large urban school district who aspire to become certified teachers by pursuing a bachelor's degree. Also examined in the study were the support mechanisms needed by the paraprofessionals through their school districts and institutions of higher education. The first section of this chapter, *Demographic Information,* provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the participants in the staff development sessions offered by the researcher. The second section, Q*uantitative Findings***,** summarizes the quantitative findings gathered through a questionnaire designed by the researcher. The data from the first two sections provide a generalized portraiture of the paraprofessionals in the Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District. This served as a foundation for the formation of interview questions for the qualitative focus of the study. The third section, *Individual Profiles of Paraprofessionals,* provides portraits obtained from participants' answers to interview questions, summative narratives, as well as participants' personal accounts of their experiences. In the fourth section, *Identification of Patterns and Themes*, patterns and themes which emerged through unitization and categorization of quantitative and qualitative data are presented. The final section is a summary of topics presented in the chapter.

Demographic Information

Participants in the district staff development sessions presented by the researcher were asked to complete a questionnaire which included questions relating to the demographics of the participants (Appendix B). Participants were assured of confidentiality and the researcher was available to address any questions or issues (Appendix A). Ninety participants of the 93 solicited responded to the questionnaires. Responses were then entered into the SPSS 11.0 for Windows program and frequencies were generated.

Of the ninety participants, 87 were female, or 96.7 percent, and 3, or 3.3 percent, were male (Table 1). All ninety participants responded to this question.

Table 1
Gender of Participating Paraprofessionals

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	3	3.3	3.3	3.3
	Female	87	96.7	96.7	100.0
	N	90	100.0	100.0	

The participants reflected a diverse sampling of ethnic groups. All respondents indicated their ethnicity. Hispanic paraprofessional participants were 35.6 percent of the total group, African-American paraprofessionals made up 15.6 percent of the group, 42.2 percent of the respondents were white, 4.4 percent were Asian, and 2.2 percent were from other ethnic groups (Table 2). This breakdown of ethnicity closely reflects the

projected student population of the Cypress-Fairbanks I.S.D. for the 2005-2006 school

year which is 46 percent white, 33 percent Hispanic, 12 percent African-American, and

9 percent Asian (Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, 2005).

Table 2
Ethnicity of Participating Paraprofessionals

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Hispanic	32	35.6	35.6	35.6
	African American	14	15.6	15.6	51.1
	White	38	42.2	42.2	93.3
	Asian/Pacific Isle	4	4.4	4.4	97.8
	Other	2	2.2	2.2	100.0
	N	90	100.0	100.0	

Participants were asked to provide their ages. Eighty-five participants chose to

respond and five chose not to respond. The mean age of the respondents was 39.95, the

median age was 42.00, and the mode was 42.00. Of the total number of respondents, 25

percent were age 33.50 or younger, 50 percent were age 42.00 or younger, and 75

percent were age 46.50 or younger (Table 3). As Figure 1 indicates, the youngest

respondent to the questionnaire was 19 years old and the oldest respondent was 55 years

old. The standard deviation in age was 8.89. Figure 1 also illustrates the frequencies of

each age group represented.

Table 3
Age of Participating Paraprofessionals

N	Valid	85
	Missing	5
Mean		39.95
Median		42.00
Mode		42.00
Percentiles	25	33.50
	50	42.00
	75	46.50

Std. Dev = 8.89
Mean = 40.0
N = 85.00
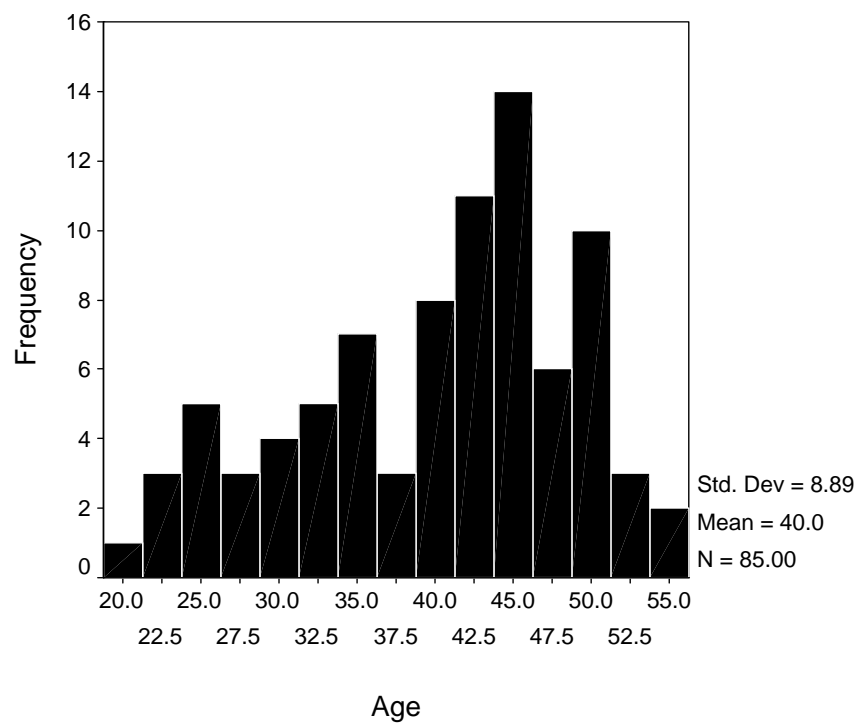
Figure 1 – Frequencies of Age of Participants Responding to Questionnaire with 85 of 90
Participants Responding.

All participants responded to the question about marital status. Single

paraprofessionals comprised 11.1 percent of the total group, 74.4 percent of the group

were married, 3.3 percent were separated, 8.9 percent were divorced, and 2.2 percent

were widowed (Table 4).

Table 4
Marital Status of Participating Paraprofessionals

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Single	10	11.1	11.1	11.1
	Married	67	74.4	74.4	85.6
	Separated	3	3.3	3.3	88.9
	Divorced	8	8.9	8.9	97.8
	Widowed	2	2.2	2.2	100.0
	N	90	100.0	100.0	

Of eighty-eight responding paraprofessionals, 85.2 percent of them had

responsibilities related to school age children for whom they were responsible. Only

14.8 percent responded that they did not have any children of school age (Table 5).

Table 5
Number of School Aged Children

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	13	14.4	14.8	14.8
	1.00	20	22.2	22.7	37.5
	2.00	36	40.0	40.9	78.4
	3.00	11	12.2	12.5	90.9
	4.00	5	5.6	5.7	96.6
	6.00	3	3.3	3.4	100.0
	N	88	97.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	2.2		
Total		90	100.0		

When asked about the highest level of education they had reached at this time, of the 89 participants responding to this question 10.1 percent indicated that they had received a GED certificate as their highest level of education. High school graduates comprised 14.6 percent of the group and those receiving vocational diplomas comprised 6.7 percent of the group. College experience was varied with 51.7 percent of the respondents have some college experience, 12.4 percent earning an associate's degree, and 4.5 percent earning a bachelor's degree (Table 6).

Table 6
Highest Level of Education of Participating Paraprofessionals

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	G.E.D.	9	10.0	10.1	10.1
	High School Graduate	13	14.4	14.6	24.7
	Vocational Diploma	6	6.7	6.7	31.5
	Some College Experience	46	51.1	51.7	83.1
	Associates Degree	11	12.2	12.4	95.5
	Bachelors Degree	4	4.4	4.5	100.0
	N	89	98.9	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.1		
Total		90	100.0		

Quantitative Findings

Paraprofessional employees participating in the staff development opportunities presented by the researcher were asked to provide information about obstacles to their education plan. Participants were assured of confidentiality. Participants indicated which of five potential obstacles were present in their lives. The choices were undecided career goals, the cost of education, family obligations, accessible university programs,

66

and health concerns. All ninety participants responded to this inquiry.

The largest obstacle indicated by the participants was the cost of education. Of

the ninety paraprofessionals, 77.8 percent indicated that financial concerns were a

challenge to the educational plan. This was followed by the obstacle of family

obligations, with 68.9 percent indicating this as an obstacle. The three remaining

possible choices each had a much lower level of concern with 27.8 percent seeing

undecided career goals as an obstacle, 20.0 percent viewing accessible university

programs as an obstacle, and only 5.6 percent considering health concerns to be an

obstacle (Table 7). The identification of obstacles to education as perceived by the

respondents to the questionnaire allowed the researcher to begin the development of

questions used in personal interviews focused on research question one.

Table 7
Obstacles to Pursuit of Educational Goals

	Undecided Career Goals (%)	Cost of Education (%)	Family Obligations (%)	Accessible University Programs (%)	Health Concerns (%)
Yes	27.8	77.8	68.9	20.0	5.6
No	72.2	22.2	31.1	80.0	94.4

The participants responded to questions about their parents' highest levels of

education in order to identify which participants were the first in their family to seek a

college degree. Of the responding eighty-nine participants, 65.2 percent came from a

family where the father did not have any type of post-high school experiences. In

conjunction with that, 22.5 percent of the fathers did not graduate from high school, 7.9

percent received a GED certificate, and 34.8 graduated with a high school diploma

(Table 8). Ninety participants responded to questions about their mothers' highest levels

of education. Results from this question indicated that 77.8 percent of the participants'

mothers did not have any experiences past high school, with 26.7 percent of the mothers

not graduating from high school, 10.0 percent receiving a GED certificate, and 41.1

percent graduating with a high school diploma (Table 9).

Table 8
Father's Highest Level of Education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No Diploma	20	22.2	22.5	22.5
	G.E.D.	7	7.8	7.9	30.3
	High School Diploma	31	34.4	34.8	65.2
	Associates Degree or Vocational Certificate	13	14.4	14.6	79.8
	Bachelors Degree	9	10.0	10.1	89.9
	Advanced Degree	9	10.0	10.1	100.0
	N	89	98.9	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.1		
Total		90	100.0		

Table 9
Mother's Highest Level of Education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No Diploma	24	26.7	26.7	26.7
	G.E.D.	9	10.0	10.0	36.7
	High School Diploma	37	41.1	41.1	77.8
	Associates Degree or Vocational Certificate	10	11.1	11.1	88.9
	Bachelors Degree	9	10.0	10.0	98.9
	Advanced Degree	1	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	90	100.0	100.0	

In order to explore the levels of both the father's and the mother's educational levels for each participant, cross-tabulations were run to produce frequency distributions for all the possible combinations of levels. These calculations allowed the researcher insight to the overall educational backgrounds of the participants' families. Cross-tabulations were produced for eighty-nine of the respondents. These cross-tabulations indicated that fifteen of the eighty-nine respondents grew up in homes in which neither parent had a high school diploma and seventeen grew up in homes in which both parents had graduated from high school with a diploma. An interesting revelation of these data is that in most cases, the fathers had obtained either an equal or higher level of education that the mothers (Table 10).

Table 10
Cross Tabulation of Father's Level of Education/Mother's Level of Education

Father's Level of Education	Mother's Level of Education						
	No Diploma	G.E.D.	High School Diploma	Associates Degree or Vocational Certificate	Bachelors Degree	Advanced Degree	Total
No Diploma	15		4	1			20
G.E.D.		1	4	2			7
High School Diploma	6	5	17	1	2		31
Associates Degree or Vocational Certificate	3	2	3	3	2		13
Bachelors Degree			7	1	1		9
Advanced Degree			2	2	4	1	9
	24	8	37	10	9	1	89

An exploration of the educational backgrounds of the paraprofessional allowed the researcher an initial understanding of the paraprofessionals and their educational experiences. It was essential to confirm the existence of a large number of first generation students in considering further exploration for research questions two and three as first generation students have specific needs for support and programming (Benmayor, 2002; Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996; Inman & Mayes, 1999; McConnell, 2000). From the gathered data, it was clear that many of the paraprofessionals were first generation students. In seeking answers to the research questions, the researcher needed to consider the specialized needs of first generation students in the formulation of interview questions in order to identify obstacles to their education as well as possible support mechanisms which could be provided from school districts and colleges.

An understanding of the demographics and educational backgrounds of the

paraprofessionals was essential to seeking answers to the research questions. The exploration of the demographics of the participants allowed the researcher to determine how the participants compared to other paraprofessionals seeking teaching degrees in other studies (Aslanian, 2001; Benmayor, 2002; Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Choy, 2002; Eubanks, 2001; Fairchild, 2003; Fishback, 2002; Hadfield, 2003; Home, 1998; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Kasworm et al, 2003; Kasworm, 2002; Linter, 1997; McConnell, 2000; Nauman et al., 2003; Parson, 2001; Pascarella, et al., 2003; Phinney & Haas, 2003; Richter-Antion, 1986; Rodriguez, 2003; Ross-Gordon, 2003; Terrell, 1990; Ting, 2003; Van T. Bui, 2002; Wheaton & Robinson, 1983).

Participants from the pool of paraprofessionals who had attended at least two sessions were contacted by telephone and asked to schedule individual interviews. The researcher contacted eight paraprofessionals and all agreed to be interviewed. The researcher contacted key personnel from the administrative offices of the Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District to gather information on district goals for paraprofessionals, levels of support provided to paraprofessionals, and general interest in paraprofessionals as future teachers.

From the transcribed interviews, data were examined and unitized to identify categories of responses. Unitized data were recorded on index cards and pattern coded according to emerging themes. "Pattern coding is a way of grouping those summaries (of segments of data) into a smaller number of overarching themes or constructs" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 68). From these coded data, the researcher was able to formulate additional questions for the individuals as well as additional questions for future

interviews.

From the unitized data collected from field notes, interview transcripts, and the questionnaire, the following categories emerged. The categories include: (1) obstacles to educational goals; (2) support systems; and (3) family educational history.

Individual Profiles of Paraprofessionals

The paraprofessionals portrayed in this section represent a cross section of the participants. These women were selected because they embody many of the characteristics revealed in the quantitative data. The women represent different ethnicities and marital status. All of the women are age 38 or older and have the family responsibilities. They have all been paraprofessional employees in a public school and are currently attending or considering attending college to become a teacher. Five of the participants are first generation students.

Maria, a First Generation, Hispanic Widowed Student

Maria is very happy to report that her family is extremely proud of her. She has two teenagers at home and has recently become a widow. Her husband had wanted her to go to school for a very long time, but situations in their lives made that impossible.

Maria grew up in a large, happy family in San Antonio. During her childhood years, her parents stressed the importance of education, but her parents' goals were for her to finish high school, as they never had. School was difficult for Maria, not because she wasn't a good student, but because of the challenges of being a minority (Hispanic) in a racially diverse elementary school. "Sometimes I felt like we (Hispanic students) didn't always get the same attention as maybe some of my other peers", Maria reported.

When Maria moved into junior high school, she attended a largely Hispanic school where she was profoundly influenced by a teacher who showed Maria that she believed in her abilities as a student. "It was a big turning point for me, because she took such personal interest in myself. And I wasn't just 'one of those kids'". The teacher enthralled Maria with tales of travel in Europe and the importance and advantages of an education. On one of the teacher's trips, she sent a postcard to Maria, which Maria still treasures today.

In her interviews, Maria indicated that she loves to be around children and enjoyed her role as an instructional paraprofessional. She felt comfortable in the school environment and enjoyed each day. Unfortunately, since death of her husband, Maria has had to take a job with the City of Houston because of increased salary and benefits for her family.

Maria stated that she worries about being able to carve out enough time and money to support her education. She sometimes feels guilty when she is unable to meet the demands of being an employee, a mother, and a student.

Maria has been attending a community college, but hoped to transfer to Texas A&M because she feels the teacher preparation program is superior to others in the area. With her changed circumstances as a single mother, she realizes now that she will probably have to attend a university closer to home to complete her degree. The close proximity would help her meet the needs of her two children.

Maria has regularly attended the staff development sessions presented by the researcher. These sessions were viewed as providing a welcoming atmosphere with

learning opportunities for growth and knowledge. She enjoys meeting and sharing experiences with other paraprofessionals who are also going to school.

In order to make the college experience easier, Maria stated that she would like a mentor to guide her through the red tape and procedures. She said, "I think I need a good guide or a good mentor. Someone who could say, look this is what you do, talk to this professor, here's where you've got to go. Helping me get through the paperwork legalities and all that jazz." Her expectations of the college are "to be taught by qualified instructors, have qualified materials, and be given the best opportunities for learning".

During her husband's illness and since her husband has passed away from cancer, Maria never stopped going to school and was encouraged by her husband to do so. Her new job offers tuition reimbursement and more flexibility with the scheduling of classes. She misses the school environment, but hopes eventually to re-enter as a certified teacher. When asked about graduation, Maria shared, "I will feel satisfaction number one. Relief…Happiness… Sadness because my husband won't be there to see me graduate. Just a mixture of emotions."

Research Question One: What are the obstacles identified by paraprofessional employees considering teacher certification?

Maria has identified several obstacles to her educational goals. The first obstacle she said she faced early in her career when she felt in high school that the expectations for Hispanic girls were not as high as other peers within her high school. Maria reports that as she strives to attain her goals as an adult, the constant challenge of managing her time and paying for college has grown. Compounded with the ordinary time

management and financial challenges, Maria has recently lost her husband and now shared that she faces the additional challenge of being a single parent.

Research Question Two: What support mechanisms can school districts provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

Maria indicated that she has enjoyed the staff development sessions facilitated by the researcher because they have provided opportunities for Maria to interact with other paraprofessionals with similar goals. She would like the district to continue to arrange networking opportunities and finds that the interactions are very motivational. Maria suggests that a tuition reimbursement program would not only help with the financial challenge of college attendance, but would exemplify the district's support of programs for paraprofessionals to become teachers.

Research Question Three: What support mechanisms can colleges and universities provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

Maria identified two support systems she would like colleges to consider. Maria stresses the importance of offering classes in various locations to allow paraprofessionals in the urban area to easily attend class while balancing family responsibilities. She also stresses that it is important to have qualified instructors who are familiar with the needs of working adults.

Betsy, a First Generation, Married Hispanic Potential Student

Betsy is a paraprofessional in a large middle school in the Cypress-Fairbanks I.S.D. She has wanted to be a teacher all of her life, and serves as a paraprofessional

right now because the position allows her to work in a public school and to be actively involved in educating children. Betsy has two school aged children and a husband who works long hours. She is hoping to be able to take classes at the community college during the summer so that she will be able to juggle both family and academic life. Betsy's family is excited about her attending school and is urging her to begin her coursework. Betsy says that "all her life I've wanted to be in the school. Every time I think about getting what I call a 'regular job', I think I like doing this (working as a paraprofessional). I like helping the kids. I like being around the kids".

Betsy has found when talking to college advisors and counselors that the academic vocabulary and paperwork is completely confusing. She explains, "It's still foggy to me to know exactly what to do. From the first time we met (with the staff development sessions), it was like way too much information. Now it seems like it's not as much as it seems like and it's starting to make more sense and there are people out there to help you". She has become frustrated in her efforts to get her questions answered because she isn't sure she is asking the right questions. As she has attended sessions facilitated by the researcher, the college application and registration process is becoming clearer. "It's like I'm not the only one, there's a hundred people behind me doing this." She prefers the community college atmosphere at this point because it is smaller and she feels she would receive more individual attention. She would like step-by-step support to navigate the college procedures.

The major concerns Betsy has about going to school are time, finances, and fear. She feels that she can manage the time and the finances. However, the basic fear of

failure is an obstacle she is struggling to overcome. She names this as a "fear of opening herself up".

Research Question One: What are the obstacles identified by paraprofessional employees considering teacher certification?

Betsy expressed that she feels challenged with the balancing of family and work responsibilities with school responsibilities. With a husband who works long hours in retail, Betsy shared that she has many obligations at home. Betsy also shared that she worries about paying for college. During the informational sessions provided by the researcher, Betsy said that she found the educational jargon and vocabulary used by college representatives to be very confusing and sees her inability to fully understand this content as an obstacle. Betsy's indicated that her greatest personal obstacle, however, is the fear of not being successful at college. She worries that she would be "letting her family down" if she experienced difficulty.

Research Question Two: What support mechanisms can school districts provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

Betsy expressed that she would like to see the amount of tuition assistance increased within the school district as paraprofessional salaries are quite low. She indicated that she would also like the district to continue to arrange opportunities for paraprofessionals attending college to interact and network.

Research Question Three: What support mechanisms can colleges and universities provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

Betsy said that she will be looking into the community college because she desired the smaller campus and class size. She also stresses that she would like the opportunity to work with a counselor or an advisor through every detail of the admissions, enrollment, and registration process.

Susan, a First Generation, White Married Student

Susan has a unique interest in becoming a teacher for visually impaired students. She currently has been working in an elementary school and has been assigned to one visually impaired student. She has helped the student to begin learning Braille and modifies all of the student's class assignments.

Susan has gone back to school. She has attended the staff development sessions offered by the researcher and has found the information from the various colleges and universities to be very helpful, but has found the opportunity to network to be the most valuable aspect of the sessions. She mentioned that she did not ask very many questions at the sessions, because she was fearful of appearing ignorant of college procedures and jargon.

Susan has twin seven year olds at home. Her husband has been very supportive and cooperative as she has attended the community college for two semesters. However, it has been stressful on the family to adjust to her new responsibilities as a student. When asked about what support she will need to complete her degree, she stated that "I need family support. That's really it. I need that my husband would be okay with it. And I know that he is." Her family has adjusted better the second semester and Susan works very hard to schedule her classes to work well with her family responsibilities.

Susan feels quite overwhelmed because she has earned no previous college hours and finds the task ahead to be daunting.

Susan is not sure what classes she needs or what steps to take next. She is interested in perhaps taking some online courses, but feels that she needs face to face classes for some subjects. During the summer of 2005, Susan was unable to complete all of her course requirements due to a personal illness, but plans to return during the spring semester.

Susan would like the school district to exhibit more support for paraprofessionals by offering them college counseling. She has not felt that the district has valued her efforts as a student and stated: "They (the school district) don't seem to be interested to know that I'm going to school. I kind of feel unimportant in a way".

Research Question One: What are the obstacles identified by paraprofessional employees considering teacher certification?

Susan shared her frustrations of the challenges of balancing work, family, and academic responsibilities. As the mother of twins, she is frequently overwhelmed as she attempts to cope with her obligations. Susan also finds that she is challenged by her fear of appearing ignorant when she is seeking assistance in the college environment. She is hesitant to ask questions and fears she many not be obtaining all the information she needs to be successful in school.

Research Question Two: What support mechanisms can school districts provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

Susan hopes that the district will continue to offer networking opportunities because the interaction with other paraprofessionals has been very helpful to her as she sought information. She shared that she would like the school district to coordinate with area colleges and universities to offer counseling services specific to paraprofessionals seeking teaching degrees. Susan feels that the district should recognize her efforts to obtain a college degree as a show of support. Susan was unclear how this could be accomplished.

Research Question Three: What support mechanisms can colleges and universities provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

Susan identified counseling services to be the most critical area of support that colleges and universities could provide. She added that, as an adult learner, she frequently found that she needed additional explanations about coursework and degree plans.

Judy, a White, Married Current Student

Judy was offered a full scholarship right out of high school. At the time, she was engaged and chose to stay home to get married. Unfortunately, that relationship failed. Later, after meeting her husband and getting married, they began a family and Judy's time centered on raising a family as a full time mother.

She has always wanted to be a teacher, but is finding school difficult. Her husband feels like her educational pursuits take time away from him both by traveling and attending classes and carving time out to study. "My husband doesn't want me to go

to school because it's taking time from him. When I'm taking classes he says I'm more distant, more into studying, and then, my kids, he says you don't spend time with them." Judy feels like she has given her children high quality time throughout the year and continues to attend school and sports events. She has worked very hard and finished thirteen credit hours in one semester.

Judy feels the need for a mentor to support her during her education. She feels that someone checking on her and encouraging her could be very helpful. She has enjoyed the staff development sessions offered by the researcher, but feels like a support network needs to be in place for college bound paraprofessionals in her district. "Paras that are already in college need a support network that if they're struggling or facing tough times, that they've got someone there patting them on the back." She feels that helpful systems for mentoring or stipends for going to school could be supports offered by the school district.

Judy knows she will have to be persistent and that there is a lot of work involved, but that the goal of becoming a teacher will be worth the hard work.

Research Question One: What are the obstacles identified by paraprofessional employees considering teacher certification?

The major obstacles that Judy shared are both family related. Meeting the needs of the busy schedules of her children makes balancing school and home is very difficult. Additionally, Judy shared that her husband is resentful of the time she invests in learning because he feels she is taking time away from him. She feels this adds an additional burden of guilt to Judy's workload.

Research Question Two: What support mechanisms can school districts provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

Judy felt that a professional mentor provided by the school district would give her a lot of support, encouragement and guidance. She felt like she would benefit from having someone to help her as she makes educational decisions. Judy also hoped that the district will continue to provide networking opportunities and found her conversations with other paraprofessionals going to school to be very motivational. Finally, Judy said that she would like the district to consider providing additional stipends to assist paraprofessionals with the financial obligations of attending college.

Research Question Three: What support mechanisms can colleges and universities provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

Judy felt that comprehensive counseling services should be provided by the colleges and universities.

Anna, a White, Widowed Student

Anna's parents both had college degrees with her mother earning a bachelor's degree and her father earning a master's. Anna's parents were divorced when she was a teenager. Going to college was the expected "next step" in Anna's family.

Anna attended a large high school on the west side of Houston, Texas. High school was easy for her, and with very little effort, as she described, she graduated in the top five percent of her class. She was active in clubs and National Honor Society while in high school. Anna's first choice for college was Rice University, but she was not

accepted there. Anna applied to the engineering college at Texas A&M and was accepted. She felt considerable pressure from her father to pursue an engineering degree.

Anna's two years at A&M were only mildly successful. She did not enjoy the classes involved in the course of study for engineering and did well "if I liked the class and like the professor. You can look at my transcripts. If I like the class I made an A. If I didn't like the class, I got an incomplete or a C or a D". Her father continued to finance her education and did not ask her about her grades.

At this point in her pursuit of an education, Anna met a boy who was attending Sam Houston State University and decided to transfer as an education student. She found that she enjoyed the education classes much more, but continued to have only mild success as a student. At this point, Anna stated, "I started to feel a little hypocritical that my father was paying for school and I was making failing grades so I quit and worked." After this Anna was married and began to work at an oil and gas company. She promised herself that one day she would return to college.

After being laid off from her job at the oil and gas company, Anna began to babysit teachers' children during the day in her home. She liked the flexibility of working only during the school year. Her husband began to experience problems at work and lost his job. He obtained another position in Bryan, Texas and Anna began to have hopes of returning to Texas A&M to finish her studies. Her husband continued to experience problems and went to the doctor where he was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Anna's life drastically changed as she began to work in a preschool three days a week. She did this in order to have two days free each week to attend to the medical needs of

her ailing husband. Unfortunately, her husband passed away and Anna suddenly found herself as a single mother with a seven year old and a four year old.

After her husband's death, Anna's thoughts returned to the possibility of a college degree. She was working long hours in an office and fortunately received a lot of help from her husband's parents. Life was hard, and Anna became very excited when she learned about the possibility of a paraprofessional educational aide position from one of the other parents at her child's baseball game.

Anna immediately loved the school setting. She enjoyed working with the students and was able to maintain a schedule similar to her children's. She attended some of the sessions presented by the researcher and began to seriously think about returning to school.

With her experience with the college setting, Anna realized she needed some academic counseling. She contacted a counselor at the College of Education at Texas A&M and he reviewed her transcripts. He recommended that she take advantage of the Fresh Start program in which a student may enroll if they meet the entrance requirements, but they do not get credit for their previous course work. This also gives the student a fresh start with the grade point average. This was a big decision that Anna faced. After further counseling sessions, she decided that she would apply to A&M after taking her lower level courses at the community college. She would use Fresh Start, but still be able to get credit for the courses she had recently completed.

Anna has almost completed all of her courses at the community college. She hopes to begin at Texas A&M during the summer of 2006. She is considering carpooling

and hopes through the staff development sessions offered by the researcher that she will be able to find another student wishing to carpool. She also will try to schedule as many online courses as possible in order to minimize her travel.

Anna's children are excited about their mother going to school. They have found common themes in some of their assignments. During the spring Anna took biology and found herself studying insects along with her second grader who became her willing assistant.

Anna is an excellent student now. She was diagnosed with ADD and is on a regimen of medication. She finds that this has helped her to study and to apply herself diligently even in classes she does not enjoy. Her biggest challenges are finding time for work and her family and sifting through the paperwork. She feels she might be able to qualify for additional financial help if she had assistance in completing the forms and submitting the paperwork on time. Sometimes she feels as if graduation is too far away, but finds inspiration in the staff development sessions when she can network and converse with other paraprofessionals seeking teaching degrees. She particularly enjoys hearing personal experiences and testimonials and finds them to be extremely motivational.

Anna appreciates professors who understand the commitments of adult students. As an evening student, she feels a certain distance from campus life and would like to be more involved. As she nears the completion of her lower level classes, it has become increasingly difficult to find classes to take at the times she has available. She has taken more classes online in order to meet her scheduling needs, but prefers a face to face

class.

Anna hopes the school district will continue to provide opportunities to meet with other paraprofessionals attending college. She has found that one of the best sources of information to be other students and welcomes additional opportunities to network.

Anna looks forward to graduation and says, "I just want to be able to stand up in front of my in-laws, and my kids, just to know that I've got it done. My kids will be really, really proud of me."

Research Question One: What are the obstacles identified by paraprofessional employees considering teacher certification?

During her time as a returning student, Anna has faced the illness and death of her husband and now finds herself dealing with the responsibilities of a single parent. Anna says that as a single parent going to school her biggest challenge is time management. Another challenge identified by Anna is her frustration with the paperwork involved with applying for financial aid. She fears that she may have missed some viable opportunities for assistance because she has found meeting the deadlines and understanding the entire financial aid application process to be overwhelming.

Research Question Two: What support mechanisms can school districts provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

Anna stated that she has found the networking sessions provided by the researcher to be a tremendous source of emotional support. She stated that she especially enjoys the testimonials from other paraprofessionals going to school as well as former

paraprofessionals now teaching. Anna expressed that she would like the district to continue to provide such opportunities.

Research Question Three: What support mechanisms can colleges and universities provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

Anna feels that intensive counseling both from community colleges and four year institutions must be provided to ensure coordination between programs. She also appreciates college professors who exhibit a level of understanding of the responsibilities of working parents attending college. She hopes that colleges will be flexible in the location and scheduling of classes and that they will provide opportunities for adult students to be involved with campus activities.

Liz, a First Generation White Potential Student

Liz's parents did not attend college, but encouraged her to do so. After high school, Liz attended Stephen F. Austin State University and completed three years before quitting to get married. She has wanted to go back to school for many years, but has some very bad memories of her math classes in college. Liz shared that she is afraid that if she enrolls in college she will not be able to pass her math classes. Liz has made an appointment with a college counselor to evaluate her transcripts. However, the counselor cancelled the meeting and Liz has never rescheduled.

During the interviews, Liz notes that she loves working with students. She feels like her experiences, as a parent and as a paraprofessional, has given her a very comprehensive understanding of the school environment. She says, "I just love children.

I think I'd be really good at it (teaching). I'm really compassionate and I like working with kids. Having my own kids go through school, I just feel like I know what I wanted as a parent, and I think as a teacher I could be that."

Liz has attended many of the staff development sessions offered by the researcher. She especially likes seeing some of the same people at each session and networking with them. She finds that her obstacles are very common among the group. "I think, from talking to the other girls, that the main thing is the time and the financial obligation. It almost seems like the financial, you can get a lot of help. A lot of the women from the meetings, they have gotten everything paid for. I wish the district would offer some classes."

Throughout the interview, Liz repeatedly mentioned her worries about math. When asked about her fears about going back to school, she reiterated her math fears. "With the math, I had trouble in high school and when I went to college I was so glad that I just had to take the algebra, I worry about the math."

Research Question One: What are the obstacles identified by paraprofessional employees considering teacher certification?

Liz identified time and money as major obstacle to her education. However, she spent a great deal of time discussing her fear of failing math. It appears that this fear of mathematics has almost paralyzed Liz in her efforts to become a student.

Research Question Two: What support mechanisms can school districts provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

Liz indicated that she enjoys the networking opportunities and informational

sessions provided by the researcher and hopes the school district will continue to provide similar opportunities.

Research Question Three: What support mechanisms can colleges and universities provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

Liz identified tutorial sessions as a major source of support from colleges.

Katie, A First Generation,White Married Student

Katie met the researcher at a McDonalds with her four children. Katie has been married for thirteen years. Katie's mother did not attend college, but her father took some college classes. Katie has two brothers who both attended junior colleges, but neither completed any degree program. Katie attended a junior college right after high school, but when she was married she quit. She has taken classes at the college periodically, but after the birth of her third child she found the cost for child care to be an inhibiting factor.

Katie has enjoyed the district staff development sessions offered by the researcher because she enjoys interacting with other paraprofessionals attending school. She says, "It is nice to have someone to talk to who is going to school. Because your family, they can't understand unless they're going to college, too. They're like, why don't you just do your work?"

The online program in which Katie has enrolled offered scholarships and gave her some credit for her previous coursework. She works late at night when her children have gone to bed. When asked about the obstacles to her education, Katie said, "The

family, the kids. Someone's always got to go somewhere. Someone's always got to do something. So I do school at night. Late at night, I'm on my computer."

During her interview, Katie indicated that the online program has been frustrating. She says it is difficult to have continuity with counseling because she usually reaches a different person each time she calls. "I think that WGU has just too many people that you talk on the phone with. You talk to one person, then you talk to the next person.. I know they have to have people in charge of things, but I think you need to be able to talk to just one person." Originally, the college placed her in a program for alternative certification rather than a bachelor's degree program and she had to begin all over.

Katie enjoys her work as a paraprofessional and working with children. She says, "I like watching them grow from not knowing, to knowing some things." She looks forward to being a teacher someday.

The summer months have been found to be more difficult for Katie than during the regular school year because she finds it hard to stay motivated. She finds it easier to go to school when she is working because she is around other paraprofessionals who are going to school and finds it motivating to share experiences with them.

Research Question One: What are the obstacles identified by paraprofessional employees considering teacher certification?

As the mother of four children, Katie shared that her family obligations have been very challenging. When she previously began college classes, she had to discontinue her classes because the cost of child care was prohibitive. She also finds it

difficult to remain motivated as an online student without the support of interacting with classmates in a traditional classroom. Katie finds the online environment to be very lonely and Katie said that would welcome opportunities for face to face interactions with classmates.

Research Question Two: What support mechanisms can school districts provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

Katie reported that she would like to see continued networking sessions provided by the school district to give paraprofessionals opportunities to share resources and provide emotional support to one another.

Research Question Three: What support mechanisms can colleges and universities provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

Katie said that she has become very frustrated with the counseling provided by her online program because she has not had consistent communication. She shared that she frequently finds herself having to re-state her problem as she is unable to contact the same counselor. She has chosen the online program because she feels the flexibility of the online, asynchronous environment will make it possible for her to complete her degree.

Marilyn, a First Generation African American Student

Marilyn grew up in Houston and attended a large, suburban school in which she was one of the few African American students. Her family was poor, but very hardworking and Marilyn remembers being very happy as a child. Neither of her parents

finished high school. Marilyn's mother passed away when Marilyn was about three years old, so she and her four siblings were raised by her father. Marilyn remembers seeing one of his paychecks, "I remember looking at one of his pay stubs and it was like 150 dollars. I was like, oooo. That's not a lot of money, but we survived."

Marilyn was retained in first grade and then placed in special education in a resource class. Counselors at her school spoke to her class frequently about working hard and trying hard. Marilyn was encouraged by their philosophy of learning to make the right choices. Although she received no help from home, Marilyn began to apply herself and soon found herself in regular education. Marilyn said, "When I got in the regular classroom, I looked at the other kids and realized that I was doing better than some of the other students. Sometimes, I think when I was in resource it helped me improve my learning."

The influence of her counselors continued to influence as she entered high school. Marilyn had to work to help support her family, but she continued to apply herself at school. She felt that others in the school never really knew how poor she was. "When I was growing up, no one really knew about the clothes I was wearing. I didn't have a lot, but we always washed our clothes. I would just pick out different pants to go with different tops. Some of my friends would ask me if they could wear my shirt? Can I wear that shirt? Could you bring it tomorrow? I was surprised, I hardly had anything!"

Marilyn is currently divorced and is raising three children with limited financial assistance from her ex-husband. Marilyn began her life as a single mother living in an apartment financed by government assistance. She worked for a security firm and had no

health benefits for herself and her family. She was frustrated by the limitations she felt by the welfare system. She felt as if she worked too hard and made too much money, she would lose her benefits. "I was told I was at my limit. I feel like that's wrong. I stopped that. I started working three jobs so I could make as much money as I wanted, instead of someone telling me I was making too much. Now, I'm off the system and I'm in a home of my own. I never thought I could make it that far."

Marilyn wants to continue her life goal by pursuing a college degree. She is thirty-eight years old and she worried that she could be too old to start school. She also was preoccupied by the fact that she had been out of school for twenty years. Marilyn talked to a lot of friends and co-workers before going to the community college to get information. She took a remedial writing course over the summer to meet the entrance requirements and now is continuing with Algebra I.

During the interviews, Marilyn shared that she would like colleges to be aware that adult students need a location close to home and an environment that is warm and welcoming. She prefers face to face classes rather than distance learning or online classes because she wants to be able to ask questions to make sure that she understands.

When asked about her graduation someday, Marilyn began to cry. "I will give all praise and thanks to God… There's a hymn they sing at church, it's called 'I Stepped Out'. I've stepped out in my faith and I've stepped out on God's promises. It's a happy thing, it's a happy goal. I try to encourage other people that think they can't do it. Because I want to give back... I feel like if I've been blessed; I need to go and share it. I'm going to give back to the community."

Research Question One: What are the obstacles identified by paraprofessional employees considering teacher certification?

Marilyn articulated that she was very fearful about entering college because of the length of time that had elapsed since she had attended high school. She also is very cognizant of the fact that she is a role model for her own children, and worries about living up to their expectations. She shared that she worries also about financing her education, but is being very proactive in seeking information about educational grants.

Research Question Two: What support mechanisms can school districts provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

Marilyn indicated that she finds her biggest support comes from her coworkers who have encouraged her to begin college. She believes mentoring will be the key to success for her and hopes the district will seek mentors for other paraprofessionals attending college.

Research Question Three: What support mechanisms can colleges and universities provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

Marilyn believes colleges must create a warm and welcoming environment in which the adult learner can feel comfortable. She has taken advantage of tutorial services offered at the community college and feels this is a very valid area for support. She also stresses that the location of classes is a key element in making college possible for working paraprofessionals.

Identification of Themes

Reviewing the unitized and categorized data led to the identification of six themes, each of which will be described and developed in the sub-sections that follow. The following themes emerged in the study: (1) adult learners seeking teaching certification have specialized needs and concerns in the area of college counseling and advising on admissions, enrollment, and degree attainment; (2) adult learners have unique needs for support systems from their families and from employers; (3) adults' previous experiences with education at the secondary or post-secondary level influence their present day decisions in education; (4) adult learners have commitments to family which frequently have more importance to the learner than the educational goals; (5) students who are the first in their family to attend college have unique concerns; and (6) the school district considers paraprofessional employees a potential source for future teachers.

Theme 1 - Adult Learners Seeking Teaching Certification Have Specialized Needs and Concerns in the Area of College Counseling and Advising on Admissions, Enrollment, and Degree Attainment

During the completion of the questionnaire, paraprofessionals had the opportunity to expand upon their concerns or questions in the form of a short narrative. From the various comments, it was very clear that the paraprofessionals need basic, sequential information about enrolling in college and financial aid. Many of the paraprofessionals admitted to being too intimidated to ask specific questions because they did not understand the educational jargon used by college representatives. In the

narratives, many requested additional information about applying to college with help at the very basic level. The overall feeling evinced from the comments was that, as adults, the participants did not want to appear ignorant, yet craved the information. After each session, the researcher received multiple emails requesting specific information in a confidential manner. On session feedback forms and emails sent after the sessions, many paraprofessionals requested that more counselors come to the staff development sessions to continue to answer questions.

Another concern voiced in the interviews was that many of the paraprofessionals who had taken some courses found out after course completion that they had not enrolled in courses that would articulate with a university degree plan since they had not first consulted with an academic advisor. Instead, they had enrolled in courses based on peer recommendations or scheduling convenience.

During the interviews, this feeling of intimidation manifested itself in different forms between the paraprofessionals who had some previous college experience and those who did not. The three paraprofessionals with no experience with college felt very ignorant about the admissions and enrollment processes. When asked if she felt knowledgeable about the processes, Susan expressed, "Not at all. I didn't understand everything in the big sessions and I didn't want to ask questions." Betsy also felt frustrated and explained, "It's still foggy to me to know exactly what to do. From the first time we met, it was like way too much information. Now it seems like it's not as much as it seems like and it's starting to make more sense and there are people out there to help you… It didn't make sense until you learned the jargon. Like the form, the

FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid], I didn't really get it till that last meeting." Each of these ladies experienced a certain degree of fearfulness or timidity about asking questions to get the information they needed. When asked what advice she would like to give the colleges and universities, Betsy continues, "Understand that some of us don't get all that jargon. We're hearing it and we can say what it means, but what does it really mean? Why do we do this first or last?"

Marilyn was the only one of the three paraprofessionals without college experience to aggressively seek advice. On the advice of her assistant principal, Marilyn made an appointment with a counselor at the community college during the spring of 2005. Marilyn was very honest with the counselor and told him she was not knowledgeable about the college system and needed extensive help. Marilyn was able to complete her application, take the admissions test, apply for financial aid, and enroll in a remedial writing course by seeking advice. Marilyn's advice to others is "Just hurry and go. Just do it. At first, I was trying to run from it. I just went and just did it. My friends were pushing me, telling me to just do it".

The six paraprofessionals interviewed who had attended college at some point in the past were less intimidated by the admissions and enrollment process. However, many currently enrolled in college did not seem to thoroughly understand the financial aid process. The paraprofessionals did not have a clear idea of the differences between loans, grants and exemptions. Anna had attended college for three years immediately following high school, but stated she was unable to get financial aid because she could not keep up with the requirements and deadlines in order to qualify.

One member of the paraprofessional group, Liz, expressed a lot of anxiety about mathematics. In her previous college experience, she had completed all of her math requirements. Due to the lapse of time, much of her previous coursework does not apply to current degree requirements. Liz has not visited with a college counselor and fears that she will be told that she will have to take multiple math courses. A visit to a counselor or academic advisor could have answered all of her questions, but when she made an appointment, the counselor cancelled the appointment and she was not brave enough to schedule another. It was as if a vast amount of energy and worry went into scheduling the conference, and to reschedule was perceived to be overwhelming.

Another of the college experienced paraprofessionals, Katie, has enrolled in an online degree program. The ability to work on her course work at any time of the day has been helpful to her. However, she has found that not being able to meet face to face with counselors or academic advisors is frustrating, which is further complicated by the fact that she has not been able to talk to one person consistently with the online program. Katie felt that each individual needs to take responsibility for learning about the programs available and finding the program most suitable for the individuals' lifestyle needs. Hadfield (2003) describes this as a need for a customer service approach to attracting students. "Although for many in academia, the word 'customer' is almost an obscenity when referring to a student, customer satisfaction is the key to attracting and retaining adult students" (p. 19).

Judy attended college right after high school and left school to get married and raise her children. Upon returning to college, she feels comfortable with the admissions

and enrollment processes and has required very little help from the college. She would like to take online courses or distance education courses in order to minimize the time away from her family. Maria has a similar story, but she has moved around the country during her marriage and has continued to go to school in different locations. Maria enjoys the community college and chooses to go to the smallest campus in the system. She enjoys the small size of the classes at this location. She enrolled in one course at one of the larger campuses, but was overwhelmed by the size of both the campus and the classes.

Anna completed almost three years of college course work, but also left to get married. Anna had attended Texas A&M and is very motivated to return to this university to complete her degree. Anna has been very proactive in her planning and meets each year with an academic advisor from the College of Education. Anna has decided to take advantage of the "Fresh Start" program allowing her to virtually erase her previous grade point average and to start over her entire degree program.

Theme 2 - Adult Learners Have Unique Needs for Support Systems from Employers and from Their Families

From information gathered on session feedback forms and through interviews, the participants expressed a need for support from the school district, from their principals, and from their families. Intertwined with the expressions of need for support was a sense of fear of failure. As adult learners, the paraprofessionals enrolled in school felt intimidated by younger students in their classes. Marilyn worried about being "able to keep up" with the younger students after being out of the classroom for twenty years.

Betsy feared "opening herself up to failure" and letting her family down. Betsy feels like she can handle the challenges of time and financing, but the fear of not being successful has kept her from enrolling in classes. Ross-Gordon (2003) found that adult learners have "an initial lack of confidence… that is rooted in perceptions that they may not be as well prepared as fellow students who have not left the formal learning environment" (p. 48). Ross-Gordon proposes that institutions of higher learning "create opportunities for early success to generate confidence. Provide students with information about courses and workshops designed to help them enhance self-awareness as learners, improve academic learning strategies, and learn the norms of academic knowledge communities" (p. 50). Judy stated that she would like a mentor to help her through the initial stages of enrollment and throughout her experience to provide support through encouragement and advice.

The Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources for the district also recognized the need for a mentoring component to any district initiatives to support paraprofessionals seeking teaching certification. She stated, "The mentoring piece is very important. It goes back to the lesson cycle; modeling, checking for understanding, and I think that it fits this situation as well. We have to make sure that we check for understanding with people. We have to be sure that we are modeling for them and giving, good, thorough explanations. We're taking people from where they are, building on that to get them where they need to be".

Another area of support identified by the paraprofessionals was the need to be in contact with their peers seeking degrees. Paraprofessionals responding to the

questionnaire identified the desire for a district network at a rate of 86.4%. In the staff development sessions provided by the researcher, the paraprofessionals enjoyed the opportunities to talk to others and to hear authentic experiences. Katie finds the opportunity to speak with others going to school keeps her motivated and feels the other paraprofessionals going to school have a deeper understanding of the challenges. One paraprofessional said on her session feedback form that after networking with others she felt that her goal was now a possibility. Others expressed the feeling that the sessions were "inspirational", "encouraging", and "motivational". The opportunity to network gave one paraprofessional "the motivation that comes with others in the same position". Another enjoyed "meeting others in the same situation and knowing I am not alone". The appreciation of the opportunity to network was reiterated in interviews, feedback forms, and questionnaires clearly identifying an area of concentration needed in the support of paraprofessionals attending college.

Another component of the networking sessions was the inclusion of personal testimonials by teachers and administrators who had been former paraprofessional employees. These women shared the struggles and challenges and gave very personal glimpses into their years as students. The participants indicated on their feedback forms that the testimonials were extremely inspirational and would like to hear more testimonials from former paraprofessionals.

During these testimonials, the presenters shared their educational experiences as well as their student teaching experiences. Student teaching is an essential component of teacher education which is difficult to manage while working full time as a

paraprofessional. In the state of Texas, an educational aide may apply for an exemption from student teaching if they have the appropriate classroom experience. Because of the necessity in student teaching to be in a classroom full time for an extended period, many paraprofessionals expressed concern over having to quit their current jobs in order to student teach. The paraprofessionals also expressed concern over their ability to obtain a teaching position if they opted out of student teaching. District administrators were asked to address both the issue of the attractiveness of hiring of paraprofessionals who chose not to student teach and the job status of paraprofessionals choosing to student teach.

The Superintendent viewed the student teaching as a "great chance" for the paraprofessionals. If the paraprofessional is within the district for student teaching, they are exposed to administrators and teachers who may be on the decision making team for hiring teachers for that school. He felt that if a paraprofessional did not student teach, they could still be considered for placement because of the shortage of qualified teachers. However, he felt that teachers who had not had student teaching experience would need to participate in extensive staff development during their first year of teaching.

The Associate Superintendent for School Administration also felt as though a paraprofessional with classroom experience, but no student teaching experience, could be considered for hiring because of the shortage of certified teachers and the decreasing numbers of potential teachers graduating from traditional programs. However, the district has hired many alternatively certified teachers who begin their teaching without

student experience and has found that these teachers need more support and supervision than teachers from traditional programs. She felt as though paraprofessionals coming into the classroom may also face these same challenges.

The Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources felt that the ability to be hired as a teacher without student teaching would depend on the paraprofessional's experiences in the school setting as an educational aide. She saw the principal as the primary source for a recommendation to even grant an interview to an applicant because "if the principal is familiar with the paraprofessional and what their experiences have been the principal may be very comfortable about recommending that individual. But, for someone who has no knowledge about this individual, it [the exemption from student teaching] could be a barrier for that individual".

In the past, a paraprofessional was not eligible for a leave of absence in order to participate in student teaching for one semester. Paraprofessionals were not guaranteed a return to a paraprofessional position after taking a semester leave for study. In addition, all job seniority and sick leave were lost. During the course of this study, changes have occurred as the district administrators have developed an increased awareness of the potential of paraprofessionals as future teachers. In June of 2005, the Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District Board of Education approved a new policy allowing qualified paraprofessionals to take leave of absence for one semester. "At the recommendation of a paraprofessional/ancillary employee's principal or supervisor and the Superintendent, a leave of absence without pay may be granted by the Board for one semester as identified on the current District school calendar for the purpose of student

teaching. Although this may not be financially feasible for all paraprofessional employees, it is hoped that with the support of the State of Texas tuition exemption for educational aid or student loans, more paraprofessionals will find student teaching as a workable part of their college program. Student teaching is defined as on-campus classroom teaching at a District school under the direction of a university supervisor and cooperating teacher" (Appendix F). These paraprofessionals must do their student teaching at a district school so the district administrators have an opportunity to observe their teaching. The Superintendent describes this policy as "an investment in future teachers". During the fall semester of 2005, the Board of Education approved this leave for two paraprofessional employees.

Paraprofessionals seeking teaching certification receive different levels of support from their families. Judy first said that her husband was very supportive, but further on in the interview she mentioned that he became resentful of the time she needed to devote to her studies and to attending classes because it "took time away from him". Betsy's family has been very enthusiastic about the possibility of Betsy beginning classes, but Betsy feels that the situation could change when "they are getting sandwiches for dinner instead of a hot meal". As a single mother, Anna has been fortunate that her in-laws and her children have been very supportive and cooperative as she has gone to school. Her children spend time with their grandparents who are willing to meet the children's scheduling needs between school and extracurricular activities. Katie has not felt as though she can depend on her family for support and seeks support through her peers and her co-workers. Marilyn is also a single mother, but enthusiasm

about attending school has influenced her children as well. Her three children enjoy checking to see if their mother has completed her homework. Whenever they drive by her college, she always tells her children, "Look! There's Mommy's school!" She feels very proud of her school and her efforts and her children reflect her feelings with their support.

Support from employers and from families plays an important role in the paraprofessionals' abilities to enroll in college and persist towards a degree. Each paraprofessional interviewed reflected a need for support at varying degrees from these sources, but all indicated the need.

Theme 3 - Adults' Previous Experiences with Education at the Secondary or Post-secondary Level Influence Their Present Day Decisions in Education

During the interview process, many of the paraprofessionals shared information about their earlier experiences in education. These critical incidents reflected the influence of the prior experiences on present day decisions.

Katie began taking classes at a community college immediately after graduating from high school. She also was married during this time and began to have children. She continued attending school, but found the cost of day care for three children to be prohibitive and she was unable to attend any more classes. After attending a session facilitated by the researcher in which a recruiter from an online university presented information, Katie enrolled in an online program. She was able to receive some credit for her previous classes. Katie's choice of an online program was made to meet her needs as the mother of four children and to circumvent the obstacles of balancing her

family commitments with her academic commitments that she had encountered on her previous attempt to obtain a degree.

Marilyn spent many of her early years as a special education student. As one of the few African American students in her high school, she enjoyed the smaller class size of the resource classroom and felt as though her teachers pushed her to succeed. Incorporated into her special education classes were lessons on character development, study skills, and motivation. Marilyn found that when she was released from the special education program and began to take regular education classes that she was better prepared to work diligently at her school work and to maintain the discipline to study than most of her peers. As a student in the community college, Marilyn is not ashamed to ask for assistance as needed. Marilyn is very realistic about her abilities and knows she is lacking academically in some areas, but believes that she will be successful with hard work, dedication, and the support of her colleagues and her church.

Anna's story is very different. Ann completed more than two years of college after high school, but discontinued her studies in order to get married and start a family. Anna was not motivated to perform well as an engineering student. She was following her father's footsteps as an engineer and did not have the self-motivation or self-discipline to be successful. Anna is taking advantage of the Fresh Start program and has relinquished her previously earned credits in order to start with a new grade point average. Anna's previous failure to succeed at college has instilled a new dedication and motivation to succeed. Anna is carefully planning her studies and conferring with college counselors at the community college as well as at a university.

Liz has not been as successful. She, too, has previous college experience. However, during her college career immediately after high school she found the mathematics courses to be extremely challenging. Liz has not yet taken any first steps to enter college and expresses repeatedly a fear of failure in the area of mathematics. She has not conferred with a counselor to determine what mathematics courses she would actually need to take in her course of study. Her previous experience has placed her in a holding pattern and no progress towards her degree has yet materialized.

Maria's fond memories of a teacher who took a special interest in her serve as motivation to continue her studies. As a Hispanic student, Maria feels that the counselors in her high school did not make significant efforts to encourage her to go to college. Even with an offered scholarship, Maria did not have enough information to make the choice to attend college immediately after high school. She regrets this decision as an adult, but continues to be motivated by the teacher from her past who believed Maria could be successful. She treasures a postcard sent from Europe to her from this special teacher and hopes that she, too, can make a positive impact in the lives of many students when she becomes a teacher.

Each of these women has come to the point of deciding whether or not to attend college from a different life path. All her unique needs, levels of success, and educational experiences, but each still feels profoundly impacted by her past experience which continues to determine her choice as a student today.

Theme 4 - Adult Learners Have Commitments to Family Which Frequently Have More Importance to the Learner Than the Educational Goals

Of the eighty-nine out of ninety respondents who answered questions about obstacles to career goals, 68.9 percent of the participants responded that family commitments were a significant challenge to their college careers. The participants who were interviewed gave great insight into these obstacles through their responses.

Susan has two small children at home. For the past several semesters, she has been attending one class per semester because she is trying to schedule her classes to fit with her family's schedule and feels guilty about relinquishing family time to attend class and to study. Susan tries to ensure that she is home in time to prepare her children for bed and to put them to sleep. She is frequently overwhelmed when she takes time to analyze how long it will take her to obtain a teaching degree. Susan believes that online courses may be an option for completing courses but recognizes that she needs face to face classes for certain subjects such as math.

Betsy's husband works in a retail store and does not have regular hours. Betsy has taken a job in a middle school because the early dismissal allows her to be home when her children arrive from school. Her family is very excited about her going back to school, but she is worried that they may feel differently when she does not have the time to cook regular meals. "I'm not sure about my family accepting this when we're eating sandwiches for dinner!" Betsy worries that she may not be successful in school, but fears that she could fail and would be letting her family down. Her family urges her to begin, but she has not yet enrolled in classes. Betsy says, "My family says, 'When are you

going to start?' Every time I get something in the mail, they say, 'When are you going to do it?' They're all behind me."

During Maria's college career, she has faced the serious illness and subsequent death of her husband. She has continued to attend classes throughout the long ordeal, but has found the challenges of caring for a sick spouse and then becoming a single mother to be almost overwhelming. Maria says, in reference to her husband, "He didn't want me to stop going to school. He told me not to stop. The teachers were very understanding. I would make up stuff. I finished those courses. I don't know how I did that! Looking back, I think, was I crazy? It kind of distracted me from Ernie's illness and got me away from things." She continues to persist, and the memory of her husband's belief in her capabilities continues to serve as a motivator. Maria's children also want her to finish. Maria looks forward to graduating someday, but realizes the experience will be bittersweet due to the absence of her husband.

Judy has been a very ambitious student taking as many as thirteen hours at the community college while working full time as a paraprofessional. Caring for her two children has been challenging and her husband resents at times the time she is spending at college and studying at home. She stayed home for a number of years with her children. Judy says, "My husband doesn't want me to go to school because it's taking time from him. He says I become a different person when I'm taking classes. He says I'm more distant and more into studying than the kids. He says that I don't spend time with the kids. I say that I have spent time with them when I was home all those years. Even now, I do spend time with them. I go to their activities. Going to school and

working full time is tough." Judy looks forward to being a teacher one day. Her advice to other paraprofessionals is "to be persistent. It's hard work, but if you're willing to go the extra mile to become a teacher, it doesn't come easy."

Katie has found attending school to be too costly because of the expense of day care. She has attempted to attend for a number of years, but has not been able to attend continuously because of family obligations. She has four children from age three to eleven and they are all very active in sports activities. Katie finds that her obligations to her family make it difficult for her to attend classes, so she has chosen an online program. Katie says, "Someone always has got to go somewhere. Someone always has to do something. So I do school at night. Late at night, I'm on my computer." The online program allows Katie to meet the needs of her children during the day and to concentrate on her studies late at night. She finds working with the online college to be frustrating because she is totally dependent on electronic and telephone communication.

Anna's dreams of a college education almost came to a halt when her husband passed away from cancer. Suddenly, Anna found herself in the role of a single mother. After her husband's death, Anna began her job as a paraprofessional in a public school because her schedule more closely matched that of her children. She has found it difficult to attend class regularly and has chosen to take some courses in an online format. Anna is very close to completing enough credit hours to transfer to university. She is considering moving her family closer to her chosen university to enable her to spend more time with her two children. As she comes close to completing freshman and sophomore level degree requirements, Anna is finding it increasingly difficult to

schedule her classes around her job and her family.

Anna's biggest challenge has been to balance the needs of her family with the requirements of college work. "Going to school has been a forced time management for me. It's gone well, the kids have never said they want to do something and I've had to say I can't do that because I have school. We make it work somehow. During the school year, we have something every night of the week until about nine o'clock. After that, it's my time, so that's pretty good." Anna studies with her children and has found some common themes in their studies. For instance, when she was studying biology, her second grader was studying insects. Anna used this opportunity to connect their studies. The problem solving strategies taught to her elementary school children have helped Anna to be more successful in mathematics. She learned to analyze the questions and answers on tests from her children. When Anna graduates, she just wants "to stand up in front of my in-laws and my kids, just to know that I've got it done. My kids will be really, really proud of me".

Liz has two teenage children and finds their schedules to be very busy. Her oldest child is heavily involved in baseball in high school and hopes to earn a scholarship to a major university. Liz's family travels extensively to baseball tournaments around the country. Her husband would like her to continue her education and is very supportive. However, Liz has found the idea of navigating the admissions process to be overwhelming and has not followed through with contacting a college academic advisor or counselor. Meeting the needs of her children's schedule has been her major focus.

Marilyn has begun her initial courses at the community college. In order to meet

the requirements, she attended a remedial English class. Marilyn is a single mother of three children. She has worked extremely diligently to move from a life based on government assistance to a first time homeowner. Marilyn is proud of her accomplishments and extremely motivated to attend school. Marilyn "never thought she would make it this far" and eagerly anticipates her college career. Marilyn's children enjoy reminding her that she has homework. Marilyn feels that her children look up to her and admire her. She says that her children will attend college when they finish high school and can now see this plan as a tangible possibility. Marilyn would like them to attend a college close to home so that she "can be there if anything happens". Marilyn is taken only one course at a time right now, and hopes to be able to attend more each semester as her family grows accustomed to her new obligations and time requirements.

Theme 5 - Students Who Are the First in Their Family to Attend College Have Unique Concerns

Marilyn, Maria, Betsy, and Susan are all the first in their families to attend college. As typical in the case of first generation students, Marilyn, Maria, Betsy and Susan do not have a family support system to help them navigate through the intricacies of a college or university (Rodriguez, 2003; Ting, 2003; Benmayor, 2002; Phinney & Haas, 2003). The "jargon" that is so difficult for them to understand is a unique challenge for them.

Marilyn is motivated to work hard because she is the first in her family to go to college and she has worked very closely with college academic advisors in order to begin. She has also taken advantage of the tutorials offered at the college which she

learned about through the advising office. Marilyn attends one of the smaller campuses within the community college system which she likes because she finds it more inviting and comfortable.

Maria has also worked closely with a college advisor. However, because she has moved around the country many times during her marriage, she has found the changes in state course requirements to be confusing. Unfortunately, there have been some courses that she has taken which will not count towards her degree plan. Three of her six siblings have graduated with college degrees and their advice has helped Maria along. Her husband also had a college degree and was able to offer advice. Because Maria was an excellent student in high school, she was offered scholarships to college. Maria and her parents did not thoroughly understand the process and she did not take advantage of the scholarships. Maria's parents were satisfied that she finished high school and surpassed their educational levels. As Maria stated, "To think further [than high school] was like way out of there! To get through high school, that was the goal." Maria feels that her high school counselors could have potentially been a source of advice and guidance, and Maria felt like she was "on her own" making the decision to turn down the college scholarships. Maria regrets this decision as she faces the slow process of working full time and earning a degree. "Sometimes, I wish things had turned out differently and I had gone to college. Then, I'd have all that behind me."

Betsy has not started her classes and continues to feel a certain level of confusion about the processes involved in college admissions and enrollment. She is seeking a program that is "laid out for her" and will accommodate her need for careful, sequential

guidance. Betsy is particularly frustrated with the vocabulary and jargon used in the

college setting. She enjoys the district staff development sessions and says that with

each session the whole picture of going to school becomes a little clearer. Betsy has

attended the sessions consistently during the three year period they have been offered,

but has not yet enrolled in classes.

Susan suffers from a feeling of hopelessness when she considers how many

college hours she will need to complete. She, like Betsy, finds herself easily frustrated

by the jargon and terminology used frequently in the college setting and is fearful of

appearing ignorant by asking for clarification. Susan enjoys the staff development

sessions because she finds strength and comfort in talking to her peers and obtaining

information from them. Susan's family is unable to assist her in developing an

understanding of the college culture, but the interchange provided through networking

with other paraprofessionals has proven to be a source of valuable information.

All of these women have found that the college environment is filled with

concepts and terminology completely foreign to a person who is a first generation

college student. The most valuable sources of clarification and information for these

paraprofessionals have been the opportunities to speak with peers who are also going to

school or the existence of competent college counselors who have shown personal

interest in each student.

Theme 6 -The School District Considers Paraprofessional Employees a Potential

Source for Future Teachers

District administrators interviewed by the researcher were asked to respond to the

question "As Cypress-Fairbanks looks for sources for recruitment of high quality teachers, what is your opinion of the value of encouraging paraprofessionals to seek bachelor's degrees in teaching?" They were also asked to share a message they would like to relate to the paraprofessionals in the district considering the pursuit of teaching degrees.

The Superintendent felt, "They are an awesome resource because they are already here, they are already familiar with the school system, and they're not teachers just because they haven't had the opportunity or didn't think they could." The Superintendent also outlined as further evidence of district interest and support a new policy passed by the Board of Education allowing a study leave for paraprofessionals. He expressed interest in seeking out future teachers because he felt the district does not have to depend " on going out and recruiting teachers all over the United States if we've got people with the talent right here in the district". The Superintendent felt that principals needed to view paraprofessionals as an "investment in future teachers" and to realize that although the paraprofessionals could not be hired as teachers immediately they needed the support of the principals as they seek degrees. "They're already here, they have the talent, we have to develop them. We need to include them in the team and make them understand their value. A lot of them think they have a glass ceiling. They can see where they want to be, but there's no way to get there from their position." The Superintendent expressed support of future initiatives such as academic cohorts, internet access as a networking tool, and study skills classes for paraprofessionals.

The Superintendent shared his message to the aspiring teachers:

I'd tell them to never give up on your dreams. You've got to follow your dream. If your goal is to be a teacher, we're going to help you figure out how. Your already working with kids, you're a valuable resource here as a team member, you live here, your kids are going or did go to school here, so why not move up to the next level, if that's your goal. If you don't want to be a teacher, then don't and we can't help you to become business people, but if you want to become part of the education family at another level, then we're going to show you how. We're going to encourage them to do that. You're never too old, you never are too poor, and you're probably a lot smarter than you think you are.

The Superintendent's comments reflected an openness to the possibility of paraprofessionals as future teachers.

The Associate Superintendent for School Administration was very enthusiastic about the consideration of paraprofessionals as future teachers and called them an "untapped resource". She felt that the paraprofessionals had a great deal of potential as teachers because "they love the culture, they love being around kids". She shared that the school district is investigating partnerships with area colleges and universities in order to offer classes to paraprofessionals in cohort groups. The district is also pursuing partnerships with area businesses to provide tuition assistance. The Associate Superintendent for School Administration is hopeful that by providing support to the paraprofessionals, the district may be able to recruit teachers in critical needs areas, especially special education and bilingual education.

The Associate Superintendent for School Administration would like principals to

assist in the development of the future teachers by providing them opportunities for varied experiences in their role as a paraprofessional. She felt that it is important that the paraprofessionals see beyond the scope of their own job roles and assigned grade levels and to be open to other possibilities. The Associate Superintendent for School Administration suggested that principals allow paraprofessionals who are college students some flexibility in their schedules to attend classes and also to observe master teachers.

The Associate Superintendent for School Administration had the following to share with the paraprofessionals:

They [the paraprofessionals] have the potential to make such a huge impact. They obviously know that Cy-Fair is a good place to work and a nurturing environment. They are on the track to really touch a child's life and change it forever. Many times they may not see in themselves that they can do it. They need to realize that they are going at it from a different standpoint than a lot of people. Their years of experience that they bring with them, and they've raised a family. A brand new teacher coming out of college doesn't bring with them the experience they have with the district; they know that it may be tiring, it may be hard, but it truly is the best profession that they could ever choose.

From this message to the paraprofessionals, it is clear that the Associate Superintendent for School Administration recognizes a valuable resource for future teachers from the pool of paraprofessionals seeking teaching degrees.

The Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources provided a comprehensive

view of the possibility of paraprofessionals becoming teachers through the lens of personnel and human resources. Responses to the questions from the researcher focused on the policies and requirements of that department. After explaining the professional study leave and its structure, she was careful to state that paraprofessionals were not guaranteed in any way a teaching position upon completion of a degree. The study leave is in place as a support and requires that the paraprofessionals perform their student teaching requirements in a Cypress-Fairbanks I.S.D. school, giving district principals an opportunity to observe their teaching and to consider whether or not a recommendation letter would be appropriate. She felt that the district's network of principals would prove a valuable resource for qualified applicants seeking teaching positions. "For the student teaching piece, the principal has to write a letter of recommendation and can pretty much tell us that she wants to have that teacher at her school. But, we also know that if there is not a position available, that she will be highly recommending her to other principals."

In addition to providing references for future teachers, the Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources would like to see principals providing mentorship and guidance to the paraprofessionals. The paraprofessionals also need opportunities to observe other teachers and participate in varied activities.

> It's important that they give encouragement to that individual. Not only words of kindness, but every once in awhile, some understanding is needed. They may have some commitments that are school related that the principal may be able to grant. We limit those to three times during the year that a person can leave, and they need to be understanding of that. Or, if someone just needs some counsel

about the system. Sometimes some people are not familiar with the university

system, or what to do next. Principals have been through that process and they

can provide guidance. They can serve as mentors. What is so encouraging to

people is to just know that they are supported. Another thing that principals can

do, within reason, they can help structure schedules that will give the

paraprofessional some opportunities in their job role as a paraprofessional that

will be exposing them to maybe something new and different from one year to

the next so that they are building experience. They are perhaps able to work with

different grade levels. Include them in planning sessions… Or they may even

have the opportunity to include them in on a parent conference. So, when they

go to interview, they've already had experiences. When they're asked questions

about working in the classroom or working with students or lesson design or how

they're going to interact with parents in certain situations, they've had an

opportunity to observe that. In conferences, you may ask a parent "Our

paraprofessional is in her last semester and ready to do her student teaching. Do

you mind if she sits in as an observer?" Of course we have to be careful about

confidentiality, but so long as a parent is willing to do that and we know that it's

a parent who will be comfortable with that.

Intertwined in the responses of the Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources are

the reiteration of basic district policies and requirements reflecting a unique perspective

from the role of a human resources specialist. Her responses reflect a consistent

consideration for the interests of the school district and the principals. In her closing

statement to the paraprofessionals, she offered a caution to the paraprofessionals as they move into the role of teacher and assume the responsibilities of an educator, "It is unbelievable the responsibility they take on as a teacher. In my position it is so disheartening to see someone who is not doing their job, and it is my job to support the principals and to make sure that person is no longer in our district."

The Assistant Director of Human Resources is involved in recruiting and interviewing teaching candidates. In this role, she often must "sell" the district to potential candidates as she attempts to attract qualified applicants to commit themselves to Cypress-Fairbanks I.S.D. Like the Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources, her lens is that of a future employer and her focus is on the needs of the district. However, as a salesperson she validates paraprofessionals' concerns for the challenges of obtaining a degree.

> We have several paras in our district that have impressed me, through going to para meetings and talks, and talking to them about becoming teachers. We don't know how many of them have some level of college courses or degrees or associates degrees, but have just stopped [attending college]. Different circumstances in life stop us sometimes. We hold our dreams of becoming teachers, we get married, we have children, all those things. Financial aid has been a big part of our paras not continuing in their dreams. If we can help them find their way to pursue, I think it's a win-win situation for both. For them, they fulfill their dreams, and for us, to get some valuable teachers

The Assistant Director has attended many of the staff development sessions presented by the researcher. During the sessions, she shared information about the district and the application process. She believes her presence in the sessions reinforces the paraprofessionals' beliefs in the value the district places on them, but cautions that there is a level of risk involved as a future position as a teacher is not guaranteed.

> Another reason I want to represent HR and the district is that we want them to know that we are not just talking! You're putting all your time and your energy and monies, and restructuring and rescheduling your life. That we truly are interested in having you on board. They're taking a risk. It is risk. We want them to know that it will be well worth the risk. We can't guarantee them anything, just like we can't guarantee college graduates or current employees going back for certifications trying to get promotions within the district. But, it's putting themselves in a place where they could be considered. And we are giving high priority to our paras. When we see that a para is becoming certified or seeking certification at a point to interview, we automatically interview them.

The Assistant Director believes that paraprofessionals familiarity with the district and their principals' awareness of their skills make them a candidate worth granting interviews. An additional acknowledgement was that the principals working with the paraprofessionals would have an awareness of the paraprofessionals' abilities to contribute to a healthy working environment through their relationships with other professionals and their professionalism. In her message to the paraprofessionals, the Assistant Director for Human Resources echoed the sentiments of the Assistant

Superintendent for Human Resources in her urging paraprofessionals to carefully consider their motivation for seeking a teaching degree.

> First of all, they really need to search themselves and ask, "Why is it that I want to do this?" And I hope it's not just because of money. I know paras don't make a lot of money, but when we are interviewing whether para-to-teacher or traditional college student, we're looking for a desire to make a difference. I know it's sounds cliché, but we don't need a body, we can get those. I would ask them to really search themselves to say, "Why is it that I want to do this?" I'm looking for someone who really has a deep passion for children and for learning. We can teach people programs, but you can't teach people to love children. And that comes across so clearly when you interview someone for an hour, you can get a real look into their heart. Because if you don't express that, it's not there. And you can't teach it. We want people who have a real passion for teaching. That portrait of a Cy-Fair teacher is not just a plaque on the wall. We truly want these people to have those instructional strategies, we want them to be a team player. Those are characteristics that are just internal, intrinsic. We want you to be a lifelong learner, and I want you to convince me that you are. So really there are some subjective things that we can't measure with an instrument, but we, as experienced interviewers, are looking for. And I make that very clear when I speak to groups. We don't want bodies, we truly want people who love children and with a love of learning.

It is clear that the Assistant Director considers the paraprofessionals to be a viable source of teachers, but expects applicants to be qualified and dedicated to education.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings and results of a study of the obstacles faced by paraprofessionals seeking teacher certification and of the support mechanisms which serve to support these students. In the first section, an overview of the demographic characteristics of the student was discussed. Through the use of a questionnaire created by the researcher, quantitative data about the participants was presented in the second section. The third section provided portraits of individuals including personal accounts of experiences and life stories. Quantitative and qualitative data were unitized and categorized to identify emerging patterns and themes which were presented in the fourth section. The next chapter will present a summary of the study, an overview of the problem, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the study and important conclusions drawn from the data presented in Chapter IV. The chapter contains five sections: a summary of the study, findings related to the literature, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Study

Overview of the Problem

School districts nationwide struggle to meet the growing need for qualified teachers, especially in critical need areas such as bilingual education, special education, math and science. Additionally, the demographic composition of the American classroom is changing which creates a compelling need to increase the participation of underrepresented groups in the teaching field (Fluckiger & Thompson, 2000). As districts seek alternative sources for qualified teachers, paraprofessional employees currently working in classrooms are an attractive and rich resource for the recruitment of future teachers.

Paraprofessionals frequently have limited college experience and may be first generation college students. These factors, coupled with the unique needs of adult undergraduate students, make the path to a college degree in education a difficult and challenging one for the paraprofessionals. In order to adequately assist the paraprofessionals in the college environment, colleges and school districts must possess

an understanding of the obstacles faced by these students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to identify the obstacles faced by paraprofessionals in a large urban school district who aspire to become certified teachers by pursuing a bachelor's degree. The study also identified recurrent and common emerging themes where community colleges, universities, and school districts can endeavor to increase their support of these students.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following questions:

(4) What are the obstacles identified by paraprofessional employees considering teacher certification?

(5) What support mechanisms can school districts provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

(6) What support mechanisms can colleges and universities provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

Review of the Methodology

Through the implementation of the naturalistic paradigm, the research study used quantitative and qualitative data to explore the lives and experiences of paraprofessionals interested in becoming teachers. The naturalistic paradigm was chosen in order to create portraits of individual paraprofessionals which could not be attained through quantitative data alone. The research was conducted in three phases.

During the first phase, the researcher created the opportunity for prolonged

engagement by providing and promoting staff development opportunities for Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District paraprofessionals over a three year period. The sessions were offered throughout the academic year. Representatives from area colleges were invited to attend these sessions to present information to the paraprofessionals about college enrollment, admissions, and procedures. Attendance at the sessions ranged from twenty-four participants to one hundred and fifty-three participants. The researcher facilitated team-building and goal setting activities at the sessions.

Ninety-three session participants were assured of confidentiality (Appendix A) and given a questionnaire addressing academic goals, desired certification, and demographics (Appendix B). Ninety completed questionnaires were returned to the researcher. Data generated from the questionnaires were entered into SPSS and descriptive statistics were generated.

The second phase of the research study focused on a more profound investigation of the motivations and levels of determination of the participants in their desire to become teachers.   The researcher conducted personal interviews with eight of the participants in the staff development sessions. During the sessions, paraprofessionals had the opportunity to complete a form reflecting their willingness to participate in a personal interview. The researcher restricted participation in the interviews to those paraprofessionals who had attended at least two of the staff development sessions. Due to her prolonged engagement of the researcher with the paraprofessional groups, the researcher was able to make a final selection of eight participants who reflected a range of the demographics and experiences reported in the statistics from the questionnaire. All

of the participants were initially contacted by telephone and all agreed to meet individually with the researcher.

The participants chose the locations for each interview. The researcher began with an outline of starting questions (Appendix C) which were formulated based on emerging themes from the data collected in phase one. The researcher asked for clarification or elaboration throughout the interviews through reflective questioning and the adoption of an informal conversational style. The procedures for member checks were explained to all participants. The interviews were taped and transcribed and each paraprofessional was given a copy to edit or to clarify.

The researcher also interviewed Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District administrators in order to explore the level of commitment and interest in the area of recruiting paraprofessional employees as future teachers. These participants were also given the opportunity for member checks.

As the quantitative and qualitative data were collected, the researcher formulated a working hypothesis. This working hypothesis assisted in the identification of new strategies and avenues of inquiry.

During the third phase of the research study, the researcher gathered the divergent data collected in the first and second phases. Using the naturalistic research techniques of identification of emerging themes, categorization, and unitization, the researcher organized the data in order to augment the working hypothesis. The Hermeneutic-Dialectic Process (Erlandson et al., 1993) was utilized to assist in the convergence of data into themes. The following themes emerged: (1) adult learners

seeking teaching certification have specialized needs and concerns in the area of college counseling and advising on admissions, enrollment, and degree attainment; (2) adult learners have unique needs for support systems from their families and from employers; (3) adults' previous experiences with education at the secondary or post-secondary level influence their present day decisions in education; (4) adult learners have commitments to family which frequently have more importance to the learner than the educational goals; (5) students who are the first in their family to attend college have unique concerns; and (6) the school district considers paraprofessional employees a potential source for future teachers.

Major Findings

Research Question One - What are the obstacles identified by paraprofessional employees considering teacher certification?

From the quantitative data collected in the questionnaire and the qualitative data collected through interviews, obstacles to the educational plans of the paraprofessionals were identified. The cost of education was identified as an obstacle by 77.8% of the respondents to the questionnaire and family obligations was identified by 68.9% as an obstacle. During the personal interviews, the participants shared personal stories and experiences concerning these obstacles.

The cost of education was a prohibitive factor to all of the eight paraprofessionals interviewed. Many expressed reservations at devoting family funds to cover the cost of their education. A certain feeling of guilt surfaced in all of the women when they spoke of paying for college. It seemed very difficult for them to rationalize spending money on

themselves rather than on their families. It troubles them that their children may have to sacrifice some things in order for them to meet their financial obligations as students.

The researcher did not sense that the first generation students possessed a thorough understanding of the financial aid process and could possibly be overlooking possible sources of financial support. Many found the financial aid process to be confusing and expressed a need for additional guidance in meeting deadlines and completing the required paperwork. The terminology used by college advisors and counselors was not clearly understood and many of the women were too embarrassed to ask for clarification. For example, Liz plans to apply for financial aid, but could not be more specific about the type of financial aid she would seek and only said that she would "use the FAFSA process".

The cost of child care is a prohibitive factor for the paraprofessionals with young children. This additional cost has caused some to discontinue their studies. In an effort to avoid costly child care, many of the women attempted to attend classes at times which melded well with their families' schedules. While this careful scheduling allowed them to avoid child care costs and to meet family needs, it is a severe limiting factor in course selection. One paraprofessional was enrolled in an online program so that she is able to work late at night when her children have gone to bed.

The fear of failure is an obstacle which has prevented some paraprofessionals from enrolling in college. They worry about "letting their families down" if they are unable to meet their academic goals. As parents, they wish to set the best example for their children and hope their children will also attend college.

During the interviews, the many levels of family obligations faced by the paraprofessionals became strikingly apparent. As older students, the women interviewed all had children at home who needed their time and support. A poignant theme which emerged from the interviews was the guilty feelings felt by the paraprofessionals as they invested time in their college careers which could have been spent with their families. It was important to the paraprofessionals to find programs that are geographically convenient so that they can balance the responsibilities of work and family. A desirable college program would be close to home and offer flexible hours. Judy was the only participant who shared that she did not have emotional support from her husband. Judy's husband was resentful of the time taken from the family and from him so that Judy could attend college. He told Judy that she "was a different person" when she attended college. Before becoming a paraprofessional, Judy was a full time mother and her husband has found it the change in her status challenging. Judy reported that she would like to network with other paraprofessionals going to college as a form of support. She also would like a professional mentor to guide her through the processes and intricacies of attending college.

The financial commitment and the struggle to meet family needs were two obstacles present in each of the stories of the paraprofessionals interviewed. In addition, many other obstacles were identified in the interviews and in the written comments included in the questionnaires. Many of the paraprofessionals expressed a strong fear of failure. Their fears involved a feeling of not meeting their families' expectations as well as being in a classroom with much younger college students. Also, a fear of appearing

ignorant during counseling or advising sessions or during a college class was identified as an obstacle.

A practical obstacle identified in interviews and questionnaires was the availability of college services during the evening. Working full time, paraprofessionals often must seek information outside of normal business hours. At the community college, the hours for counseling, registration, advising, and other college services were extended to accommodate working students. However, many paraprofessionals found it difficult to obtain university services at four year institutions outside of traditional business hours.

Research Question Two - What support mechanisms can school districts provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

Working full time and attending college is a struggle at any age, and the paraprofessionals will require varying types of support from the school district. The type of support most often mentioned was financial support. Many of the paraprofessionals expressed the belief that tuition support from the district would not only help them financially, but would also be a tangible reflection of the district's support of their efforts. The Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District offers paraprofessionals a yearly stipend to offset tuition costs. This stipend is based upon the individual's return to the district the following school year and a formal degree plan from a university confirming their plans to seek education degrees.

Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District is located northwest of Houston, Texas. There are no four year institutions located within the district and travel to nearby

universities is often hampered by traffic congestion. Many paraprofessionals reported that if classes could be offered closer to the district, that they would be able to attend classes more easily. Partnerships with universities on nearby community college campuses would aid the paraprofessionals by bringing classes closer to their homes. District personnel reported that the district is in the preliminary stages of exploring this as a viable option.

The staff development sessions offered on a regular basis allowed many paraprofessionals opportunities to meet and interact with other paraprofessionals with similar interests. The paraprofessionals who attended these sessions expressed a desire for the continuation of these opportunities because they were able to form friendships, share knowledge of college resources, share textbooks, and provide emotional support for each other. Many viewed networking as an essential component to ensure their academic success.

Student teaching requires that students work full time in a classroom for their practicum without pay. The paraprofessionals feared that, when they arrived at the point in their academic plan when student teaching would be required, they would lose their paraprofessional positions. The Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District Board of Education created an educational leave policy for paraprofessionals in June of 2005. Paraprofessionals can now apply for a leave of one semester without losing seniority or sick leave and they are guaranteed a paraprofessional position after their return. The requirements of the policy are that the paraprofessional perform the student teaching in a district school. This plan allows paraprofessionals the needed time and gives the district

an opportunity to recruit potential teachers from a previously largely untapped source.

Both paraprofessionals and district personnel identified a mentorship program as a vital piece to the educational plan of the paraprofessionals. Mentors, such as the principal, can help these adult students navigate the university environment and can serve as advisors in making decisions about education plans. The Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources also stressed that when paraprofessionals attain their degrees and begin the process of attaining a teaching position, principals would be asked to provide recommendations. A principal who has served as a mentor for an individual can prove to be a valuable reference during a job search. Additionally, the emotional support offered to an aspiring teacher could potentially impact the aspiring teacher's chances of successful completion of a teaching degree.

Research Question Three - What support mechanisms can colleges and universities provide to meet the needs of paraprofessional employees in pursuing teacher certification?

The uniqueness of adult students is supported by both the literature and the results of this study. Colleges and universities currently tailored to meet the needs of traditional students must analyze and assess their abilities to meet the specialized needs of the adult student. If university services are only offered within the span of traditional business hours, the university is creating a possible barrier to participation by working adult students.

Many of the paraprofessionals involved in this study described to varying degrees their anxiety about seeking advising and counseling services. Some reported that

they were worried about appearing ignorant to college personnel. Others said they did

not understand the educational jargon used in the admissions process and were too

embarrassed to ask for clarification. One paraprofessional stated that she would like to

be able to talk to the same person each time she requested help on campus. Many

paraprofessionals expressed a need for step-by-step guidance through the enrollment and

admissions process and through the formalization of their degree plans.

Marilyn stated that it was important that the colleges appeared "inviting". This

sentiment was mirrored in the comments of many other paraprofessionals. As they enter

into the foreign world of the college campus, they felt the need for personal contact and

to feel welcomed. One paraprofessional currently enrolled in college wished that

extracurricular activities were planned in the evening to meet the needs of the working

adult student so that she could become more involved in campus life.

The location of the college is a critical element to the success of the

paraprofessionals' college careers. Many of them are working parents and the location of

the district combined with the city traffic makes it difficult for them to invest additional

time in travel to and from class. At the staff development sessions and in the interviews,

the paraprofessionals reported that they hoped that classes could be offered closer to the

Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, or that the district would form

partnerships with universities to offer classes. Colleges can also offer varied methods of

delivery of classes, such as online courses, in order to facilitate the attendance of those

facing geographical challenges.

Findings Related to the Literature

The findings in this study were directly supported by the literature. The obstacles identified by the paraprofessionals in the study paralleled obstacles outlined in studies of adult learners and first generation students (Kasworm, 2003; Richter-Antion, 1986; Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Fairchild, 2003). The obstacles identified by the paraprofessionals were not unique to this population, but rather commonly found by adult learners in all fields of study. The paraprofessionals reflected many typical characteristics of adult learners as evidenced by the literature. The delayed enrollment, fear of failure, desire to improve careers, lack of knowledge of college procedures, and a high level of involvement in family commitments were factors found in many of the paraprofessionals' life experiences (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Aslanian, 2001; Fairchild, 2003).

The needed support from institutions of higher education reflected in the literature was identified by the paraprofessionals. To meet the needs of adult learners, colleges and universities must consider changes in college services necessitated by the growth of the older student population (Hadfield, 2003; Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Fairchild, 2003).

Conclusions

As the urban schools in our country continue to grow and change, nontraditional avenues for recruitment of teachers must be explored. The emerging themes in this study support a strong potential within the paraprofessional work force to become future teachers. Both school districts and colleges recognize this potential and must move

forward to enable the paraprofessionals achieve their dreams of becoming teachers.

Three major conclusions emerge from this study:

(1) The pool of paraprofessional teacher candidates is a valuable, untapped resource which urban school districts cannot afford to ignore.

With an increasing need for highly qualified teachers, urban school districts need to realize the value of investing time and money in the development of teachers from the paraprofessional working force. Paraprofessionals offer classroom experience and familiarity with school environments. By working within a district, they exhibit loyalty to the district and knowledge of the hidden laws of the school culture. Often, paraprofessionals represent marginalized populations and possess a unique understanding of the needs of children of all cultures.

(2) Urban school districts typically do not have adequate procedures for recruiting paraprofessionals into teacher certification programs, for supporting them during these programs, and for facilitating their placement in teaching positions upon completion of the programs.

Urban districts wishing to develop quality teachers from the paraprofessional pool within their own districts must have organized plans in place for recruitment to college attendance, encouragement during their college careers, and support in seeking positions within the districts. School districts have the potential to form partnerships with area universities and to establish mentorship programs within the districts. Paraprofessionals seeking teaching certificates must be viewed as future investments which will mature into teachers who are familiar with the district and its culture.

Districts will benefit through the placement of these individuals into schools and have the advantage of a long term relationship with the paraprofessionals as well as being familiar with their work ethic and level of expertise.

(3) Community colleges and universities donot have adequate ways of better accommodating the needs of non-traditional students who are adult learners.

An understanding of the needs of these adult learners will guide institutions of higher education in the adjustment of traditional schedules and services to accommodate these needs. The growing population of older students will be a dynamic influence in the changing face of higher education.

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendations for Practice for School Districts

Growing teacher shortages and competition for recruitment of qualified candidates have forced school districts to investigate the recruitment of teachers from nontraditional sources. Structured plans and programs available to paraprofessionals within a school district will allow districts to develop teachers from within. This gives school districts the advantage of knowledge about the candidates' abilities.

School administrators within a school can easily recognize which paraprofessionals have the capacity to become a future teacher. Input and recommendations from building level administrators could help identify paraprofessionals to be recruited into a teacher development program. Strict requirements for admittance into the program will ensure that only candidates with the highest likelihood of success and completion are admitted.

Urban school districts need to develop procedures for recruiting paraprofessionals into teacher certification programs, for supporting them during these programs, and for facilitating their placement in teaching positions upon completion of the programs. An essential component of any teacher development program in a school district is a formalized mentoring program. As nontraditional students, the paraprofessionals will need the support of a mentor teacher who can advise and guide during the long process of attaining a college degree.

School districts must also form partnerships with area colleges and universities to attempt to provide classes at a geographical location which is convenient to the lifestyles and commitments of the paraprofessionals. They also must hold the institutes of higher education accountable through active involvement to ensure that the paraprofessionals are provided a quality program.

Recommendations for Practice for Colleges and Universities

Community colleges and universities must find ways of better accommodating the needs of non-traditional students who are adult learners. Community colleges and universities must continue to form partnerships to provide seamless, affordable undergraduate programs for teaching degrees. Assistance for the adult students involved in the program must be dynamic and must consider the specialized needs of the adult learners. Counseling and other services must be readily available outside of normal business hours to accommodate the working adults.

Institutes of higher education must also form partnerships with school districts. With their opportunity to interact with potentially a large number of paraprofessional to

teacher programs, they can provide guidance for the organization of the programs within multiple districts. Also, they must be willing to collaborate with school districts with the implementation of off-campus instruction and alternative programs such as distance learning, online programs as well as classes offered at convenient times and locations.

Recommendations for Further Study

Based on the findings and conclusions in this study, the following areas of further study are recommended:

(1) Investigate obstacles classified as family commitments.

The conversations with the paraprofessionals and the data from the questionnaire reveal that family commitments are a major obstacle to the participation of the paraprofessionals in higher education. During the conversations, the family commitments were described in detail and it became apparent to the researcher that there is an inherent difference in the nature and complexity of the family commitments of younger students and of students over the age of forty. In order to more fully meet the needs of the older student, colleges and universities need to investigate more closely the types of obstacles classified as family commitments. The women in this study shared experiences of loss of a spouse, illness of older relatives, sports events at the high school level involving their children, and divorce. These issues would not be commonly faced by younger students. It is important that institutions of higher education possess an understanding of the life experiences of their older students and the uniqueness of the obstacles they face.

(2) Conduct longitudinal studies of the success of paraprofessionals to educator programs already in progress and the structure of successful programs.

Due to the lack of established programs, there is little information in the literature about the career paths and successes of paraprofessionals who have become fully certified classroom teachers. Further investigation of the professional experiences during the initial years of teachers would lend insight into the vital components of successful programs.

(3) Investigate current partnerships between community colleges and universities who provide seamless transitions for students seeking teaching degrees.

As school districts, colleges, and universities attempt to organize programs for paraprofessionals to become teachers, a deep understanding of current programs is essential. With more information about current partnerships, new programs could be formed with consideration of the strengths and weakness of existing programs. This would allow for programs to be created expeditiously.

(4) Conduct studies focused on the efforts of urban schools district to recruit, support and place into teaching positions paraprofessionals seeking teaching degrees.

As exemplified in the literature, there have been some districts in the United States that have successfully implemented paraprofessionals to teachers programs. However, more information is needed about the specific structures in place within these programs which facilitated the recruitment and retention of the paraprofessionals and the placement into teaching positions.

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APPENDIX A

Consent Form

Cypress-Fairbanks I.S.D. Paraprofessional Employee Staff Development Plan

I understand that my responses to these questions are confidential and are to be used by the Houston Area Initiative program in the Principals' Center at Texas A&M University and Cypress-Fairbanks I.S.D. to evaluate the impact of the Cypress-Fairbanks I.S.D. Paraprofessional Employee Staff Development Plan. I, _____, also understand that the purpose of the study is to gain information about teacher recruitment and its impact on the Cypress-Fairbanks I.S.D. at no perceived benefit to myself. I, _____ ,have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this project. I understand that this participation in this project is a voluntary option open to all paraprofessional employees in the Cypress-Fairbanks I.S.D. and if I choose to not participate that this will have no effect on my status in the school district. A total of 100 participants have been asked to participate in this study. The data gathered in this project will be used in the course of study of the researcher, Carrie Oden Marz, as well as in her record of study. **The** *current study begins in November, 2003 and runs through July, 2005. I can choose to participate in the project during this time frame or may withdraw at any time. Any photos taken made during the sessions may be used to promote the project. Any audio tapes made during the subject interviews will be voluntary and I may request to not be taped during any interviews.*

I, _____, understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board - Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding human subjects' rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Dr. Michael W. Buckley, Director of Research Compliance, Office of Vice President for Research at (979) 458-4067. I can contact the researcher, Carrie Oden Marz, at (281) 517-6356 at Hancock Elementary or carrie.marz@cfisd.net . The researcher has obtained a Certificate of Confidentiality as required by the IRB board. My signature indicates that I am willing to participate in this study.

My signature indicates my willingness to participate in the study.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   *Signature of Researcher*

_____

Date

If you would like a written copy of this form, please indicate this to the session facilitator.

**Questionnaire Given to Paraprofessionals Participating in Staff
Development Opportunities**

Houston Area Initiative
Cypress-Fairbanks I.S.D. Paraprofessional Employee Staff Development Plan
Paraprofessional Questionnaire

Dear Respondent:

Houston Area Initiative research team from Texas A&M University needs your assistance in conducting an important research project concerning the development of paraprofessional development and recruitment of new teachers in the Houston Area. The study is an important one that will help the Houston Area Initiative to provide continued improvement and support of the paraprofessional development program in which you are participating and whether the research team and program coordinator's expectations are being met. We are asking your help by completing the following questionnaire.

Your answers are completely confidential and will be released only as summaries in which no individual's answers can be identified. When you return your completed questionnaire, you will never be connected to your answers in any way. This questionnaire is voluntary. However, you can help us very much by taking a few minutes to share your experiences and opinions concerning the professional development program in which you are participating.

Thank you for your time and effort in completing the questionnaire. It's only with the generous help of paraprofessionals, such as yourself, that our research can be successful.

Sincerely,

Carrie Oden Marz
Texas A&M University, Graduate Student
Assistant Principal, Hancock Elementary

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Please tell us about yourself

Question 1 – 5 are optional. If you feel uncomfortable with answering a particular question(s), please skip the question and go to the next one.

1) Gender?

❑ Male
❑ Female

2) Ethnicity?

❑ Hispanic
❑ African American
❑ White
❑ Asian/Pacific Isle
❑ Other than above stated _____

3) Age _____

4) Marital Status?

❑ Single
❑ Married
❑ Separated
❑ Divorced
❑ Widowed
❑ Other _____

5) For how many school age children are you primarily responsible?

❑ 0
❑ 1
❑ 2
❑ 3
❑ 4 or more (please specify _____)

6) Please tell us about your present level of education.

❑ G.E.D.
❑ High School Graduate
❑ Vocational Diploma
❑ Some College experience
❑ Associates Degree
❑ Bachelor's Degree

If you answered question #6 as <u>Some College Experience</u> answer question #7:
If your answer was other than <u>Some College Experience</u> please proceed to question #8.

7) Approximately how many college credits/hours have you completed?

❑ 1 – 12
❑ 13 – 24
❑ 25 – 36
❑ 37 – 48
❑ 49 – 60
❑ 61 or more

8) How many years have you been attending college?

❑ 0 – 1
❑ 2 – 3
❑ 4 – 5
❑ 6 or more (please specify _____)

9) Have you registered for college classes?

    a. If yes, where have you registered? _____

    b. If no, are you planning to register? _____

10) What obstacles have hindered you in your pursuit of a degree in education?

❑ Undecided Career Goals
❑ Cost of Education/Lack of Financial Resources
❑ Family Obligations
❑ Accessible University Program
❑ Health Concerns
❑ Other _____

Please tell us about your family's education

11) Father's highest education level completed?

- ❑ No Diploma
- ❑ Graduate Equivalency Diploma (G.E.D.)
- ❑ High School Diploma
- ❑ Associates Degree or Vocational Certificate
- ❑ Bachelor's Degree
- ❑ Advanced Degree

12) Mother's highest education level completed?

- ❑ No Diploma
- ❑ Graduate Equivalency Diploma (G.E.D.)
- ❑ High School Diploma
- ❑ Associates Degree or Vocational Certificate
- ❑ Bachelors Degree
- ❑ Advanced Degree

13) How many siblings do you have?

- ❑ 0
- ❑ 1
- ❑ 2
- ❑ 3
- ❑ 4
- ❑ 5 or more (please specify) _____

14) How many of your siblings have completed at least a bachelor's degree in college?

- ❑ 0
- ❑ 1
- ❑ 2
- ❑ 3
- ❑ 4
- ❑ 5 or more (please specify) _____

Please tell us about your career and aspirations

15) What is your present employment status?

❑ Paraprofessional (part-time)
❑ Paraprofessional (full-time)
❑ Custodial
❑ Facilities Maintenance
❑ Other _____

If you answer to #14 was other than Paraprofessional, please skip questions 15 – 17 and continue,

beginning with #18.

16) Number of total years serving as a paraprofessional?

❑ First year teaching
❑ 1 – 2 years
❑ 3 – 4 years
❑ 5 – 7 years
❑ 8 – 15 years
❑ 16 – 30 years
❑ Over 30 years

17) Approximately how many hours per week do you work as a paraprofessional?

❑ 1 – 10
❑ 11 – 20
❑ 21 – 30
❑ 30 – 40
❑ 41 or more

18) Present grade level assignment(s)? Check all that apply.

❑ Pre-Kindergarten	❑ 8th	❑ Resource (Sp. Ed.)
❑ Kindergarten	❑ 9th	❑ Life Skills
❑ 1st	❑ 10th	❑ Library
❑ 2nd	❑ 11th	❑ In Class Support
❑ 3rd	❑ 12th	❑ Other
❑ 4th	❑ 9th	
❑ 5th	❑ 10th	
❑ 6th	❑ 11th	
❑ 7th	❑ 12th	

19) If you became a certified teacher, which grade level would be most desirable to you?

❑ Pre-Kindergarten   ❑ 6th
❑ Kindergarten   ❑ 7th
❑ 1st   ❑ 8th
❑ 2nd   ❑ 9th
❑ 3rd   ❑ 10th
❑ 4th   ❑ 11th
❑ 5th   ❑ 12th

20) Below is a list of certification areas. Please rank your top 3 choices that you would aspire to seek certification by placing a 1, 2, and 3 in the corresponding boxes.

❑ Early Childhood Education   ❑ Math Education

❑ Elementary Education   ❑ Social Studies Education

❑ Special Education   ❑ Language Arts Education

❑ ESL   ❑ Science Education

❑ Bilingual Education   ❑ Educational Administration

Please tell us about how you would prefer to obtain your teacher certification

21) Below is a list of instructional delivery methods. Please select the method(s) that you would prefer to obtain your teaching certificate.

❑ Traditional classroom
❑ Distance Learning
❑ Web-based Instruction

22) When would you prefer to take courses leading to a teacher certification? Please rank in order of preference.

❑ Evening Classes

❑ Weekend Classes

❑ Intensive Summer Sessions

❑ Other _____

23) Which method would you prefer to obtain your teaching Certificate?

❑ Alternative certification program
❑ Emergency certification program
❑ Traditional educational degree granting program

24) Why did you decide to become a paraprofessional/educational support staff member?

❑ The work schedule fits well with family needs
❑ Desire To Become A Teacher
❑ Desire To Do Community Service
❑ Other _____

25) What point in your life did you decide that you wanted to enter the teaching profession?

❑ First career choice
❑ Career advancement (support staff to faculty)
❑ Change in career (non-education to education)
❑ Other _____

26) Please select from the list below, 3 workshops or mentoring sessions you would choose to attend to aid you in your professional preparation.

❑ Teaching Learning Disabled Students
❑ Teaching Academically Advanced Students
❑ Teaching Slow Learning Students
❑ Teaching Average Students
❑ Cultural Diversity and Social Group Awareness
❑ Classroom Management Techniques
❑ School Safety and Security
❑ Other _____
❑ Other _____

27) Below is a list of things that have been identified as teacher needs for satisfaction. Please choose <u>4 items</u> that, in your opinion, are the most important in seeking a career in teaching.

- ❑ Adequate New Teacher Preparation
- ❑ Salary
- ❑ Benefits
- ❑ Administrative Support
- ❑ Consistent/Supportive Discipline Procedures
- ❑ Positive School Climate
- ❑ Support from Other teachers
- ❑ Amount of Space to Teach
- ❑ Community/Parent Support

28) Would you be interested in forming a network of Cy-Fair I.S.D. paraprofessional employees seeking degrees who would meet throughout the school year?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

29) If you answered <u>*YES*</u> to #28, then what would <u>you</u> like to see included in the program?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX C

Paraprofessional Interview Information

Name _____

Address _____

Contact Phone Numbers Hm._____

Wk. _____

Cell_____

Best time to call _____

Best day and time to meet _____

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. These interviews will support my research for my doctoral studies at Texas A&M University.

Carrie Marz

APPENDIX D

Basic Questions Used in Paraprofessional Interviews.

Tell me anything you feel comfortable about your current family situation.

Why do you want to be a teacher?

What things in your life are obstacles to your educational plan?

What challenges do you think you will face when you attend college?

What influenced your selection in a college?

What challenges do you think you will face when you attend a 4 year teacher preparation program?

How will you finance your college education?

What support do you think you need to successfully complete a 4 year degree at the college of your choice?

Do you plan to attend a community college prior to completing your education at a 4 year college or university?

Do you feel knowledgeable about the college admission and acceptance process?

What are your expectations of a teacher preparation program at a 4 year college or university?

What support and advice have you received regarding teacher preparation programs?

Who gave you this advice? Were you pleased with this advice and support?

What support do you think you will need from a 4-year institution?

What advice do you have for students who are planning to attend a community college and transfer to a 4 year institution?

What would you like teacher preparation programs in colleges and universities to know as they work to improve their teacher recruitment, training, and retention programs?

What do you think would be the best method of delivery for your program? (Online, face to face, distance education)

What can our school district offer you as support?

APPENDIX E

Basic Questions Used for Interviews with District Administrators

As Cypress-Fairbanks looks for sources for recruitment of high quality teachers, what is your opinion of the value of encouraging paraprofessionals to seek bachelor's degrees in teaching?

What initiatives has the district started to encourage paraprofessionals to seek degrees?

What future initiatives may be planned?

Many paraprofessionals worry about completing their student teaching requirements. How can the district support them as they need extended leave to complete this?

How do you think your principals need to support them?

Another possibility is for paraprofessionals to take a state exemption and not complete an actual internship or student teaching. Do you think this affects their "hireability"?

All college students are faced with challenges as they pursue their degrees. In speaking with paraprofessionals seeking degrees, I hear again and again how the paras need a support system or a networking program. Are there any plans to implement these resources?

If you could stand in a room full of these aspiring teachers who are facing so many challenges as they seek degrees, what would you tell them?

APPENDIX F

Cypress-Fairbanks Board Policy for Leave of Absence for Student

Teaching for Paraprofessionals

PARA-
PROFESSIONAL /
ANCILLARY
EMPLOYEE STUDY
LEAVE

At the recommendation of a paraprofessional/ancillary employee's principal or supervisor and the Superintendent, a leave of absence without pay may be granted by the Board for one semester as identified on the current District school calendar for the purpose of student teaching. Student teaching is defined as on-campus classroom teaching at a District school under the direction of a university supervisor and cooperating teacher.

The paraprofessional/ancillary employee must have been employed by the District for at least three years and be currently enrolled in a program of study leading to a bachelor's degree, teacher certification, and qualification for NCLB highly-qualified status.

Paraprofessional/ancillary employees requesting a study leave shall submit a letter of application for leave to the assistant superintendent for human resources at least 45 days prior to the semester in which the leave is sought.

The paraprofessional/ancillary employee shall not earn credit towards a creditable year of service for salary purposes nor shall the employee continue to accrue other employee benefits such as leave days or vacation days during the period of the leave. The unused leave days previously accumulated at the time of the leave of absence shall be retained, and no break in continuous service with the District shall occur.

Return to employment in the same position or at the site employed prior to the leave is not guaranteed by the District. The paraprofessional/ancillary employee returning to the District from this leave shall be returned to a comparable paraprofessional/ancillary position unless selected for a teaching position.

Requests for return to duty at the end of the leave shall be submitted to the assistant superintendent for human resources at least 30 days prior to the next semester as shown on the District school calendar. Proof of completion of the university-sponsored student teaching must be submitted prior to return from leave. An employee who fails to return in any capacity at the expiration of the leave may have his or her employment terminated.

VITA

Carrie Oden Marz
13307 Dunmore Ct., Houston,TX 77069

Educational Profile

Ed.D., Educational Administration   May, 2006
   Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas

M.Ed., Educational Administration   August, 2002
   Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, Texas

B.S., Early Childhood Education   August, 1982
   Kent State University, Kent, Ohio