

DODEA SPECIAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE (SEI)

2004-2005 SEI SURVEY RESULTS



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Department of Defense Education Activity Special Education Initiative (SEI) Survey

BACKGROUND

In 2002, The Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) conducted a system-wide review of its special education services that focused on four major components of quality services for students with disabilities: resources, curricula, related services, and facilities. The review resulted in the DoDEA Special Education Initiative (SEI), a comprehensive plan designed to bring DoDEA special education services to new levels of excellence. Through a joint agreement among all of the armed services, additional funding was allocated to support the six-year initiative beginning in school year 2003-2004.

METHOD

In the spring of 2005, an online survey was administered to DoDEA special education professionals and paraprofessionals (hereafter "respondents") working with students in Pre-Kindergarten through twelfth grade. Respondents included: teachers, assessors, assessment assistants, speech and language pathologists, and paraprofessionals. Survey data were collected during a five week period from 12 Jan 2004 – 18 Feb 2005 to examine the impact of the SEI to date, and to gather information to help guide the allocation of resources and support. The survey questions addressed four broad areas. Each area with the corresponding research question(s) is presented below.

1. **Respondent demographics.** Demographic items included: District, grade levels of students, primary assignment, and primary setting for service delivery (special education, general education, combination).
2. **SEI resources.** Have increased staffing and resources improved Special Education services?
3. **Professional development.** To what extent are special education professionals receiving professional development? What are participants' professional development needs?
4. **Special education team collaboration.** What is the nature and extent of special education team collaboration? What barriers exist to collaboration?

The online survey was administered in two parts. Part I contained questions addressing the first three areas above and was completed by all professionals and paraprofessionals.¹ Part II addressed the fourth area, special education team collaboration, and was completed only by the following individuals: teachers of students with mild/moderate learning impairments (LI/MM) or moderate/severe learning impairments (LI/MS); teachers of preschool students with disabilities (PSCD), and paraprofessionals.

¹ A paraprofessional is a school staff member formerly known as an "aide." In special education, paraprofessionals act as an assistant to a teacher working in the classroom or provide direct one-on-one assistance to students.

RESULTS

General Comments

“I am proud to work in a system that recognized a weakness and took appropriate measures to ensure equality of educational services for all students. The additional resources and materials are enabling.”

“To this point I’ve seen a lot of money thrown at special education, with very little regard given to asking the teachers what they want/need. It seems as though a very select group has been chosen to speak for the majority.”

“ [I] am thankful that a survey was conducted. I have been impressed with many of the materials and furniture that the PSCD [Preschool Services for Children with Disabilities] program has received.”

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

One-thousand two-hundred and seventy-one (1,271) special education professionals completed the online survey, which represents approximately 91% of the 1,400 special education professionals and paraprofessionals currently working in DoDEA. Respondent demographics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of Survey Respondents

	N	%
Primary Assignment Area		
Assessment Assistant	38	3%
Assessor	90	7%
Emotionally Impaired	29	2%
Hearing/Vision Impaired	13	1%
Learning Impaired/Mild to Moderate	281	22%
Learning Impaired/Moderate to Severe	80	6%
Paraprofessional	368	29%
Preschool Services for Children with Disabilities	82	7%
Speech & Language	135	11%
Missing	155	12%
Grade Levels		
Elementary	629	49%
Middle	160	13%
High School	98	8%
Combination Levels	252	20%
Missing	132	10%
Geographic Area		
Europe	576	45%
DDESS/Americas	308	24%
Pacific	257	20%
Area Office	2	<1%
Missing	128	10%
Total	1,271	

SPECIAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE (SEI) RESOURCES

To determine the impact of SEI resources, respondents were asked whether they had seen evidence of additional resources including: additional work hours for paraprofessionals, assessors and assessment assistants, assistive technology, the Read 180 program, and furniture. Respondents who had seen evidence were then

“A lot of helpful technology has become available, but since ATs and ETs are so overwhelmed with networking duties, much of it is still sitting in boxes awaiting set up.”

“The assessors have made a big impact. I can now focus on teaching during my instructional day, and this is a pretty drastic change from years in which I was required to do testing and write ups.”

“There were plenty of resources provided, one had to use one's own time to figure out how they could best be put to use. There wasn't any suggestion or training on these materials.”

“Best resources I've ever had.”

“Training is always helpful when things get updated. Para-professionals do not always get this training. It is just expected for an individual to pass along updated information to us.”

asked how helpful these resources had been in helping students meet DoDEA standards. The responses for each SEI resource are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Evidence and Helpfulness of SEI Resources

SEI Resource	Percentage Who Have Seen Evidence	*Percentage Responding “Very Helpful” or “Helpful”
Additional hours for paraprofessionals	53%	96%
Assessors and assessment assistants	72%	78%
Assistive technology lending libraries	59%	92%
Assistive technology	68%	95%
Read 180 program	84%	88%
Furniture	54%	92%

* Represents percentage of those who had seen evidence, not percentage of all respondents

Approximately three hundred (300) respondents provided additional comments on SEI resources. Respondents were very positive about the assessor positions and felt that they provided more time for teachers to be in the classrooms. However, respondents would like more input in deciding which resources focus on instruction are purchased, such as furniture and classroom materials, and more training on using the resources that have been provided.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Over half (58%) of the respondents reported that they had seen evidence of professional development designed to “maximize the quality of special education services” at their location. Responses did not differ by geographic area, but they did differ by respondents’ primary assignment area. While the majority of assessors (88%) and teachers of students with mild/moderate learning impairments (68%) had seen evidence of professional development, only 41% of speech and language pathologists and 51% of paraprofessionals had seen evidence of professional development.

When asked how helpful the professional development had been in helping students meet DoDEA standards, the majority of respondents reported that it had been “Very Helpful” (25%) or “Somewhat Helpful” (34%).

To determine the extent of professional development, respondents were asked whether or not they had received training in 22 specific areas in the past two years. Overall, the majority of respondents (55%) had attended training in one to five of the areas. The remaining respondents had either attended no training (19%) or attended

“The Special Education Initiative has given a face lift and a lift to the Special Education Environment. The classroom settings are more inviting for student learning.”

“I wish there was an earnest interest/attempt for in-service training for para-professionals. Most of our inservice time has been geared to classroom teachers.”

“I like it! For the first time in over 20 years I have been sent for training and received many new supplies and technology programs.”

“[We need] Training SPECIFIC to SLPs. Training that helps us maintain our ASHA [American Speech and Hearing Association] certification (CEUs) [Continuing Education Units]...”

“I would gladly take any course that is offered to para-professionals. I have had zero special ed. training and have had zero offers

training in more than five areas (26%). Paraprofessionals and assessment assistants have received the least training, with one-fourth reporting having attended no training.

To guide future professional development, respondents were asked to indicate whether they would like to receive training in 22 specific topics. The top five topics, listed in decreasing order of positive responses, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Most Frequently Requested Professional Development Topics

	% of Positive Responses
Dealing with challenging student behavior	46%
Instructional strategies for special education	38%
Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)	38%
Developing standards-based IEPs	33%
Special Education procedures	29%

There were no differences in respondents’ professional development interests based on district or geographic area. However, as expected, there were differences based on the grade levels taught and primary assignment area. While respondents working with students at the elementary level more frequently wanted professional development in autism spectrum disorders and phonemic awareness, those at the high school level more frequently requested professional development in community based instruction and Read 180. The first and second choices of respondents disaggregated by primary assignment area are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Professional Development Needs by Primary Assignment

Primary Assignment Area	Most Frequently Chosen Topic	Second Most Frequently Chosen Topic
Assessment Assistant	Special Education procedures	Excent
Assessor	Autism spectrum disorders	Functional Behavioral Analysis
Emotionally Impaired	Dealing with challenging behaviors	Read 180
Hearing/Vision Impaired	Excent, Alternate assessment (tie)	Read 180
LI/MM	Dealing with challenging behaviors	Incorporating content area standards into special education instruction; Developing standards-based IEPs (tie)
LI/MS	Instructional strategies for special education students	Incorporating content area standards into special education instruction
Paraprofessional	Dealing with challenging behaviors	Instructional strategies for special education students
PSCD	Autism spectrum disorders	Dealing with challenging behaviors
Speech &	Changing role of SLPs	Autism spectrum disorders

for training courses.”

“We collaborate during lunch, in the bathroom, in the evening over the telephone, in the teacher’s lounge (when checking our mail) or any other time during the day.”

“[I] do very much appreciate the additional paraprofessional hours. If I could have asked for only one thing out of the SEL, this would have been it.”

“We tend to have 5 or 10 minutes scattered throughout the day that we check in with each other and share information about students or other things that need to be done and when assemblies or other special things happen we have more time.”

“We were given additional hours for better manpower in the special education classes to enhance the programs; however as fast as the hours are given, local administration is pulling the paraprofessionals to cover lunch and recess duty.”

Language		
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Approximately 183 respondents commented on additional topics or areas they would like to receive professional development or training, such as assessing younger children, and training for speech and language pathologists that would count toward Continuing Education Units (CEUs) and certification/recertification.

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEAM COLLABORATION²

Only paraprofessionals, PSCD teachers, LI/MM teachers, and LI/MS teachers were asked to answer questions relating to special education team collaboration (n=894).

When asked if they had daily collaboration time, 49% (n=421) of respondents responded positively and 51% (n=418) responded negatively.³ Respondents with daily collaboration time were then asked when daily collaboration occurred. Their responses are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Time of Daily Special Education Team Collaboration

	N	Percent
Before and/or After School	178	42%
During school day	118	28%
Before, after, and during school day	125	30%
Total	421	

Respondents without daily collaboration time were asked how frequently they collaborated with their special education team. Their responses are presented in Table 6. There were no differences in special education team collaboration by geographic area, district, or grade level.

Table 6. Frequency of Collaboration For Respondents Without Daily Collaboration

	N	Percent
3-4 times per week	46	11%
Once or twice a week	160	38%
Once or twice a month	86	21%
Less than once a month	126	30%
Total	418	

Four-hundred fifty (450) respondents provided additional comments on special education team collaboration. Respondents commented that the collaboration time was often short (less than five minutes) and occurred at “available” times, such as during lunch or when passing in the hallway. The most frequently mentioned obstacle to daily collaborative planning was a lack of common duty-free time. Respondents commented that teachers’ planning times are often used for meetings or

“It is so helpful in meeting the needs of the students to have the opportunity to frequently collaborate.”

“We have Mondays allocated with some planning time during the day. However, EVERY Monday my paraprofessional has been pulled to do another duty in the school.”

“Major kudos for this initiative, because of this funding it has afforded us special educators the opportunity to do what we love most! TEACH KIDS.”

“The new curriculum, computers, assistive technology, kitchenwares, and furniture have been AWESOME! The students have truly benefited from all the new supplies! I feel very fortunate to be working for DoDDS.”

“This is a great beginning.”

²Special education team collaboration was defined as collaboration between the paraprofessional and the special education teacher.

³Fifty-five (55) respondents did not provide an answer to this question.

other CSC duties and that paraprofessionals were often “pulled” to perform other duties in the school

To determine the nature of special education team collaboration, respondents were asked when paraprofessionals engaged in certain activities during their collaborative planning time. Responses are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7. Special Education Duties Performed by Paraprofessionals

Duty	Before and After School Day	During the School Day	Before, After, and During School Day	Do Not Perform This Duty
Provide information to teachers about student performance	33%	28%	28%	12%
Discuss information about students' performance	33%	30%	29%	8%
Review IEPs and classroom modifications	32%	29%	16%	23%
Plan instruction for students	38%	22%	20%	21%
Review work, papers or tests	24%	26%	22%	28%
Prepare materials and/or lessons for students	38%	20%	23%	19%
Address students' technology needs	24%	23%	18%	35%
Receive specialized training	21%	28%	8%	43%

Note: Numbers may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Respondents were also asked what extra duties were routinely assigned to paraprofessionals and when these duties were typically performed. These responses are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8. Extra Duties Performed by Paraprofessionals

Duty	Before and After School Day	During the School Day	Before, After, and During School Day	Do Not Perform This Duty
Bus duty	35%	2%	5%	58%
Playground duty	7%	34%	5%	54%
Cafeteria duty	5%	43%	4%	48%
Escorting students	14%	24%	22%	40%
Materials Preparation	24%	22%	34%	21%
Technology training/preparation	16%	18%	10%	56%
Correcting papers/tests	13%	23%	15%	49%
Excent data entry	7%	12%	12%	69%
Clerical tasks	16%	22%	28%	35%

Note: Numbers may not equal 100% due to rounding.

There were no differences in the duties performed by paraprofessionals based on

“Thank you once again for the SEI - it is a brilliant concept that has had tremendous benefits for our students. I only hope that we can continue this momentum over time.”

“It is evident that there is money being spent but there seems to be little coordination with the local schools. We were recently cut special education personnel and we are wondering why the investment in things but not people.”

“Overall, I think the SEI has been a huge step in the right direction. I am just thrilled to have the variety of resources that I have today. I actually have my own set of Literacy Place Shoebox books, READ 180 and LEAP FROG materials.”

geographic area or district. However, there were differences by grade levels.

Respondents at the elementary school level more frequently reported that paraprofessionals perform bus, cafeteria, and playground duty.

In addition to the extra duties listed in Table 8, one-hundred eighty-eight (188) respondents commented on additional duties assigned to paraprofessionals not listed in Tables 7 and 8. Respondents commented that paraprofessionals frequently serve as substitutes in regular classrooms when no substitute is available, or when classroom teachers have meetings. In addition, they commented that paraprofessionals often perform clerical duties for the school such as taking attendance or working in the supply room. Respondents in the PSCD program reported that paraprofessionals assist in purchasing groceries and preparing snacks

CONCLUSIONS

The results from the online survey indicate that overall, special education professionals have seen increased resources as a result of the SEI and feel that the additional resources are beneficial in helping students meet the DoDEA standards. Respondents were especially positive about the assessor positions, and felt that the assessors were very beneficial as they allowed teachers to spend more instructional time with students. While the majority of professionals have participated in professional development, paraprofessionals and speech/language pathologists reported receiving less professional development than other professionals. Approximately half of the respondents expressed an interest in professional development in dealing with challenging behaviors; however, the specific professional development needs of special education professionals varied based on grade level and primary assignment area. Respondents across grades and assignment areas felt that paraprofessionals were in need of more professional development. Although most professionals reported collaborating with their special education team, only approximately half have a set daily time to collaborate. The major obstacle to daily collaboration was the lack of common duty free time between the special educator and paraprofessional. Respondents reported that common free time is often used for meetings and other CSC duties, or is taken because paraprofessionals are assigned extra duties in the school during this time.