A survey of beliefs of teachers and administrators regarding developmentally appropriate preschool programming was conducted. An instrument based on National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) guidelines (1987) for developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) was developed and distributed. Items were designed to assess beliefs concerning curriculum goals; teaching strategies; guidance of socioemotional development; language and literacy development; cognitive, physical, and aesthetic development; motivation; parent-teacher relations; assessment of children; program entry; and staffing. Participants were 401 elementary and special education administrators, and prekindergarten, kindergarten, primary, intermediate, and special education teachers from a large Northeastern state. The sample included subjects from 104 school districts with rural, suburban, and large metropolitan populations. Findings revealed that special educators, prekindergarten teachers, and elementary and special education administrators had significantly better knowledge of DAP than kindergarten, primary, and intermediate grade teachers. It is concluded that the findings are especially problematic, since kindergarten through sixth grade teachers, who had the least knowledge of DAP, make up the primary pool from which teachers are most likely to be selected for public school preschool programs.
Educator Beliefs Regarding Developmentally Appropriate Preschool Programming

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RUNNING HEAD: Beliefs Regarding Developmentally Appropriate Preschool Programming

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ABSTRACT

A state-wide survey of teacher/administrator beliefs regarding developmentally appropriate preschool programming was conducted. An instrument, based upon guidelines for developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) recently established by NAEYC, was developed and distributed. Special educators, Pre-K teachers and elementary and special education administrators had significantly better knowledge of DAP than kindergarten, primary and intermediate teachers. These findings are especially problematic since those with the least knowledge of DAP (primary and intermediate teachers) provide the primary pool from which teachers are likely to be selected to serve in increasing numbers of public school preschool programs.
Educator Beliefs Regarding Developmentally Appropriate
Preschool Programming

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, we have amassed considerable evidence concerning the impact of quality programming in the early years upon the child's later development (e.g., Goodman, 1982, Lazar & Darlington, 1982, Schweinhart & Weikart, 1985, Weikart, 1970). Yet, until very recently, professional consensus concerning what exactly constitutes quality programs was not established. Rather, early childhood programs have been like Buddhist gardens in their range of program diversity. Without a reasonably clear and consistent statement concerning educationally reprehensible indicators of quality, systematic research designed to promote the knowledge-base needed for improvement of preschool programs has been hampered.

After many years of public debate and research concerning elements of quality preschool programming (e.g., Blank, 1985, Morgan, 1985), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) established the first formal set of quality program criteria. This document, Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8 (NAEYC, 1987), now serves as the sole criteria for granting accreditation to early childhood programs meeting its relatively stringent requirements (NAEYC, 1988).

At the same time NAEYC's quality standards document is
beginning to filter down to early childhood professionals, increasing pressures are emerging from preschool advocates and legislative mandates (e.g. PL 99-457) calling for greatly expanded public supported preschool programs. While support for these guidelines is evident among members of NAEYC is the extent to which other educators who are likely to be involved in rapidly expanding preschool programs concur with these guidelines. Thus, the purpose of this study was to further our understanding of the degree to which educators who are likely to administer and teach in such programs agree with NAEYC quality standards.

Instrumentation

Based upon guidelines outlined in Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8 (NAEYC, 1987) the "Educators' Beliefs Regarding Preschool Programming" (EBRPP) (see Appendix A) was developed to assess knowledge of appropriate practice among educators. Items were created to assess beliefs in the sub-areas described in the document. These included beliefs concerning: curriculum goals, teaching strategies, guidance of socioemotional development, language/literacy development, cognitive, physical and aesthetic development, motivation, parent-teacher relations, assessment of children, program entry and staffing.

Two responses (A or B) were developed to clearly delineate between knowledge of appropriate/inappropriate practice for preschoolers. A panel of three judges who had extensive background in early childhood education and who were very familiar with NAEYC guidelines unanimously certified that each of the 18 item
survey questions/responses discriminated between appropriate and inappropriate responses for areas explored in the NAEYC document.

Final items were randomly assigned a number in the survey instrument as were appropriate/inappropriate responses for each item. Appropriate responses were scored as "1" and inappropriate responses were scored "0." The final draft of this instrument was piloted with a group of graduate students in elementary/early childhood education and required an average of 5 minutes to complete.

Sample

The sample for this study was 401 elementary and special education administrators, pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, primary, intermediate, and special education teachers from a large Northeastern state. This sample included subjects from 104 school districts with rural, suburban, and large metropolitan populations. All subjects were state certified in their respective fields.

Table 1 describes the sample for this study.

[Table 1 about here]

Methodology

Nine hundred sixty (960) surveys were distributed to educators in a large Northeastern state. School district administrators were contacted by telephone regarding their willingness to participate in the study. Surveys were distributed after receiving district approval. Researchers personally
delivered and retrieved surveys from 10 school districts in close proximity to researchers. Postage paid return envelopes were enclosed with each survey mailed to teachers and administrators from the remaining 94 school districts. The 401 returned surveys represent 42% return on the instrument.

One-way analysis of variance procedures were used to determine possible belief differences among educator groups. Results of these analyses are described below.

Results

As can be seen in Table 2, educators appear to have a reasonable knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices for preschool children. Of a total of 18 items, the lowest mean score (15.37) was achieved by primary grade teachers. The highest mean score (17.67) was achieved by pre-k teachers.

[Table 2 about here]

One-way analysis of variance determined a number of significant differences (p<.05) between subject groups. Differences are presented in Figure 2.

[Figure 2 here]

Significant differences (p<.05) between groups are identified as follows:

. Elementary administrators (F(1,422)=8.99, p<.01) special education administrators (F(1,319)=12.43, p<.01) and pre-k teachers (F(1,302)=8.59, p<.01), scored significantly higher than elementary education teachers.

. Special education administrators (F(1,47)=12.40, p<.01) pre-
k (F(1,30)=10.76, p<.01) and special education teachers (F(1,54)=4.21, p<.05) scored significantly higher than intermediate teachers.

Elementary administrators (F(1,210)=11.36, p<.01) special education administrators (F(1,107)=13.92, p<.01), pre-k teachers (F(1,90)=9.39, p<.01), and special education teachers (F(1,114)=5.02, p<.03) scored significantly higher than primary grade teachers.

Special education administrators (F(1,73)=6.33, p<.01) and pre-k teachers (F(1,55)=6.16, p<.02) scored significantly higher than kindergarten teachers.

Sub-Areas

Respondents, in general, appeared to have a reasonable knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices and no significant differences were found between groups in the areas of cognitive development, aesthetic development, parent-teacher relations and assessment of young children. Significant differences among professional groups, were, however, found in the following areas: curriculum goals, teaching strategies, guidance of socioemotional development, language/literacy development, physical development, motivation, assessment of children, program entry and staffing.

Goals

Table 3 presents means and standard deviations for the 2 questions concerning developmentally appropriate goals for preschool children. Specifically, the two items used to assess
goals sought to determine: (1) if children learn most effectively through interacting with child-selected activities (correct response) or by following teacher-directed activities, and (2) whether development of appropriate activities for children should be based upon observation of children's abilities and interests (correct response) or based upon standardized group norms.

While subjects appeared to have a high degree of understanding concerning appropriate curricular goals, intermediate teachers scored significantly lower than elementary \( (F(1,127)=7.79, p<.01) \) and special education administrators \( (F(1,42)=5.52, p<.02) \) and special education teachers \( (F(1,47)=6.58, p<.01) \).

**Physical Development**

Table 4 presents means and standard deviations for the 2 questions concerning developmentally appropriate practices relating to the physical development of preschool children.

Again subjects appear to know what is appropriate as measured by NAEYC guidelines. The only significant difference among the groups was found between primary teachers and elementary education administrators \( (F(1,178)=10.04, p<.01) \). Primary teacher's lower scores indicated that they were more likely to indicate that 4 and 5 year olds should engage in more teacher scheduled physical activity time and engage in more pencil and paper tasks (items 10 and 11).

**Strategies**
Table 5 presents means and standard deviations for the questions concerning developmentally appropriate teaching strategies (Items 2, 4, 6, 7, 18). Items relating to this sub-area tried to determine if educators believed children learn more effectively through interacting with: (1) child-selected activities rather than teacher-selected activities, (2) concrete activities rather than workbook activities, (3) through interaction with teacher-prepared environments over teacher-directed instruction, (4) play-oriented activities over teacher-directed lessons, and (5) whether children should engage in more informal small group activities rather than large group instruction.

[Table 5 about here]

As can be seen above, pre-k teachers and special education administrators scored highest in terms of teaching strategies (5.00 and 4.93 respectively). Intermediate grade teachers scored significantly lower than pre-k teachers ($F(1,27)=4.58, p<.04$) and special education administrators ($F(1,93)=7.29, p<.01$). Primary grade teachers also scored significantly lower than special education administrators ($F(1,93)=4.81, p<.01$).

**Staffing**

Table 6 presents means and standard deviations by position for the sub-area of staffing.

[Table 6 about here]

While, all of the above scored high in terms of attitudes toward group size and teacher child ratio, primary teachers
(F(1,203)=6.38, p<.01) and elementary teachers (F(1,414)=12.29, p<.01) were significantly more likely than administrators to correctly indicate that group size should be no more than 20 children with 2 adults.

Guidance

The question concerning guidance explored whether desired behavior could best be facilitated in young children by modeling and encouraging expected behavior (correct response) or by establishing and enforcing rules. Table 7 presents means and standard deviations for the score concerning appropriate guidance of young children by position.

[Table 7 about here]

While educators scored reasonable high on this item, elementary education administrators scored significantly higher than intermediate (F(1,142)=4.97) primary (F(1,197)=6.81, p<.01) and elementary grade teachers (F(1,192)=5.09, p<.02).

Language Development

Table 8 presents means and standard deviations for beliefs concerning language development by position. The test item for this variable explored whether young children's literacy and language could best be developed through emphasizing letter recognition and alphabet-oriented skill development or through a variety of experiences involving play, listening, reading stories and more informal communications (correct response).

[Table 8 about here]

Special education teachers (F(1,52)=6.75, p<.01) elementary administrators (F(1,148), p<.01), and special education
administrators (F(1,47)=9.27, p<.01) scored significantly higher than intermediate teachers. Elementary education (F(1,103)=3.82, p<.05) and special education administrators (F(1,104)=3.82, p<.05) also scored higher than primary grade teachers.

Motivation

Item 15 was designed to assess views toward most appropriate methods for motivating children. Specifically, guidelines suggest children should be motivated by natural curiosity to learn rather than by teacher approval and rewards such as stickers or special privileges. Elementary administrators (F(1,197)=10.71, p<.01), special education administrators (F(1,102)=4.23, p<.04) and pre-k teachers (F(1,84)=4.46, p<.04) scored significantly higher than primary teachers. Elementary administrators (F(1,148)=11.25, p<.01), special education administrators (F(1,47)=9.27, p<.01), and special education teachers (F(1,52)=6.75, p<.01) also scored higher than intermediate teachers.

Table 9 presents means and standard deviations for educators' responses to an item concerning how very young children are best motivated.

[Table 9 about here]

Program Entry

NAEYC guidelines suggest kindergarten age children who have been determined to lack school readiness through screening tests should be allowed entrance regardless of developmental level rather than denied entry to kindergarten. Item 16 was designed
to assess beliefs concerning this view. Table 10 presents means and standard deviations relating to this question.

This item showed great diversity among educators. Mean scores ranged from a maximum score of 1.00 achieved by the pre-kindergarten teachers to a low score of .27 for intermediate teachers. Within these diverse views, significant differences were noted as follows:

- Kindergarten teachers scored significantly lower than elementary education administrators, (F(1,144)=4.22, p<.04) special education administrators (F(1,61)=4.88, p<.03) and pre-kindergarten teachers (F(1,45)=8.43, p<.01).
- Primary grade teachers scored significantly lower than elementary administrators (F(1,175)=28.35, p<.01) and special education administrators (F(1,92)=18.95, p<.01). Yet, they scored significantly higher than intermediate grade teachers (F(1,79)=6.76, p<.01) on this same item.
- Intermediate teachers scored significantly lower than elementary administrators (F(1,128)=16.14, p<.01), special education administrators (F(1,55)=16.56, p<.01) and pre-k teachers (F(1,29)=24.01, p<.01).
- Elementary teachers as a group scored significantly lower than elementary (F(1,361)=32.72) and special education administrators (F(1,278)=15.82, p<.01) and pre-k teachers (F(1,262)=14.90, p<.01).
Discussion

In general, subjects in this study appeared to have a reasonable knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices for preschool children as measured by NAEYC guidelines. Yet, a closer look at the data revealed some rather surprising findings. The discussion which follows will explore issues relating to findings by position.

Elementary and Special Education Administrators

On most items, (with the exception of the pre-k teachers), those most likely to fill rapidly developing public school pre-k positions (primary and intermediate teachers) scored significantly lower than elementary and special education administrators and special education teachers. These data raise a number of interesting questions.

First of all, why would administrators have a better knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices than primary and intermediate level teachers? With a much stronger child development/curriculum focus required in elementary teacher education curriculum than required in administrative programs it would seem that teachers would score higher on the instrument. Yet the inverse was found in this study. One explanation might be that administrators somehow manage to keep up with current information in their fields through journals or workshops. This possibility was supported by subsequent analysis of journals commonly read by elementary administrators. Data for our study was collected in May and early June. The May issue of Principal, for example, was a "Special Report: Early Childhood
Education" which included mention of NAEYC recent guidelines and related articles. While the timing of this issue could have inflated scores of administrators, a corresponding score inflation would have been similarly expected among kindergarten and primary teachers whose professional journals have also highlighted accreditation guidelines in recent years (e.g. YOUNG CHILDREN and CHILDHOOD EDUCATION).

In addition to journals, educators are likely to obtain recent information from inservice training. Although follow-up interviews have not been undertaken, exploration of inservice content might provide useful answers to observed differences in future studies.

However administrators come to obtain knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices, this high degree of knowledge could be of great value to the profession. As more preschool programs for special needs as well as regular children move into public schools (Marx & Seligson, 1988), it will be interesting to see if these administrators manage to support the implementation of appropriate programs based upon their beliefs. NAEYC (1987) suggests a number of obstacles to such implementation by administrators:

Administrators, even more so than teachers, are pressured to ensure that children learn in their programs. Parents exert heavy pressure on administrators. Commercial curriculum developers influence administrators to purchase kits or textbooks that they claim will help children excel. But most importantly, public school administrators are
required to implement various policies mandated by the local school system or state (NAEYC, 1987, p.84).

Perhaps the potential power of this pressure was observed on the item relating to an appropriate teacher-child ratio. While guidelines indicate group size should be no more than 20 children with \( n \) adults, on this particular item, administrators scored significantly lower than primary and elementary teachers. These data suggest that administrators either are not aware of excessive demands required in the preschool setting or that administrators are aware of such demands but unable to alter existing policies to make smaller teacher-child ratios in the earlier years. Only time and future research will determine if knowledge results in more developmentally appropriate practice or if inappropriate policies are allowed to continue because of pressures to balance budgets and resources. Despite pressures such as the above, a recent study found that three factors appear to be good indicators of effective administrator leadership in preschool programming. These include leaders who are (1) well grounded in early childhood education and child development (2) well known and respected by teachers, and (3) respected by and influential with the district superintendent (Mitchell and Modigliani 1989).

Special Education Personnel

As a group, special education administrators and teachers had significantly better knowledge of developmentally appropriate practice than kindergarten, primary and intermediate teachers. One reason for this superior performance might be differences in
professional preparation as well as classroom expectations. In general, special education programs appear to emphasize individual rather than group progress. This feature is evidenced by content dealing with items such as "Individual Education Plans." In addition, once in the classroom, special education teachers are expected to reach objectives determined to be appropriate for each child by a team of professionals. Such professional group goal setting for individuals is certainly not in accord with traditional public school regular education settings.

**Elementary (K-6) Teachers**

Elementary teachers k-6 fared the poorest in terms of knowledge of developmentally appropriate practice. This finding was especially disappointing since this educator group forms the pool from which teachers of younger children are most likely to be drawn. When scores of elementary sub-groups (kindergarten, primary and intermediate teachers) were explored, it became evident that within this group intermediate teachers fared significantly poorer in the areas of developmentally appropriate strategies, goals, guidance, language development, motivation and program entry. In light of the relatively low scores of this group, one must seriously question the wisdom of allowing teachers from this group to teach in pre-k classrooms without additional training and supervised teaching experiences with younger children.

Data is beginning to show that teachers with more formal background in child development and early childhood education are
more likely to carry out appropriate practices (Mitchell and Modigliani 1989). In addition, teachers whose previous teaching experience was with older children seemed to have "a particularly difficult time 'unlearning' inappropriate methods" (Mitchell and Modigliani, 1989 p.58). This information becomes increasingly problematic in union states, for example, where seniority (rather than competence with a particular age group) is used as teacher selection criteria.

NAEYC (1987) suggests a number of forces which might account for our findings concerning the relatively poor performance of elementary teachers. Among these include: a shortage of qualified teachers to meet the demands of rapidly developing programs often necessitates poorly prepared teachers to assume positions for which they are not prepared, parental pressures on teachers for children to achieve high academic scores and teacher accountability as measured by student scores on standardized tests (NAEYC, 1987 p.84).

While all of the above might have contributed to poorer performance on the part of elementary teachers, the pressure (or perceived pressure) to enable children to achieve a particular test score was felt to be most salient. This focus upon teaching to a standardized norm rather than teaching a particular child might account for differences observed between elementary teachers and special education personnel. Special education teachers are both trained and expected to determine (in conjunction with a group of concerned adults) specific educational needs of children and develop a carefully planned program of activities (IEP) to meet
individual needs. Teachers in such programs feel accountable for reaching such individual goals. Elementary teachers, on the other hand are, in general, trained to teach classes of students rather than individual students in a classroom. Clearly, many elementary programs are beset with expectations for bringing all children up to a particular level.

**Pre-k Teachers**

Another puzzlement in this study involved the teachers in the pre-k program. These teachers were selected from the pool of regular elementary teachers. Since formal certification training requirements were the same, we had to ask what inservice activities, practice experiences, or selection procedures might have contributed to this group's positive performance concerning developmentally appropriate practice.

Pre-k teachers in this program teach 4 days per week. The fifth day is devoted to extensive and continuing inservice training. Inservice topics explored by these teachers included activities such as:

1. orientation sessions for all staff, including those new to the team, to assure knowledge and understanding of, and concurrence with the goals of the program.
2. regular meetings of the entire staff to explore new approaches, enrich understanding of children and their development and enhance team approaches.
3. when appropriate, a focus on effective teaching strategies for first and second language development and acquisition.
4. regular meetings of the staff members responsible for each
component (e.g. classroom professionals, social services teams)

- sessions designed to increase awareness of the special strengths of children and families from all economic, ethnic, language and cultural groups.

- total staff training sessions designed to develop observation and record-keeping skills and to personalize planning based upon children's strengths and interests.

- total staff training on working effectively with parents from all cultural and linguistic groups to support parents and focus upon the importance of parent involvement to the children's learning.

- activities planned to include prekindergarten, kindergarten, and early elementary teachers in order to provide continuity of learning opportunities for children and families. (New York State Preschool, 1988)

The mandated continuous inservice programs described above differ considerably from the 2 conference day inservice system with sporadic after school inservices typical of elementary teacher inservices by the school districts used in this study. The length and scope of inservices may have contributed to results of our study.

**Recommendations:**

In light of this study, a number of recommendations appear worth mentioning.

- Data herein could serve as a foundation for planning
greatly-needed inservice preparation for those in the process of developing/expanding pre-k programs.

Knowledge of developmentally appropriate practice rather than other variables (e.g. seniority) should guide in the selection of pre-k teachers. Also in terms of selection, special cautions should be given toward hiring intermediate grade teachers for pre-k programs.

Since knowledge is not always the best predictor of practice additional studies are needed to assess the extent to which early childhood programs engage in developmentally appropriate practice as defined by the profession (NAEYC, 1987).

Inservice training for elementary teachers concerning developmentally appropriate practice for the pre-k level might be useful activity to lessen misunderstandings and pressure toward earlier academic preparation. One approach might be that initiated by a State-sponsored pre-k program.

References


Table 1
Study Sample

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*Some elementary teachers did not identify their specific grade level. Subjects in this group could include teachers from Grades k-6.
### Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviations for Total EBRPP Score by Position

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Table 3

Mean and Standard Deviations for EBRPP Goals Score by Position

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Mean and Standard Deviations
for EBRPP Physical Development Score by Position

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<tr>
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<td>.00</td>
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</tr>
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<td>pre-k tch</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k teacher</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>primary tch</td>
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<td>.00</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.12</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.97</td>
<td>.18</td>
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<tr>
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Table 7

Mean and Standard Deviations for EBRPP Guidance Score by Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
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<th>Standard Dev.</th>
<th>N</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>elem admin</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
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<td>65</td>
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<td>elem tch</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>133</td>
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<tr>
<td>sp ed tch</td>
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<td>.17</td>
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### Table 8
Mean and Standard Deviations for EBRPP Language Development Score by Position

<table>
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<th>Position</th>
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<th>N</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
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<td>pre-k tch</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k teacher</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
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<td>primary tch</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intermediate tch</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elem tch</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>142</td>
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<tr>
<td>sp ed tch</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>34</td>
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<td>Position</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Standard Dev.</td>
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<td>------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
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</tr>
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<td>elem admin</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.00</td>
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### Table 10
Mean and Standard Deviations for EBRPP Program Entry Score by Position

<table>
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<th>Standard Dev.</th>
<th>N</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>sp ed admin</td>
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<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pre-k tch</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k teacher</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>primary tch</td>
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<td>elem tch</td>
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<tr>
<td>sp ed tch</td>
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