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Retention of Special Education Professionals : Perceptions of Principal Support

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RETENTION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS:

PERCEPTIONS OF PRINCIPAL SUPPORT

by

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ABSTRACT

An abstract of the dissertation of Lauretta Janette Manning for the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership: Special and Counselor Education presented June 5, 2008.

Title: Retention of Special Education Professionals: Perceptions of Principal Support

The field of special education is faced with the challenge of a national shortage of special education professionals, including teachers, speech-language pathologists and psychologists. This has devastating effects on students with disabilities, as they do not have the benefit of well-qualified, experienced professionals due to a continual turnover of staff. This research focused on the retention of special education professionals, as approximately 50% leave before their fifth year, and this trend is expected to continue. Beginning professionals are most vulnerable, particularly in the first three years of teaching. Research has examined factors that impact a special education professionals' job satisfaction, and consequently their motivation to remain in the field. The number one factor cited was building administrator's support.

This research explored the phenomena of building administrator support to special education professionals. Surveys were sent to over 300 special education professionals in a large urban school district. Included in the survey were items that described behaviors/attributes of principals that fell into one of 6 categories of principal support: *emotional, appraisal, instrumental, informational, advocacy for students with disabilities,* and *knowledge of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA).* Respondents were asked to rate how important these attributes were to them, and to what extent they perceived receiving this support from their principal. In total, 216 (59%) of special education professionals from all grade levels in a large urban school district participated in the survey. Findings indicated that *emotional* support from principals was rated the highest in importance by special education professionals, followed by *knowledge of the special education law (IDEA), advocacy for students with disabilities, instrumental, appraisal* and *informational* support. The individual behavior/attribute ranked highest was: *Is honest and straightforward with the staff.*

Special education professionals indicate that various forms of principal support were "moderately" to "very important" to them. However, they reported that they received this support only up to "some" extent. Several factors may contribute to this discrepancy, including role ambiguity between principals and special education administrators, as well as lack of knowledge of special education law and procedures for building administrators.

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INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Since the inception of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, special education has experienced teacher shortages, and this trend is expected to increase exponentially. Effective teachers constitute the most valuable resource for our schools, and serious consequences occur when qualified educators are not available. According to an American Federation of Teachers survey, special education is the area of teaching with the greatest shortage in the 200 largest United States cities (McLeskey, Tyler, & Flippin, 2003). Ninety-eight percent of the nation's schools report a shortage of special education teachers (Fideler, Foster, & Schwartz, 2000). Furthermore, the Council for Exceptional Children has identified the national shortage of qualified special education professionals as one of its major challenges for this decade. Three factors exacerbate the critical shortage of special education professionals: an increase in the number of students with disabilities, an insufficient supply of newly certified special education teachers, and a high rate of attrition for special education professionals.

First, the number of students identified with disabilities grew almost three times faster than the overall student population in the 1990s (United States Department of Education, 2001). From 1992 to 1999, the nation's student

population (age 3 to 12) grew by 6.8%, whereas the number of students who qualified for special education grew by 20.3% (Brownell & Skritic, 2002). It is estimated that while overall public school enrollment will remain virtually unchanged in the next decade, the number of students with disabilities will continue to increase disproportionately (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001).

Second, there are not enough special education graduates to fill the vacancies. By the year 2010, over 600,000 special education professionals will be needed (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2003). However, each year college and university programs in the United States prepare approximately half the number needed annually to fill these positions (Kozleski, Mainzer, & Deshler, 2000). This problem is further aggravated by the fact that approximately 40% of graduates of special education preparation programs do not actually enter the teaching field following graduation (Boe, Cook, Paulsen, Barkanic, & Leow, 1999).

Last, special education professionals are leaving the field at an alarmingly high rate. In 2000, Kozleski et al. stated "four out of every ten special education professionals entering the field leave special education before their fifth year of teaching" (p. 6). The following year, Ingersoll (2001) concluded that up to 50% of special education professionals quit within 5 years and that special education professionals are more likely to depart than any other teacher group. In addition, special education professionals are 10 times more likely to transfer to general education than general educators are to transfer to special education (McLeskey,

Tyler, & Flippin, 2004). This leads to the central question of my research project: why are special education professionals leaving? Furthermore, what can be done to prevent this exodus of these essential professionals?

In this chapter, I define key vocabulary and concepts used in the paper. Next, a brief account of the development of the field of special education is outlined and the evolving roles of special education professionals are described in order to give a historical context of the problem. Finally, I explore the impact of the chronic shortage of special education professionals on students and the educational organization at large.

Key Terms and Concepts

The term *disability* refers to an individual

> with mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services. (IDEA, 2004)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the law that outlines the policies and procedures to ensure free and appropriate education for students with disabilities. One of its requirements is that:

> To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children who are not disabled, and that special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be attained satisfactorily. (IDEA, 2004, Sec 612 5 B)

Although the intent of the law seems straightforward, interpretation of the concept "to the maximum extent appropriate" often causes confusion and conflict amongst teachers, parents and administrators. Some may favor having students with disabilities receive specialized instruction and curriculum in a sheltered classroom to maximize their potential. Others may believe that all children, regardless of learning or behavioral differences should be educated in the same classrooms, with supplementary support as needed. This is commonly referred to as inclusion, which is based on the premise that "students are more alike than not alike, learning can occur through participation with modeling of competent peers, the instructional support needed to help students succeed can be provided in a regular classroom, and everyone benefits from having students with different learning styles and behavioral traits in the same classroom" (Salisbury & Smith, 1993, p. 10).

Another term used throughout this paper is *attrition*. The Miriam-Webster Online Dictionary has defined this as "a reduction in numbers usually as a result of resignation, retirement, or death."

For the purpose of this study, *principal* refers to the building administrator who supervises the special education program and special education professionals in the school. It may be the principal, assistant principal or vice principal who fulfills this role.

Historical Context of the Problem

In the past, public education did not always include students with learning, physical, and behavioral differences. Schooling for students with disabilities was either nonexistent or was conducted in separate classes or separate schools. This perspective began to change with the United States Supreme Court's landmark decision in Brown versus Board of Education in 1954. With this historical event, education was now mandated as a right and not a privilege. However, for students with disabilities, constitutional rights did not evolve until 1971 when the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children won a class action suit charging that the Pennsylvania schools should be required to accommodate children who were intellectually different (Sorrels, Rieth, & Sindelar, 2004). With that case, the right to education for students with disabilities became a national public policy issue.

In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed, mandating free and appropriate public education for students with disabilities. This was later changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1990. It was further amended in 1997, and again in 2004, when the name was changed to Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA, 2004). Each amendment has reinforced the concept of inclusion of students with disabilities, in addition to ensuring that the general curriculum be used for

instruction. In the earlier years, most students with disabilities were either confined to separate classrooms or buildings, or pulled out for remedial type instruction that did not always correlate with the curriculum within the general education classroom. Nowadays, almost all students with disabilities are educated within neighborhood schools, and the majority of the students sit in classrooms alongside their non-disabled peers.

As a result of the federal provisions of IDEA and IDEIA, the role of special education professionals has undergone changes. Much more emphasis is placed on working closely with the general education teachers, sometimes co-teaching or helping to modify the general education curriculum. Special education professionals also supervise educational assistants who support inclusion in classrooms. Others may work in a resource room where students come in and out all day to receive specialized instruction that complements general education. Although some still teach in self-contained classrooms with students who have severe cognitive or emotional disorders, the majority support and teach students with mild to moderate learning disabilities through teacher consultation/collaboration, inclusion support and modification of the curriculum. For some veteran special education professionals, this is a change in role, as they may have been familiar with providing instruction to individuals or in small-groups.

Special education professionals help to create an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for each student. The IEP specifies personalized goals, determines the type and amount of specialized instruction, and outlines what modifications and accommodations are necessary for the student to achieve the goals. As part of a multidisciplinary approach, special education professionals work closely with parents, teachers and other professionals. This puts them in a critical role of consulting and mediating between the individual child's needs, parents' desires, and the classroom teacher. As will be explored later, special education professionals often report being overwhelmed and fragmented because they entered the profession to teach, yet their job entails so many other responsibilities. As one teacher articulated, "My frustration is trying to be all things to all people. I am supposed to keep perfect paperwork, collaborate with regular education teachers, train and grade peer tutors, keep in constant contact with parents, and still find time to teach my students!" (Kozleski et al., 2000, p. 8). Thus, the problem of high attrition of special education professionals is situated in the evolving and changing role and demands placed on special education professionals and amidst the school-wide tensions that exist around inclusion.

Importance of the Problem

Continual turnover of the teaching force has a significantly negative impact on all members of an educational system. Substantial research indicates that well-prepared, capable teachers have the largest impact on learning (Darling-Hammond,

2000; Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). As teacher effectiveness (as perceived by students) increases sharply after the first few years of teaching (Kain & Singleton, 1996), students do not receive this benefit if educators leave before they become competent and experienced. Individuals with exceptionalities, who are already at a disadvantage because of learning or behavioral difficulties, have their educational achievement even further compromised by a teaching force that is constantly changing, inexperienced and in many cases unqualified. Consequently, educational organizations do not get a long-term payoff from the departure of beginning teachers.

Because of a constantly changing workforce in both general and special education, schools are unable to ensure that special education programs are consistent in philosophy and implementation. As one principal lamented,

> having many new teachers on the staff at any given time meant that there was less of a knowledge base – it meant there was less cohesion of the staff. It meant that every year, we had to re-cover ground in professional development that had already been covered and try to catch people up to where the school was heading. (Darling-Hammond, 2003, p. 3)

When teachers are not available, districts are forced to hire substitutes or teachers without the required training and licensure. Special education is especially hard hit as Brownell, McNellis, and Miller (1997) state, "more emergency certificates (i.e. temporary teaching licenses issued before completion of training) are granted in special education than any other area of education" (p. 231). The Office of Special Education Programs estimated that in 2002, "over 49,000 teachers

of students with disabilities were determined not qualified for the position" (United States Department of Education, 2002, p. 4). Using an estimation of one special educator to 17 students on average this results in approximately 833,000 students taught by personnel who are not fully certified (Carlson, Schroll, & Klein (2001). At-risk schools are most significantly impacted, as illustrated by a study in California that indicated that teachers who are under-qualified, inexperienced or both are assigned almost exclusively to low-income schools serving students of color (Darling-Hammond, 2003).

Shortages caused by attrition also create financial burdens on the school districts, as they channel money into recruitment and professional support for the new teacher who replaces the one who left. One study estimated that it costs the state approximately $8,000 per recruit who leaves within the first 3 years (Texas Center for Educational Research, 2000). This is particularly discouraging as this money could be better used for instruction and resources that directly impact student learning.

In the following chapter, research that has examined factors related to special education professionals' decisions to leave or stay in the profession is reviewed. Following this, I summarize the specific research that led to the focus of this study, specifically principal support and special educational professionals. Features around principals' support are explored, including how their roles have changed in the last decade and factors that may impact their leadership abilities in

the area of special education. Finally, the theoretical framework and research questions are defined.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Factors Associated with Attrition and Retention

In the past few decades, the shortage of special education professionals has been a national dilemma and researchers have looked at both recruitment and retention. Although it is vital to attract bright and competent educators, it is equally important to keep the ones currently in the field. Both beginning and veteran teachers bring invaluable talent to the field, and too often they leave prematurely. For this reason, the following literature review is focused on retention of special education professionals rather than recruitment.

Many researchers have attempted to tease out of the factors that may contribute to a special educator's decision to leave the profession. These various factors can be organized into two overall categories: (a) individual characteristics and (b) working conditions.

Four examples of individual characteristics of teachers have been studied: academic achievement, certification/training, gender and experience in the field. A variety of factors have been examined in the area of working conditions. These include role ambiguity/conflict, higher caseloads with more diverse students, classroom assignment, grade level of school, overwhelming paperwork, isolation, lack of supplies/resources, resistance to including students with disabilities, and

lack of administrative support. In the next section, individual characteristics, then working conditions will be explored.

Individual Characteristics

Academic Achievement

Several studies have found that the "best and the brightest" (as identified by their scores on exams such as the SAT) are the ones most likely to leave the field of special education (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004, p. 2). Special education professionals with higher scores on standardized test are twice as likely to leave than those with lower scores (Muller & Markowitz, 2003).

Certification/Training

Many studies have concluded that the lack of appropriate preparation and certification is significantly correlated with the intention to leave (Carlson & Billingsley, 2001; Miller, Brownell & Smith, 1999). Boe et al. (1999) surveyed over 4,000 educators and found that "teachers who did not hold a certificate for their main assignment were twice as likely as those who were fully certified to leave the classroom or move to another classroom" (p. 29). Considering that Billingsley (2001) found that only 63% of first year special education teachers were fully certified for their job, many beginning teachers are at high risk of leaving.

Research suggests that the more preservice training prospective teachers receive, the more likely they are to stay in the profession. For example, studies have found that those who graduate from 5-year programs stay in teaching at much

higher rates than do those from a 4-year program (Andrew & Schwab, 1995; Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002).

Gender

Findings about gender and commitment to the field of special education have been mixed. Miller, Brownell, & Smith (1999) and Boe, Bobbit, Cook, Whitener, & Weber (1997) found no correlation between gender and attrition of special educators. Research by Morvant, Gersten, Gillman, Keating, & Blake (1995) and Seery (1990) indicated that males were more likely than females to leave their positions in special education. Conversely, Singer (1993) found females to be at a higher risk for attrition.

Experience in the Field

Researchers consistently report that beginning teachers are at the greatest risk for attrition (Cross & Billingsley, 1994; Miller et al., 1999; Morvant, Gersten, Gillman, Keating, & Blake, 1995; Singer, 1993). Young inexperienced teachers are twice as likely to leave than their more experienced counterparts (Boe et al., 1999). Unlike doctors who intern or lawyers who article, new teachers are expected to meet the same demands as their more experienced colleagues from the very start, with little or sometimes no support from a experienced veteran. Like seasoned teachers, they "must plan lessons, teach content subjects, manage student behavior, collaborate with peers, communicate effectively with parents, and complete paperwork" (Brownell & Skritic, 2002, p. 5). In addition, they are often given the

most challenging classrooms as senior teachers may request the more attractive assignments.

Beginning general and special education professionals share many of the same concerns. As one author stated, "the story of beginning teaching usually revolves around several themes: reality shock, the lonely struggle to survive and a loss of idealism" (Feiman-Nemser, 2003, p. 3). Another reported that the dominant feeling faced by beginning teachers is that "they are quite concerned about their ability to be successful yet they are unsure about seeking assistance for fear of being viewed as incompetent" (Galvez-Hjornevik, 1985, p. 3).

Billingsley and Tomchin (1992) categorized the problems specifically experienced by new special education professionals into three categories:

> (1) pedagogical concerns that included instructional concerns, lack of appropriate materials and resources, problems with students' behavior, and the observations used by administrators for beginning teacher evaluation; (2) organization and time concerns; and (3) special education issues that included mainstreaming and collaboration, working with paraprofessionals, individual education plans and scheduling students. (p. 109)

Beginning teachers in special education can be faced with enormous challenges that demand highly developed professional skills. Some of the skills are (a) effective strategies for adapting and implementing assessment and instruction for learners with special needs and (b) effective classroom management strategies (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2000). These are the skill areas commonly addressed in teacher education programs. However, the needs of new special education teachers extend well beyond these. They must also have highly developed interpersonal and

advocacy skills in addition to the practice of teaching. "New teachers are also newcomers to a particular school community" and they must be able to negotiate the informal and formal culture of the new schools (Feiman-Nemser, 2003, p. 3). In addition they must work effectively with other teachers, parents, paraprofessionals and other school personnel. As will be explored further in the next section, if working conditions do not support these novice teachers, they are very vulnerable to attrition.

Working Conditions

Numerous studies highlight various factors in working conditions that negatively impact special education professionals' sense of job satisfaction, which may then lead to the decision to quit. Working conditions, such as role ambiguity/conflict, higher caseloads with more diverse students, classroom assignment, grade level of the school, overwhelming paperwork, isolation, lack of supplies/resources, resistance by classroom teachers and administrators to including students with disabilities, and lack of administrative support will be summarized in the next section.

Role Ambiguity/Conflict

An intensive 2-year research project conducted by the Council of Exceptional Children determined that ambiguous and competing responsibilities were cited as one of the major concerns of special education professionals (Kozleski et al., 2000). The research committee asserted, "We expect special

education teachers to do more for students who have increasingly diverse and complex needs with less time, fewer materials, and less support than ever before" (Kozleski et al., 2000, p. 8). Special education professionals may be beset with contradictory expectations from parents, teachers and administrators (Kozleski et al., 2000; Mastropieri, 2001).

As the field is changing rapidly, many veteran teachers may not feel adequately prepared to be primarily a collaborator or facilitator of teams of adult colleagues, rather than providing individual instruction to children. Some feel frustrated when their primary role becomes collaboration rather than providing direct services to students (Embich, 2001; Morvant et al., 1995). Likewise, novice teachers may have trained on specific skills such as differentiated instruction and collaborative teaming, but not have the confidence or ability to collaborate as an equal with general educators.

Higher Caseloads with More Diverse Students

Between 1996 and 2000, special education caseloads have increased by approximately 22% (Carlson et al., 2001). Russ, Chiang, Rylance, and Bangers (2001) interviewed 193 teachers and found that there was a correlation between high caseloads and teachers leaving. Carlson and Billingsley (2001) stated that teachers who served students with many different disabilities (as opposed to one type, such as cognitive disability) were the most likely to express a strong intention to leave special education.

Classroom Assignment

Several studies have linked the classroom assignment to attrition. For example, Seery (1990) reported higher level of attrition for those teachers in full day programs (where students are in the same classroom most of the day). Singer (1993) reported that teachers working with students with emotional disabilities were the most likely to leave. Singh and Billingsley (1996) surveyed 658 special education professionals in Virginia, and found that teachers who worked with behaviorally disordered students were more likely to quit the profession.

Grade Level of School

Grade level of the school (elementary, middle, high) has been associated with attrition, with secondary teachers being the most likely to leave the field of special education (Heyns, 1988; Keith, Warren, & Dilts, 1983; Singer, 1993).

Overwhelming Paperwork

It is estimated that special education professionals spend at least one day or more a week on paperwork, and an extensive study concluded "no barrier is so irksome to special education professionals as the paperwork that keeps them from teaching" (Kozleski et al., 2000). As a result, excessive paperwork has been cited as a factor in teacher attrition in several studies (Billingsley et al., 1995; Morvant et al., 1995; Schnorr, 1995). Special education does generate a large amount of paperwork, as each student requires an individual education plan each year that must be developed by the special educator with input from other professionals.

With this plan comes even more paperwork, such as meeting notices, minutes, reports, evaluations, and progress documentation. According to anecdotal comments, many special education professionals complain that procedural compliance seems to be stressed over the successful implementation of programming. In addition, special education professionals in general recognize the importance of individualized education programs, but many express frustrations over the clerical responsibilities that take time away from teaching. General educators also spend time on paperwork such as grading papers, but many special education professionals believe that this is viewed as part of their instruction that contributes rather than interferes with their teaching. (Billingsley, 2001).

Isolation

Numerous studies have noted a "cult of isolation" as the norm in many schools (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Denscombe, 1980; Rosenholz, 1989). General and special education professionals alike often have little time or opportunity to interact with their own peers. Special education professionals are unique in that they are part of two communities: their within-school general education colleagues and their across-schools special education colleagues. They are often isolated physically and professionally from general education teachers because of classroom layouts, scheduling realities, or more covertly, ambivalent attitudes about including students with disabilities in the school learning community. A recent study by Fortune and Landaker (2003) found that almost half (44%) of special education professionals

reported that "their program was physically isolated from the general education program [and] one quarter (25%) did not feel their program was an integral part of the school" (p. 19). A study by Kilgore and Griffin (1998) found that schools that segregated students with disabilities ultimately segregated their teacher as well. The sense of isolation is amplified as they have proportionately far fewer special educator colleagues in the school for support than their general educator counterparts. An extensive study by the Council for Exceptional Children (Kozleski et al., 2000) cites isolation as one of the major reasons for high attrition rates amongst special education professionals. This was corroborated by several other studies. Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, and Harniss (2001) surveyed over 800 special education professionals, and found that "the need for special education professionals to work with each other and the extremely limited opportunities provided for this activity was frequently cited as a major problem" (p. 563). Brownell and Smith (1992) summarized 12 studies on the attrition factors for special education professionals and concluded that "professional isolation from colleagues" (p. 239) influenced many special education professionals' decisions to leave teaching.

Lack of Supplies/Resources

Researchers found that special education professionals have fewer curricular and technological resources than those available to their general education peers (Brownell, Sindelar, Bishop, Langley, & Seo, 2002). A study by

the Council for Exceptional Children (Kozleski et al., 2000) reported that special education professionals are often given the "castoffs" of computers, as they are the last in priority to receive supplies. Given that they have the largest amount of paperwork, this makes their job even more arduous.

A study in 2003 (Fortune & Landaker) concluded that over half of the special education professionals interviewed "felt that the instructional material and supplies they received were less than adequate" (p. 16). Special education professionals spent an average of $785 of their own money in 2002/2003 to buy instructional materials for class. More than one fifth anticipated expenditures of $1000 or more. Beginning special education professionals believe that they have "fewer curricular and technological resources than those available to their general education colleagues" (Griffin, Kilgore, Otis-Wilburn & Winn, 2003, p. 6).

Resistance to Including Students with Disabilities

Special education professionals are often frustrated by the general educators' resistance to inclusion (Salen, 2001), even though one of the main principles of the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act in 1997 was to ensure that students with disabilities have access to general education along with their non-disabled peers. Traditionally, special education and general education have been viewed as separate entities, especially when it involves students with more significant cognitive or emotional needs. Thus, many general educators and special education professionals do not "find it easy to assimilate

easily into the new and foreign culture of inclusive education" (Goessling, 1998, p. 249). Research suggests that the majority of general educators may agree with the philosophical concept of including students with disabilities, but feel inadequately prepared to teach them (Hutchinson & Martin, 1999; Sprague & Pennell, 2000). As a result, some of their attitudes toward including students with disabilities in their classroom are frequently ambivalent (Smith & Smith, 2000) or negative and uncertain (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003). Carter and Scruggs (2001) followed the path of a first year special educator. Although faced with incredible challenges, such as a large caseload and limited materials, the greatest concern was the lack of support from general educators and administrators of her endeavors to ensure that the students in her classroom were included in general education. This sentiment is echoed in many anecdotal reports from special education professionals, who believe they must constantly advocate for their students to be part of the mainstream, even though the Individuals with Disabilities Act has been in place for more than 30 years.

In addition to their general education counterparts' attitudes, principal's stance on the education of students with disability is also very important. In fact, it is often even more impactful, as the education leaders often set the tone of the building. In a survey of 408 elementary school principals –only 1 in 5 principals'attitudes toward inclusion were positive while most were uncertain (Praisner, 2003, p. 135). This is very significant, as it reflects the ambiguity around

special education at the administrative level, which certainly affects those teachers who are implementing it. As noted in the next section, principals have a great deal of influence on the working conditions of special education professionals.

Lack of Administrative Support

The most frequent reason cited across several studies for special education professionals' sense of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with their job was building administrative support. Billingsley (2005), who has conducted several studies about special educator attrition, concludes that a supportive principal is the number one incentive for staying in special education. Several studies concluded that administrators who did not support special education professionals were a strong predictor of teachers' decisions to leave the classroom (Billingsley, 2002; Gersten et al., 2001; Miller et al., 1999). Ax, Conderman, and Stephens (2001) found that "42% of respondents of a special education survey cited the lack of administrative support as central to their decisions to leave the field" (p. 68). The Office of Special Education (2002) in Oregon surveyed 265 recently hired special education professionals. The second most cited reason for leaving their last position was "unsupportive regular education administrators" (the first was a move from an area). Conversely, if teachers believed that their principal demonstrates open communication, strong leadership, a trusting relationship and shows appreciation for their efforts, they were much more likely to feel a commitment to stay (Cross & Billingsley, 1994; Singh & Billingsley, 1996). In a study of 1500 special education

professionals in Alaska, 88% of the respondents indicated that a supportive principal was an incentive to continue teaching (Schnorr, 1995). In a survey of over 4,000 teachers, Boe et al. (1999) found that "educators who remain in their jobs are more than three times as likely to perceive their administration as supportive than teachers who leave" (p. 12).

In summary, extensive research has been undertaken to look at the high turnover of special education professionals. Researchers have found several factors that contribute to special education professionals leaving. Across the studies, the most common factor described for individual characteristic is the amount of experience of the teacher, with beginning teachers being the most likely to quit. The single most important working condition is the lack of principal support, followed closely by role ambiguity and paperwork.

The Principal and Special Education

As referenced above, principals have enormous impact on the school's vision, culture, and overall work environment. Gersten et al. (2001) found that support from principals had strong effects on "virtually all critical aspects of (special education) teachers' working conditions" (p. 557). As the role of the principal is multidimensional, other factors noted above, such as role ambiguity/conflict, isolation, lack of resources/supplies and resistance to including students with disabilities, are also directly influenced by the support or lack of support. For example, DiPaola, and Walther-Thomas (2003) concluded that the

principal's role is most important for improvement of educational opportunities for students with disabilities (p. 14). Likewise, Villa, Thousand, Meyers, and Nevin (1993) found that "administrative leadership was the most powerful predictor of positive teachers attitudes" about educating students with disabilities (p. 43).

Before reviewing the research on principal support of teachers, three factors that contribute to the complexity of the relationship between the work of principals and special education services need to be examined. The factors are: (1) the changing role of the principal in special education (2) lack of preparation and (3) role confusion/ambiguity.

Changing Role of the Principal in Special Education

Historically, it was the special education administrator, usually housed at the central office, who has been in charge of the educational programs for students with disabilities. However, two key pieces of legislation, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) have impacted the role of principals as it relates to special education.

One of the purposes of NCLB is "to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments." This is to be achieved by "promoting school wide reform and ensuring the access of children to effective, scientifically based instructional strategies and challenging academic content" (p. 12). Principals are

now challenged to become instructional leaders responsible for evidenced-based methods that improve positive outcomes for both general education and special education students. What is the impact of this added responsibility? For example, does standards-based reform and high stakes accountability create a less hospitable environment for students with educational and behavior disabilities and their teachers? Are principals less tolerant of students who may lower the building test scores?

The second legislation, the reauthorization of IDEA requires students with disabilities to access the general curriculum and to participate in statewide assessments in order to meet state standards. This emphasizes the importance of collaboration between general educators and special education professionals. Again, how does this affect the overall management of the school? Does it create additional scheduling concerns for principals as they include students with disabilities in more general education classes? Similarly, do administrators recognize and build in support time for collaboration between general and special education professionals?

Both Acts have increased the responsibility and accountability for principals on the education of students with disabilities. For many, this has always been standard practice. For others, however, they may have viewed special education as a parallel education system that is housed in their building only, so it is a shift in

mindset. Again, this illustrates the influence of principal's attitudes and actions that directly impact the working conditions of special education professional.

Research indicates that principals do not feel well prepared to fulfill their role in special education (Monteith, 2000; Walther-Thomas, DiPaola, & Butler, 2002). DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) found that "principals identified help and information about implementing successful special education programs as their greatest need" (p. 48). Similarly, principals have acknowledged that meeting the needs of students with disabilities is a major challenge (School Board News, 2003), which in turn impacts their ability to support special education professionals. Billingsley (2005) concluded that many principals find special education "a daunting task, fraught with legal minefield," (p. xxi) particularly in the area of discipline for students with disabilities, accountability, and compliance issues.

Lack of Preparation

Jones (2006) surveyed 181 principals and found that the majority (55.3%) did not have special education courses required in their administrative preparation program. Similarly, research by Lust (2005) indicated that "very little of the principals' level of knowledge in special education could be explained by the training received during principal preparation programs" (p. 2). Kaye (2000) stated that "most state principal certification programs do not require knowledge about special education beyond a minimal exposure to the law, and only five states have principal certification requirements related to students with disabilities" (p. 11).

Role Confusion/Ambiguity

In many school districts, special education services are supervised in part by central administration and in part by individual school staff. This division and diffusion of responsibilities may lead to role confusion and ambiguity between central office administrators and principals. Doyle (2001) interviewed 19 school administrators about special education programming, and one of the issues brought up was that principals felt "not only did they feel unsupported by central administration and they were actually disempowered by it in many ways" (p. 11). Frohoff and Lindle (1998) found that the roles of principals and special education administrators "are not clearly defined," which causes confusion in regards to procedures and placements. Other studies found that principals are required to supervise special education programs, yet have little input into policies, enrollments, and placements (Lashley, 1992; Levy, 1995). Sullivan (1996) surveyed 55 special education administrators and 107 principals about tasks involving special education. The following tasks caused confusion as to the role: "developing policies, establishing special education programs, curriculum planning and development, establishing channels of communication and responsibilities, integrating special education with the entire school program, communication with parents and the public" (p. 16). In this district, one example of role conflict and ambiguity occurs when principals are expected to supervise special education

professionals placed in their building, yet they may not have any input on the hiring of these individuals.

As noted above, principals' responsibilities with special education have increased over the last decade with the passage of both No Child Left Behind (2001) and the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004). Principals may not feel equipped to be effective leaders of special education programs, and consequently supervise special education professionals. Many principals have not received formal training in their preparation programs at universities. In addition, their roles and responsibilities may not be clearly defined, which also exacerbates the challenge of successfully overseeing the special education programs and staff. All of these factors may influence the ways that principals support the special education professionals in their schools.

In the following section, the research on principal support is reviewed. The chapter concludes with the theoretical framework for defining principal support and the research questions to be addressed in this study.

Principal Support of Teachers

Most research that has been completed on the impact of principals' support involves general education teachers rather than special education professionals. Taken together, the research with classroom teachers indicates that they feel most encouraged by administrators who are open, accessible and genuinely caring about the well being of staff members. Such administrators are able to create a nurturing,

collaborative environment where teachers are encouraged to be part of decision making and to develop their professional skills. Table 1 outlines the major findings of this research.

Table 1

Characteristics of Effective Principal Support

Respects teachers as professionals Has an open-door policy Provides support with parents Provides support in student discipline	Richards (2004)
Encourages teacher leadership Encourages professional growth Encourages collaboration	Rea, McLaughlin, and Walther-Thomas (2002)
Builds school community Demonstrates a shared and inclusive leadership Embraces change and fosters diversity	Drago-Severson (2000)
Facilitates effective communication Is accessible Involves staff in decision-making Takes a personal interest in teacher well-being	Brewster and Railsback / 2003
Fosters ongoing learning Protects teachers from forces that inhibit their ability to teach Promotes helping relationships amongst staff Engages teachers in establishing common goals and decision making	Rosenholtz (1989)

Although there are similarities between the working conditions of general educators and special education professionals, there are also distinct differences. Special education professionals may have less involvement in the overall functioning of the school, such as participation in staff meetings or on school based committees. In addition, special education may be seen as a separate program, so the principals feel less responsibility toward students with disabilities and their

teachers. Gersten, Gillman, Morvant, and Billingsley (1995) found that general educators were more likely than special education professionals to agree to the following statements: my principal: (a) provides current information about teaching/learning (b) informs me about school / district policies (c) explains reasons behind programs and practices (d) understands my program and what I do (e) provides leadership about what we are trying to achieve and (f) interacts with me frequently (p. 5).

There is less research on the beliefs of special education professionals regarding principal support. A study by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC, 1998) concluded that the following actions of principals are important to the job satisfaction of special education professionals: be supportive of teacher decisions, provide collaboration opportunities, provide mentoring, treat all professionals equally and reward teachers with appropriate mechanisms.

In a survey by Rea, McLaughlin, and Walther-Thomas (2002), special education professionals identified three major characteristics of principals that were deemed as important: (a) encouraging teacher leadership; (b) encouraging professional growth and (c) encouraging collaboration.

Gersten et al. (1995) summarized results of a survey of special education professionals in regards to the impact of administrative support on their job satisfaction, commitment and intent to leave. The major concerns of special education professionals in regards to the principals' attitudes and actions included:

(a) a lack of understanding of what teachers do in their classroom (b) failure to recognize the significance of teachers' work challenges and accomplishments and include them in the life of the school (c) inadequate levels of assistance with specific problems, such as discipline or integration efforts and (d) reluctance to involve teachers in determining the shape of the school's special education programs (p. 4).

In 1992, Littrell undertook a study to identify special and general educators' perception of principal support. Her research addressed two critical issues: (a) the degree of importance that teachers attached to specific elements of principal support and (b) the amount or extent that teachers received specific elements of administrative support. Both special and general educators reported that emotional support from the principals was perceived as the most important element of principal support, followed by instrumental support (being provided with the tools necessary to do their jobs). Participants who received high levels of support were most likely to remain in their jobs.

In summary, research on principal support is primarily based on the perceptions of general education teachers, in part because they constitute a larger proportion of professionals in the field of education. There is less research on special educators and principal support, and it is often part of a larger study that includes factors which may detract or enhance the job satisfaction of the professional. Littrell's (1992) investigation of special educators' perception of

principal support is one of the largest and most comprehensive study, and is the model for this research project.

Theoretical Framework for Defining Principal Support

Littrell (1992) based her study on a theoretical framework proposed by House (1981). As a sociologist, House was concerned about the impact of work stress on the physical and mental health of employees. Over several years, he studied types of administrative support, both formally and informally, that helped to alleviate stress on the job, and concluded that most fell into four broad categories: emotional, instrumental, informational and appraisal. Although there are many books on leadership, both academic and pop-culture, that espouse the way to effectively support employees, House' typology provides a clear and simple scaffolding to frame research questions. House described the four main types of support as follows:

1. Emotional support: Principals show teachers that they are esteemed, trusted professionals and worthy of concern by such practices as maintaining open communication, showing appreciation, taking an interest in teachers' work, and considering teachers' ideas.
2. Instrumental support: Principals directly help teachers with work-related tasks, such as providing necessary materials, space, and resources, ensuring adequate time for teaching and nonteaching duties, and helping with managerial-type concerns.

3. Informational support: Principals provide teachers with information that they can use to improve classroom practices. For example, principals provide informational support by authorizing teachers' attendance at in-service workshops, offering practical information about effective teaching practices and providing suggestions to improve instruction and classroom management.
4. Appraisal support: As instructional leaders, principals are charged with providing ongoing personnel appraisal, such as frequent and constructive feedback about their work, information about what constitutes effective teaching, and clear guidelines regarding job responsibilities (House, 1981).

The four categories of support were useful in Littrell's 1992 study of special education professionals' views of principal support. Since that time, there have been two important changes in the provision of special education services that impact the context in which principals support special education professionals. With the passing of No Child Left Behind in 2001 and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 2004, the researcher proposes that there are two other essential components of principal support which must be explored.

The first is the principal's knowledge of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which guides the policies and procedures for educating students with disabilities. Principals are ultimately responsible for ensuring legal compliance relating to the education of their students (Bateman & Bateman, 2001;

CEC, 2001; Sage & Burrello, 1994). This includes the Individual Disabilities Education Act which basically ensures free and appropriate education for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. As a result, principals need to have a solid working knowledge of such a law to ensure that it is implemented accordingly. As a central office administrator, I have witnessed a multitude of conflicts between special education professionals and principals over compliance with special education law (IDEA). An example of this occurs frequently at the high school level, where the principal may proceed with disciplinary action, such as expulsion. However, IDEA stipulates that a "manifestation determination" hearing must be held to establish whether or not the student's disability may have affected the decision that lead to the infraction. It is the special educator's responsibility to ensure that the student's rights are protected, and this may conflict with the administrator's desire to carry out disciplinary action.

The second area is the principal's advocacy for students with disabilities, which is the most powerful element in creating a welcoming, inclusive environment for all students, and consequently the special education teachers. One source of frustration for special education professionals cited in many studies is the resistance of staff and principals in including students with disabilities into general education (Goessling, 1998; Hutchinson & Martin, 1999; Salen, 2001). Dipaola and Walther-Thomas (2003) concluded that the principal's role is most important for improving the educational opportunities for students with disabilities. Similarly,

Villa et al. (1993) found that "administrative leadership was the most powerful predictor of positive teachers' attitudes" (p. 43) about educating students with disabilities. This being the case, it stands to reason that a principal who advocates for students with disabilities would have a positive impact on the working conditions of the professionals directly involved with the education of this groups of students.

Miriam-Webster defines an advocate as "one that supports or promotes the interests of another." Principals who advocate for students with disabilities are acting as spokespersons for individuals who may be at a disadvantage. This particular descriptor implies someone with an active role in supporting others. Specifically, this term also encompasses the belief system of the school leader, which not only serves as the template in designing how the school is managed, but also directly influences how the staff perceives the task of educating students with disabilities. In a study of more than 800 special education professionals, Gersten et al. (2001) concluded that, "ultimately it is the combination of values and actions of the principal and teaching staff as mediated by the overall school culture that influences the level of support felt by the special education teacher" (p. 557).

Thus, the theoretical model of principal support used by Littrell in 1992 (Emotional, Instrumental, Informational and Appraisal) is expanded in this study to include Knowledge of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Advocacy for students with disabilities.

Based on the need for further exploration concerning the views of special education professionals on principal support, the following research questions were addressed in this study.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to answer the following research questions: Research question 1: What components of principal support do special education professionals rate as most important?

1. (a) Is there a difference between what beginning and experienced special education professionals rate as most important?
1. (b) Is there a difference between what the 5 categories of special education professionals rate as most important?
1. (c) Is there a difference between what special education professionals at different school levels rate as most important?
1. (d) Is there a difference between what male and female special education professionals rate as important?

Research question 2: To what extent do special education professionals report that components of principal support are present in their work site?

2. (a) Is there a difference between the principal support reported by beginning versus experienced educators?
2. (b) Is there a difference between the principal support reported by the 5 categories of special education professionals?

2. (c) Is there a difference between the principal support reported by special education professionals at different school levels?

2. (d) Is there a difference between the principal support reported by male versus female special education professionals?

Research question 3: To what extent do special education professionals report that they receive the support in the areas that they rate as most important?

3. (a) Is there a difference between the extent that beginning versus experienced special education professionals receive support important to them?

3. (b) Is there a difference between the extent that the 5 categories of special education professionals receive support important to them?

3. (c) Is there a difference between the extent that special education professionals at different school levels receive support important to them?

3. (d) Is there a difference between the extent that male versus female special education professionals receive support important to them?

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

This is a descriptive study of special education professionals' perception of principal support. Special education professionals' views of the importance of different types of principal support, and to what extent they received this support is described. The ways that different types of special education professionals (teachers in academic, behavior and life skills classrooms, psychologists and speech-language pathologists) view principal support are examined. The extent to which gender, years of experience and the grade level of school where employed are associated with different perceptions of principal support is also described.

Participants

Participants included licensed professionals employed in special education, including teachers, psychologists and speech-language pathologists in a large urban school district. The rationale for including psychologists and speech-language pathologists is two-fold. First, the district has over 150 itinerant psychologists and speech-language pathologists, so these groups are an integral part of the special education professional workforce in districts this size and retention of these professionals can also be a challenge. Secondly, psychologists and speech-language pathologists are directly supervised and evaluated by principals in the district, so they have a significant relationship with the principal.

Instrument

To develop the survey, the researcher partially replicated the survey designed by Littrell (1992). Their study formulated 40 questions about administrative support based on House's categories (described above): Emotional, Instrumental, Informational and Appraisal. In addition to these questions, new questions that relate to the principal's Knowledge of IDEA and Advocacy for students with disabilities were added.

Demographic Section

The first part of the questionnaire included demographic and job-related information. Four elements of information were collected. The first was years of experience. As noted in the introduction, the amount of experience was cited as one of the individual characteristics that may lead to attrition. In this district, a teacher is deemed probationary for the first 3 years of employment. Therefore, 3 years was used as the demarcation for beginning versus experienced teacher. The second factor is type of assignment or position. There were five distinct types of positions amongst the subjects, with the first three being special education teachers who primarily work in one of the following classroom setting: (a) academic support classrooms for students with mild to moderate disabilities (b) self-contained classrooms for students with behavior disabilities, and (c) self-contained classrooms for students with significant learning/communication needs. The last two positions are psychologists and speech-language pathologists. Psychologists

work with all students, and are primarily responsible for the assessment of students and assisting with appropriate educational plans and placements of students with disabilities. They are also the liaisons between outside agencies and work closely with administrators if students require disciplinary action or a change of placement to a more restrictive environment. Speech-language pathologists create individual education plans, provide direct service and work closely with classroom teachers for students with communication disabilities. These five categories were included as each may have different perceptions of the type and amount of principal support available.

Development of New Survey Items

The second section of the survey included 60 principal support items (attributes/behaviors) along six constructs (Emotional, Instrumental, Informational, Appraisal, Knowledge of IDEA, and Advocacy). The first 40 questions are from the original survey by Littrell (1992). These included 12 items in the construct of Emotional support, 7 in Appraisal, 8 in Informational and 13 in the Instrumental construct. To develop the questions for the two new constructs (Advocacy for students with disabilities and Knowledge of IDEA), three steps occurred. First, possible survey items (attributes/behaviors of principals) were drafted. To do so, literature that focused on what principals needed to know about special education law, and ways that principals could develop inclusive schools was reviewed. For example, Patterson (2001) authored a principal's guide to special education law

(IDEA) to help principals design effective special education programs. This type of article gave ideas for questions that focus on what principals need to know about IDEA. The second type of article focused primarily on what constitutes an inclusive school. For example, Boscardin (2005) reviewed several studies in order to propose ideas for principals on how to support inclusive practices in their school. This provided ideas for questions for the Advocacy area, as principals who advocate for students with disabilities are demonstrating behaviors and beliefs that lead to inclusion of students of all abilities into the mainstream of the school environment. Eventually 31 potential survey items that described attributes/behaviors of principal support (see Appendix A) were drafted.

For the second step, four colleagues of the researcher (a psychologist, a speech-language pathologist and two special education teachers) reviewed the 31 proposed items describing attributes/behaviors of principal support for clarity, accuracy, relevance and possible redundancy of each question. Based on the feedback, the following questions were eliminated. The rationale for the elimination is in parentheses.

-Fosters a sense of community for students with disabilities (similar to another item Provides a welcoming environment of all students)

-Ensures that students with disabilities have appropriate classroom materials (similar to another item Provides material, space and resource needs)

-Ensures access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities (similar to two items, Provides material, space and resource needs and Ensures that students with disabilities have appropriate technological materials/supplies)

-Partners with parent in the implementation of the student's IEP (this is not the typical responsibility of principals)

-Through this process, the 31 items were reduced to 27.

For the third and final step, the remaining 27 survey items (attributes/behaviors of principal support) were distributed to 16 special education professionals who work in the school district including 9 special education teachers, 4 psychologists, and 3 speech-language pathologists. Participants rated the survey items on three levels: (a) clarity of the question (b) relevancy of the question as it relates to the two categories (Knowledge of IDEA, Advocacy for students with disabilities) and (c) importance of the attribute/behavior of principal support in their last work experience in a school setting (see Appendix B). Items with low scores on clarity and accuracy were eliminated, leaving 10 questions for the category of Advocacy for students with disabilities and 10 for Knowledge of IDEA (results in Appendix C). The survey was then finalized, combining demographic items and the 60 items describing attributes/behaviors of principal support (see Appendix D). For each item on the survey, respondents were asked to describe (a) the importance of specific types of principal support (0 = not

important, 1 = minimally important, 2 = moderately important, 3 = very important) and (b) the extent of support they receive from their principal (0 = no extent, 1 = small extent, 2 = some extent, 3 = great extent). The response options that used in this survey are known as "ordinal scales" (Creswell, 2002, p. 172) as participants are asked to rank their opinions, for example, from least important to most important. It is important to note that the intervals between each response cannot be assumed to be equal due to the subjectivity of the options. For example, the "distance" between not important and minimally important is not necessarily equal to moderately important to very important.

Procedures

As part of the fulfillment for the research, I submitted a Human Subjects Research Review to Portland State University. In addition, I completed a similar Human Subjects Research Review for the school district, and it was approved.

Prior to sending the survey, I made presentations to various groups of special education professionals at monthly meetings, providing a brief synopsis of the study and emphasizing the importance of their input. By doing so, I hoped to increase the return rate of the surveys.

This survey was then mailed to all special education teachers, psychologists and speech-language pathologists in the school district. A cover letter (see Appendix E), the questionnaire, and an addressed, return envelope were enclosed.

In addition, a letter was sent to the principal of that school to provide information about the survey, in addition to a copy of the survey.

Information from the survey was input to SPSS, and data were analyzed (see data analysis section).

Data Analysis

Reliability of Survey Items

The first step in processing the data was to determine reliability of survey items. In this case, I wanted to ensure that the questions of each category of support (emotional, appraisal, instructional, informational, knowledge of IDEA and advocacy for students with disabilities) were consistent in measuring the characteristics that they are suppose to measure. In other words, the 12 questions in the emotional category of support should demonstrate consistency with one another. A statistic known as coefficient alpha was applied to describe how well the various survey items complement each other in their measurement of the same quality.

For the purpose of analysis, the term *constructs* will refer to the six categories of principal support (Emotional, Appraisal, Instructional, Informational, Advocacy for students with disabilities and Knowledge of IDEA). As there are four types of respondents based on (a) years of experience, (b) type of position, (c) type of schools, and (d) gender, they will be considered subgroups.

Descriptive Statistics

The raw data from the survey were entered into SPSS format. Information obtained included the mean, standard deviation, and range of responses to each survey question as it applies to the importance of the attribute and the extent it is occurring in the work site. In addition to the individual item level, data were tabulated to describe mean, standard deviation and range of responses for each construct (emotional, appraisal, instructional, informational, knowledge of IDEA, and advocacy for students with disabilities). Specific analyses for the research questions are described below.

Research question 1: What components of principal support do special education professionals rate as most important?

For each of the six constructs (Emotional, Appraisal, Informational, Instrumental, Advocacy for students with disabilities and Knowledge of the Individuals with Disabilities Act) composite scores were computed by determining the mean rating and standard deviation. Response choices were Not Important (0), Minimally Important (1), Moderately Important (2), Very Important (3). Paired sample *t* tests were then conducted to compare means of importance for each construct.

1. (a) Is there a difference between what beginning and experienced special education professionals rate as most important?

1. (b) Is there a difference between what the 5 categories of special education professionals rate as most important?

1. (c) Is there a difference between what special education professionals at different school levels as most important?

1. (d) Is there a difference between what male and female special education professionals rate as important?

Research questions 1.(a), 1.(b), 1(c), 1(d)

For the subgroups (experience, profession, school level and gender), means and standard deviations for each of the six constructs were determined. A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between subgroups (experience, profession, school level and gender) and the perception of importance of principal support. As there were overall differences between the means, post-hoc Bonferroni analysis were conducted to determine the cause of these differences.

Research question 2: To what extent do special education professionals report that components of principal support are present in their work site?

For each of the six constructs (Emotional, Appraisal, Informational, Instrumental, Advocacy for students with disabilities and Knowledge of the Individuals with Disabilities Act) composite scores were computed by determining the mean and the standard deviation. Response choices were No Extent (0), Small Extent (1), Some Extent (2), and Great Extent (3). Paired sample *t* tests were conducted to compare means of extent for each construct

2. (a) Is there a difference between the principal support reported by beginning versus experienced educators?

2. (b) Is there a difference between the principal support reported by the 5 categories of special education professionals?

2. (c) Is there a difference between the principal support reported by special education professionals at different school levels?

2. (d) Is there a difference between the principal support reported by male versus female special education professionals

Research question 2.(a), 2.(b), 2.(c), 2.(d):

For the subgroups (experience, position type, and school type), means and standard deviations for each of the six constructs were determined. A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between subgroups (experience, profession, school level and gender) and the perception of the extent of principal support.

Research question 3: To what extent do special education professionals receive the support in the area that they rate as most important?

Paired sample *t* tests were conducted to evaluate the difference between special education professionals' ratings of the importance of forms of principal support versus the extent to which they receive those form of support from the principal.

3. (a) Is there a difference between the extent that beginning versus experienced special education professionals receive important support?

3. (b) Is there a difference between the extent that the five categories of special education professionals receive important support?

3. (c) Is there a difference between the extent that special education professionals at different school levels receive important support?

3. (d) Is there a difference between the extent that male versus female special education professionals receive important support?

Research questions 3.(a), 3.(b), 3.(c), 3.(d):

For the subgroups (experience, profession, school type and gender), means and standard deviations for each of the six constructs were determined. Two-way analysis of variances were conducted to evaluate the effects of the 4 subgroups (experience, profession, school level, or gender) and ratings of Importance of principal support on the Extent of principal support.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

As described in chapter 3, the primary purpose of this study was to determine what type of principal support is the most important to special education professionals and to what extent this support is occurring in their work environment. For this research, special education professionals included psychologists, speech-language pathologists, teachers in academic support classrooms, teachers in behavior classrooms and teachers in life skills classrooms. The second purpose was to explore whether a difference exists between the four groups of respondents (as determined by profession, school site, experience and gender) in their perception of the importance and prevalence of the principal support. This chapter includes a summary of distribution and return rate, including demographic characteristics of participants, and results for each research question.

Summary of Distribution and Return Rate

On May 17th, the questionnaire was mailed to 364 special education professionals of an urban school district where the researcher was employed. A cover letter (see Appendix E), the survey, a coupon for an educational store, and a self-addressed envelope were enclosed.

By June 14, 2007, 216 were received, indicating an overall return rate of 59.6%. (see Table 2). Teachers in the academic support classrooms were the largest group of respondents, followed by speech-language pathologists and psychologists.

Table 2

Distribution and Return Rate (Profession)

Profession	Number Mailed	Number Received	Percent Returned
Psychologist	47	43	91.5
Speech-Language Pathologist	73	44	60.3
Teachers (Academic support)	163	90	55.2
Teachers (Life Skills)	28	20	71.4
Teachers (Behavior)	39	19	49.0
Teachers (Communication/Behavior)	8	4	50.0
Teachers (Other)	8	4	50.0
Missing data		2	< .1
Total sample	364	216	59.6%

For the purposes of the analysis, the two groups with four respondents (Teachers in Communication/Behavior classroom and Teachers in Other classrooms) were combined with Teachers in Behavior classrooms and Teachers in Academic Support classrooms respectively. Teachers in Communication/Behavior classrooms had responsibilities most similar to Teachers in Behavior classrooms. By examining the characteristics of the four respondents in the Teachers (Other), it was determined that these teachers were located in sites containing older students who do not require a self-contained classroom, and the teachers' responsibilities are most similar to Teachers in Academic Support classrooms. The Profession variable for those cases was recoded to allow for group comparisons that were of sufficient size.

Almost five times as many females responded as males (see Table 3).

Table 3

Distribution and Return Rate (Gender)

Gender	Number Mailed	Number Received	Percent Returned
Females	270	167	57.6
Males	74	37	50.0
Missing data		12	< .1

More than 88% of the respondents had 3 or more years of teaching experience (see Table 4).

Table 4

Return Rate (Experience)

Experience	Number Received	Percent Returned
Under 3 years	19	8.8
3 or more years	191	88.4
Missing data	6	2 8

For this question, respondents were provided 2 options to the question Years of Experience in Special Education; either Under 3 years or 3 years or more. As it did not specify where or when this experience occurred, the researcher was unable to determine the exact data for Experience when reporting the demographics of the Number Mailed.

The majority of respondents worked in an elementary school, followed by high school and middle school (see Table 5).

Table 5

Return Rate (School Level)

School	Number Received
Elementary	90
Middle School	39
High School	60
Other	26
Missing data	1

The specific data on school type for Number Mailed was unavailable as 2 of the professions (Speech-Language Pathologists and Psychologists) often changed work sites throughout the year depending on the needs of schools.

Reliability Analysis for Constructs

Pilot testing of the two new constructs (Advocacy and Knowledge) used in this study was described in chapter 3. After data collection, it was important to assess the reliability of all the constructs. An item analysis was conducted for both new constructs (Advocacy and Knowledge), and the 4 existing constructs (Emotional, Appraisal, Instrumental, Informational). Each construct had 10 questions, for a total of 60 questions.

The Cronbach coefficient alpha was used to determine internal consistency across items in each of the six constructs (Emotional, Appraisal, Informational,

Instrumental, Advocacy, and Knowledge). The two new constructs (Advocacy and Knowledge) created by the researcher had reliability coefficients that were within accepted standards (Salkind, 2000, p. 96). The alpha coefficients related to the two new constructs ranged from a low of .78 to a high of .91 (see Table 6). For the remaining constructs, reliability analysis found an alpha coefficient range of .72 - .91; again within acceptable range.

Table 6

Cronbach Coefficient Alpha Results for Each Construct

Construct	Alpha
Emotional (Importance)	.72
Emotional (Extent)	.95
Appraisal (Importance)	.85
Appraisal (Extent)	.91
Informational (Importance)	.80
Informational (Extent)	.89
Instrumental (Importance)	.78
Instrumental (Extent)	.89
Advocacy (Importance)	.78
Advocacy (Extent)	.91
Knowledge (Importance)	.80
Knowledge (Extent)	.91

Results for each Research Question

Research Question 1

What components of principal support do special education professionals rate as most important?

In order to determine what components of principal support were rated as most important, composite scores were computed by determining the mean rating and standard deviation of each construct (Emotional, Appraisal, Informational, Instrumental, Advocacy for student with disabilities, and Knowledge of the Individuals with Disabilities Act). Response choices were Not Important (0), Minimally Important (1), Moderately Important (2), Very Important (3). Table 7 shows the means and standard deviation for the total group, in order of highest to lowest scores of importance.

Table 7

Mean (SD) Ratings of Importance of Principal Support (Total)

Construct	$n = 216$
Emotional	2.7 (.26)
Knowledge	2.6 (.39)
Advocacy	2.5 (.36)
Instrumental	2.2 (.45)
Appraisal	2.2 (.51)
Informational	2.0 (.55)

Results indicated that Emotional support was rated the most important, followed by Knowledge, Advocacy, Instrumental, Appraisal and Informational. Paired sample *t* tests were conducted to evaluate the difference between special education professionals' ratings of the importance that were close in value. The paired *t* test between Emotional Importance ($M = 2.7$, SD = .26) and Knowledge Importance ($M = 2.6$, SD = .39) was statistically significant, $t_{(211)} = 4.67$, $p<.001$.

The paired *t* test between Knowledge Importance ($M = 2.6$, SD = .39) and Advocacy Importance ($M = 2.5$, SD = .36) was statistically significant, $t_{(210)} = -.1.54$, $p<.001$. The paired *t* test between Instrumental Importance ($M = 2.2$, SD = .45) and Appraisal Importance ($M = 2.2$, SD = .51) was statistically significant, $t_{(214)} = 1.50$, $p<.001$. The paired *t* test between Appraisal Importance ($M = 2.2$, SD = .51) and Information Importance ($M = 2.0$, SD = .55) was statistically significant, $_t(214) = 7.81$, $p<.001$. There were significant differences between each of the rankings from the highest to the lowest.

The individual items with the highest rankings were within the Emotional and the Advocacy for students with disabilities constructs. The 5 survey items that were rated as most important (out of 60 total) were as follows:

1. Is honest and straightforward with the staff ($M = 3.0$, SD = .18) (Emotional)
2. Accepts all children as part of the school community ($M = 2.9$, SD = .29) (Advocacy)
3. Believes that all children can learn ($M = 2.9$, SD = .41) (Advocacy)
4. Allows me input into decisions that affect me ($M = 2.9$, SD = .31) (Emotional
5. Is easy to approach ($M = 2.9$, SD = .37) (Emotional)

1a. Is there a difference between what beginning and experienced special education professionals rate as important?

As described in chapter 3, beginning special education professionals were those who had less than 3 years of experience, and experienced professionals were those with 3 or more years of experience. The means and standard deviation scores for each construct were computed.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between experience and perception of the rating of principal support. The independent variable, the years of experience, included two levels: less than 3 years, and 3 years or more. The dependent variable was the mean of the importance of the six constructs. The ANOVA was significant only for the construct of Advocacy, $F(_{1, 206}) = 6.66$, $p = .011$. Teachers with 3 or more years of experience ranked Advocacy ($M = 2.5$, $SD = .35$) higher than teachers with less than 3 years of experience ($M = 2.3$, $SD = .40$) (see Table 8).

Table 8

Mean (SD) Ratings of Importance of Principal Support and Experience

Construct	Under 3 years $n = 19$	3 years and more $n = 191$	Difference in rating between beginning and experienced professionals
Emotional	2.6 (.29)	2.7 (.25)	$ns < .05$
Appraisal	2.3 (.46)	2.2 (.51)	$ns < .05$
Informational	2.0 (.58)	2.0 (.56)	$ns < .05$
Instrumental	2.2 (.44)	2.2 (.45)	$ns < .05$
Advocacy	2.3 (.40)	2.5 (.35)	$F_{(1,206)} = 6.66, p = .011$
Knowledge	2.5 (.42)	2.6 (.39)	$ns < .05$

1b. Is there a difference between what the 5 types of special education professionals rate as important?

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the relationship between professional groups' rating of relative importance of types of principal support. The independent variable, the type of special education profession, included 5 groups: Psychologists (Psych), Speech-Language Pathologists (SLP), Teachers - Academic, Teachers - Life Skills, and Teachers - Behavior. The dependent variable was the mean of the importance ratings of the six constructs (Emotional, Appraisal, Informational, Instrumental, Advocacy for student with disabilities, and Knowledge of the Individuals with Disabilities) (see Table 9).

The main effect for the Emotional construct was statistically significant, $F_{(4, 211)} = 4.58, p < .01$. This indicated that professional group membership had a

significant role in the individual's rating of the importance of the principal's emotional support. A post-hoc Bonferroni analysis indicated that the main effect differences can be attributed to significant differences between Teachers-Academic ($M = 2.7$, $SD = .24$) and both Speech-Language Pathologists ($M = 2.6$, $SD = .28$) and Psychologists ($M = 2.6$, $SD = .26$). Teachers in Academic contexts rated the Emotional principal support subscale higher than SLPs and Psychologsts.

No significant differences existed among professional group's mean ratings of the construct of Knowledge, $F(_{4, 207}) = .29$, $p = .89$.

Table 9

Mean (SD) Ratings of Importance of Principal Support and Profession

Construct	Psych $n = 43$	SLP $n = 44$	Teacher - Academic $n = 94$	Teacher - Life Skills $n = 20$	Teacher - Behavior $n = 23$
Emotional	2.6 (.26)	2.6 (.28)	2.7 (.24)	2.6 (.31)	2.8 (.20)
Appraisal	1.9 (.54)	2.0 (.47)	2.4 (.43)	2.1 (.49)	2.4 (.39)
Informational	1.9 (.53)	1.9 (.53)	2.1 (.54)	1.7 (.59)	2.2 (.53)
Instrumental	2.0 (.40)	2.1 (.41)	2.3 (.46)	2.1 (.42)	2.3 (.42)
Advocacy	2.7 (.27)	2.5 (.29)	2.5 (.36)	2.2 (.49)	2.6 (.27)
Knowledge	2.6 (.34)	2.6 (.37)	2.6 (.41)	2.4 (.44)	2.5 (.46)

1c. Is there a difference between what professionals at different school levels rate as important?

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between school level and the rating of importance of principal support. The independent variable, the type of school settings, included four categories: Elementary, Middle, High School or Other (include K-12 school, alternative school

settings or community transition centers for 18-21 year olds). The dependent variable was the mean of the importance of the six constructs (Emotional, Appraisal, Informational, Instrumental, Advocacy for student with disabilities, and Knowledge of the Individuals with Disabilities). The main effect was significant for Advocacy only $F(3, 209) = 2.7, p = .044$ (see Table 10).

Table 10

Mean (SD) Ratings of Importance of Principal Support and School Level

Construct	Elementary $n = 90$	Middle $n = 39$	High School $n = 60$	Other $n = 26$
Emotional	2.7 (.22)	2.7 (.30)	2.7 (.27)	2.7 (.31)
Appraisal	2.2 (.49)	2.2 (.48)	2.2 (.55)	2.2 (.52)
Informational	2.1 (.51)	1.9 (.56)	1.9 (.64)	2.0 (.49)
Instrumental	2.2 (.47)	2.2 (.33)	2.2 (.47)	2.1 (.48)
Advocacy	2.6 (.31)	2.5 (.47)	2.4 (.32)	2.5 (.38)
Knowledge	2.6 (.36)	2.6 (.47)	2.5 (.39)	2.5 (.41)

A post-hoc Bonferroni analysis indicated that the main effect differences can be attributed to the differences between Elementary professionals ($M = 2.6$, $SD = .31$) and High School professionals ($M = 2.4$, $SD = .32$) with Elementary professionals ranking Advocacy higher than High School professionals.

1d. Is there a difference between what female or male special education professionals rate as important?

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between gender and importance of principal support. The independent variable was gender (male or female). The dependent variable was the mean of the importance of

the six constructs (Emotional, Appraisal, Informational, Instrumental, Advocacy for student with disabilities, and Knowledge of the Individuals with Disabilities). The ANOVA was significant for Advocacy only, $F(1, 200) = 7.80$, $p = .006$, with females ranking Advocacy ($M = 2.6$, $SD = .33$) higher than males (2.4, $SD = .47$) (see Table 11).

Table 11

Mean (SD) Ratings of Importance of Principal Support and Gender

Construct	Female $n = 167$	Male $n = 37$
Emotional	2.7 (.25)	2.6 (.30)
Appraisal	2.2 (.51)	2.1 (.53)
Informational	2.0 (.55)	1.8 (.57)
Instrumental	2.2 (.46)	2.1 (.42)
Advocacy	2.6 (.32)	2.4 (.47)
Knowledge	2.6 (.39)	2.5 (.41)

Research Question 2

To what extent do special education professionals rate the components of principal support as existing in their work site?

In order to determine the extent to which components of principal support exist in special education professional's work site, composite scores were computed by determining the mean and standard deviation of each construct (Emotional, Appraisal, Informational, Instrumental, Advocacy for student with disabilities, and Knowledge of the Individuals with Disabilities Act). Response choices were No Extent (0), Small Extent (1), Some Extent (2), and Great Extent

(3). Table 12 shows the means and standard deviation for the total group, in order of highest to lowest scores of Extent.

Table 12

Mean (SD) Ratings of Extent of Principal Support (Total)

Construct	$n = 216$
Emotional	2.1 (.77)
Advocacy	1.8 (.69)
Knowledge	1.7 (.76)
Appraisal	1.6 (.76)
Instrumental	1.5 (.73)
Informational	1.4 (.79)

Results indicated that professionals rated the Emotional support construct as the form of principal support received most in the work site, followed by Advocacy, Knowledge, Appraisal, Instrumental and Informational. Paired sample *t* tests were conducted to evaluate the difference between special education professionals' ratings of the extent of principal support that were close in value. The paired *t* test between Advocacy Extent ($M = 1.8$, SD = .69) and Knowledge Extent ($M = 1.7$, SD = .76) was statistically significant, $t_{(209)} = 3.27$, $p<.001$. The paired *t* test between Knowledge ($M = 1.7$, SD = .76) and Appraisal Extent ($M =$ 1.6, SD = .76) was statistically significant, $t_{(214)} = 4.22$, $p<.001$. The paired *t* test between Appraisal Extent ($M = 1.6$, SD = .76) and Instrumental Extent ($M = 1.5$, .73) was statistically significant, $t_{(214)} = 1.51$ $p<.001$. The paired *t* test between Instrumental Extent and Informational Extent was statistically significant, $t_{(214)} =$ -

2.93, p<.001. The mean for Emotional support was placed between Some Extent (2) to Great Extent (3). The mean for the other constructs placed them between Small Extent (1) and Some Extent (2).

Similar to the ratings of importance, the 5 individual items (out of 60 total) that were rated as being received to the greatest extent were within the Emotional and Advocacy constructs. The 5 individual items were as follows:

1. Believes all children can learn (M = 2.6, SD = .78) (Advocacy)
2. Accepts all children as part of the school community (M = 2.5, SD = .85) (Advocacy)
3. Acts friendly towards me (M = 2.4, SD = .83) (Emotional)
4. Gives me undivided attention when I am talking (M = 2.4, SD = .81) (Emotional)
5. Provides a welcoming environment for all students (M = 2.4, SD = 89) (Advocacy)

2a. Is there a difference between the principal support reported by beginning versus experienced special education professionals?

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between Experience and the extent of principal support. The independent variable was Experience (under 3 years or 3 years and more). The dependent variable was the mean of the extent of the six constructs (Emotional, Appraisal, Informational, Instrumental, Advocacy for student with disabilities, and Knowledge of the

Individuals with Disabilities Act). The ANOVA was significant for Advocacy only, $F(_{1, 206}) = 5.10, p = .025$, with more experienced teachers ranking their receipt of principal support in form of Advocacy ($M = 1.9$, $SD = .68$) higher than beginning teachers ($M = 1.5$, $SD = .71$). See Table 13.

Table 13

Mean (SD) Ratings of Extent of Principal Support and Experience

Construct	Under 3 years $n = 19$	3 years and more $n = 191$
Emotional	2.0 (.83)	2.1(.76)
Appraisal	1.5 (.74)	1.6 (.77)
Informational	1.2 (.66)	1.4 (.81)
Instrumental	1.4 (.74)	1.5 (.74)
Advocacy	1.5 (.71)	1.9 (.68)
Knowledge	1.56 (.77)	1.8 (.76)

2b. Is there a difference between the principal support reported by 5 types of special educational professionals?

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between professional groups and the extent of principal support. The independent variable was Profession (Psychologist, SLP, Teacher – Academic, Teacher – Life Skills, Teacher - Behavior). The dependent variable was the mean of the extent of the six constructs (Emotional, Appraisal, Informational, Instrumental, Advocacy for student with disabilities, and Knowledge of the Individuals with Disabilities). There was no statistical difference between any of the groups, Emotional, $F_{(4, 211)} = .58, p < .68$; Appraisal, $F(_{4, 210}) = 2.26, p < .06$; Informational, $F(_{4, 210}) = 1.16, p <$

.33; Instrumental, $F(4, 207) = .77, p < .54$; Advocacy, $F(4, 209) = 1.38, p < .24$; Knowledge $F(4, 206) = .29, p < .89$ (see Table 14).

Table 14

Mean (SD) Ratings of Extent of Principal Support and Profession

Construct	Psych $n = 43$	SLP $n = 44$	Academic $n = 94$	Life Skills $n = 20$	Behavior $n = 23$
Emotional	2.2 (.66)	2.1 (.70)	2.0 (.85)	2.1 (.72)	2.3 (.76)
Appraisal	1.4 (.77)	1.4 (.70)	1.6 (.80)	1.5 (.62)	1.9 (.74)
Informational	1.3 (.90)	1.4 (.72)	1.4 (.78)	1.1 (.70)	1.7 (.80)
Instrumental	1.5 (.70)	1.4 (.66)	1.5 (.80)	1.4 (.53)	1.7 (.82)
Advocacy	2.0 (.65)	1.7 (.67)	1.8 (.73)	1.7 (.62)	1.9 (.65)
Knowledge	1.7 (.74)	1.6 (.82)	1.8 (.79)	1.7 (.50)	1.7 (.81)

2c. Is there a difference between the principal support reported by special education professionals at different school levels?

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between school setting and perception of the rating of principal support. The independent variable, the type of levels, included 4 categories: Elementary, Middle, High School or Other (include K-12 school, alternative school settings or community transition centers for 18-21 year olds). The dependent variable was the mean of the importance of the six constructs (Emotional, Appraisal, Informational, Instrumental, Advocacy for student with disabilities, and Knowledge of the Individuals with Disabilities). There was no statistical difference between any of the groups, Emotional, $F(3,211) = 2.05, p < .107$; Appraisal, $F(3, 210) = 1.04, p < .38$; Informational, $F(3, 210) = 1.76, p < .16$; Instrumental $F(3, 211) = .69, p < .56$;

Advocacy, $F(3, 209) = 1.90, p < .13$; and Knowledge, $F(3, 206) = 2.22, p < .088$ (see Table 15).

Table 15

Mean (SD) Ratings of Extent of Principal Support and School Level

Construct	Elementary $n = 90$	Middle $n = 39$	High School $n = 60$	Other $n = 26$
Emotional	2.2 (.71)	2.2 (.70)	2.0 (.84)	1.9 (.82)
Appraisal	1.7 (.78)	1.5 (.78)	1.5 (.75)	1.4(.68)
Informational	1.5 (.80)	1.3 (.80)	1.2 (.80)	1.3 (.70)
Instrumental	1.6 (.78)	1.5 (.65)	1.5 (.76)	1.3 (.62)
Advocacy	2.0 (.69)	1.8 (.67)	1.7 (.71)	1.8 (.61)
Knowledge	1.8 (.77)	1.7 (.77)	1.7 (.71)	1.4 (.78)

2d. Is there a difference between the principal support reported by male versus female special education professionals? A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between gender and importance of principal support. The independent variable was gender (male or female). The dependent variable was the mean of the extent of the six constructs (Emotional, Appraisal, Informational, Instrumental, Advocacy for student with disabilities, and Knowledge of the Individuals with Disabilities). The ANOVA was not statistically significant for any of the constructs: Emotional, $F(1,202) = .19, p < .66$; Appraisal, $F(1, 201) = .29, p < .59$; Informational, $F(1, 201) = .52, p < .47$; Instrumental, $F(1,202) = .06, p < .82$; Advocacy, $F(1, 200) = .65, p < .42$; and Knowledge, $F(1, 198) = .24, p < .63$ (see Table 16).

Table 16

Mean (SD) Ratings of Extent of Principal Support and Gender

Construct	Female $n = 167$	Male $n = 37$
Emotional	2.1 (.77)	2.1 (.80)
Appraisal	1.5 (.79)	1.5 (.64)
Informational	1.4 (.82)	1.3 (.68)
Instrumental	1.5 (.77)	1.5 (.64)
Advocacy	1.9 (.70)	1.8 (.65)
Knowledge	1.7 (.78)	1.7 (.67)

Research Question 3

To what extent do special education professionals receive support in the areas that they rate as most important?

Paired sample *t* tests were conducted to evaluate the difference between special education professionals' ratings of the Importance of forms of principal support versus the Extent to which they receive those forms of support from the principal. For all constructs, there was a statistically significant difference between the ratings of Importance and Extent of principal support.

The paired *t* test between Emotional Importance ($M = 2.7$, $SD = .26$) and Emotional Extent ($M = 2.1$, $SD = .77$) was statistically significant, $t_{(215)} = 10.31$, $p < .001$. This means that the importance of Emotional support was statistically higher than the mean for Emotional Extent.

The paired *t* test between Appraisal Importance ($M = 2.2$, $SD = .51$) and Appraisal Extent ($M = 1.6$, $SD = .76$) was statistically significant, $t_{(214)} = 12.23$, $p < .001$. This means that the importance of Appraisal support was statistically higher than the mean for Appraisal Extent.

The paired *t* test between Informational Importance ($M = 2.0$, $SD = .56$) and Informational Extent ($M = 1.4$, $SD = .80$) was statistically significant, $t_{(214)} = 11.08$, $p < .001$. This means that the importance of Informational support was statistically higher than the mean for Informational Extent.

The paired *t* test between Instrumental Importance ($M = 2.2$, $SD = .45$) and Instrumental Extent ($M = 1.5$, $SD = .73$) was statistically significant, $t_{(211)} = 13.90$, $p < .001$. This means that the importance of Instrumental support was statistically higher than the mean for Instrumental Extent.

The paired *t* test between Advocacy Importance ($M = 2.5$, $SD = .36$) and Advocacy Extent ($M = 1.8$, $SD = .69$) was statistically significant, $t_{(213)} = 14.59$, $p < .001$. This means that the importance of Advocacy support was statistically higher than the mean for Advocacy Extent.

The paired *t* test between Knowledge Importance ($M = 2.6$, $SD = .39$) and Knowledge Extent ($M = 1.7$, $SD = .76$) was statistically significant, $t_{(210)} = 15.54$, $p < .001$. This means that the importance of Knowledge support was statistically higher than the mean for Knowledge Extent (see Table 17).

For each construct, special education professionals said it was "moderately" to "very important", but for 5 of the constructs (Appraisal, Informational, Instrumental, Advocacy and Knowledge), they received it from "small" to "some extent." Special education professionals reported that they received Emotional support slightly higher than to "some extent."

Table 17

Mean (SD) Ratings of Importance and Extent of Principal Support

Construct	Importance	Extent	*t*	*df*	Differences in Importance Versus Extent
Emotional	2.7 (.26)	2.1 (.77)	215	10.31	$p < .001$
Appraisal	2.2 (.51)	1.6 (.76)	214	12.23	$p < .001$
Informational	2.0 (.56)	1.4 (.80)	214	11.08	$p < .001$
Instrumental	2.2 (.45)	1.5 (.73)	211	13.90	$p < .001$
Advocacy	2.5 (.36)	1.8 (.69)	213	14.59	$p < .001$
Knowledge	2.6 (.39)	1.7 (.76)	210	15.54	$p < .001$

To answer the following subset of research questions, two-way analysis of variances were conducted. The two independent variables in this analysis were (a) Categories of Experience, Profession, School Level or Gender and (b) Mean (SD) ratings of the importance of principal support. The dependent variable was the mean (SD) ratings of the extent of principal support received

3a. Is there a difference between the extent that beginning versus experienced special education professionals receive support important to them?

A two-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the effects of both Experience and Importance on the Extent of principal support. Results of the two-way ANOVA indicated that there was no statistically significant main effect for any of the six constructs of principal support. This means that experience did not have a role in influencing respondents' views on the extent that they receive support important to them (see Table 19).

Table 19

Analysis of Variance for Experience and Importance/Extent

Construct	*df*	*F*	Significance
Emotional	1, 210	1.06	*ns*, $p = .40$
Appraisal	1, 209	.84	*ns*, $p = .58$
Informational	1, 209	.87	*ns*, $p = .56$
Instrumental	1, 206	1.08	*ns*, $p = .38$
Advocacy	1, 208	1.05	*ns*, $p = .40$
Knowledge	1, 206	1.15	*ns*, $p = .33$

3b. Is there a difference between the extent that the five categories of special education professionals receive support important to them?

A two-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the effects of both Profession and Importance on the Extent of principal support. Results of the two-way ANOVA indicated that there was no statistically significant main effect for any of the six constructs of principal support. This means that profession did not have a role in influencing respondents' views on the extent that they receive support important to them (see Table 20)

Table 20

Analysis of Variance for Profession and Importance/Extent

Construct	*df*	*F*	Significance
Emotional	4, 216	.86	*ns*, $p = .70$
Appraisal	4, 214	.77	*ns*, $p = .84$
Informational	4, 215	1.13	*ns*, $p = .29$
Instrumental	4, 216	.94	*ns*, $p = .59$
Advocacy	4, 208	1.05	*ns*, $p = .40$
Knowledge	4, 206	1.15	*ns*, $p = .33$

3c. Is there a difference between the extent that special education professionals in different school levels receive support important to them?

A two-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the effects of both School Level and Importance on the Extent of principal support. Results of the two-way ANOVA indicated that there was no statistically significant main effect for any of the six constructs of principal support. This means that school level did not have a role in influencing respondents' views on the extent that they receive support important to them (see Table 21).

3d. Is there a difference between the extent that female versus male special education professionals receive support important to them?

A two-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the effects of both Gender and Importance on the Extent of principal support. Results of the two-way ANOVA indicated that there was no statistically significant main effect for

any of the six constructs of principal support. This means that gender did not have a role in influencing respondents' views on the extent that they receive support important to them (see Table 22).

Table 21

Analysis of Variance for School Level and Importance/Extent

Construct	*df*	*F*	Significance
Emotional	3,215	.88	*ns*, $p = .65$
Appraisal	3,214	.94	ns, $p = .57$
Informational	3,214	.80	*ns*, $p = .79$
Instrumental	3,214	.61	*ns*, $p = .97$
Advocacy	3,213	.80	*ns*, $p = .77$
Knowledge	3,210	.74	*ns*, $p = .85$

Table 22

Analysis of Variance for Gender and Importance/Extent

Construct	*df*	*F*	Significance
Emotional	1, 204	.80	*ns*, $p = .06$
Appraisal	1, 203	.87	*ns*, $p = .61$
Informational	1, 203	.58	*ns*, $p = .89$
Instrumental	1, 200	1.35	*ns*, $p = .18$
Advocacy	1, 202	.69	ns, $p = .42$
Knowledge	1, 200	.59	ns, $p = .80$

Overall, all respondents reported that they did not receive support at a level that matches its importance to them. There were no significant differences between males and females.

Summary of Results for Each Group

Total Group

The findings of this study reveal that as a group, special education professionals rank Emotional support as the most important dimension of principal support, followed by Knowledge of Special Education law, Advocacy for students with disabilities, Instrumental, Appraisal and Informational (Research question 1). As a group, special education professionals indicate that they receive Emotional support the most, followed by Advocacy for students with disabilities, Knowledge of Special Education law, Appraisal, Instrumental and Informational (Research question 2). For all six constructs of principal support, there was a significant difference between the rating of Importance of this support, as compared to the Extent that special education professionals perceive that they actually receive it in their work site (Research question 3).

Experience

There was no statistical difference between the mean rating of Importance of beginning (less than 3 years) and their more experienced peers (3 years or more) in the types of principal support, except in the construct of Advocacy. Experienced teachers rated the importance of this attribute as more important than did beginning teachers (Research question 1).

Similarly, there was no statistical difference between the mean rating of Extent between beginning and experienced special education professionals, except for the construct of Advocacy, with experienced teachers indicating that they received more Advocacy principal support than did beginning teachers (Research question 2).

There was no statistical difference of impact on experience and the mean rating of Importance versus Extent of principal support that they received (Research question 3).

Professional Group

There was a statistical difference between the mean rating of Importance in the types of principal support in all constructs, except for the construct of Knowledge. In the construct of Emotional support, Teachers - Academic rated this attribute higher than Speech-Language Pathologists. In the construct of Appraisal, Teachers – Academic and Teachers – Behavior ranked this type of principal support higher than Psychologists and Speech-Language Pathologists. In the construct of Information, Teachers – Academic rated this attribute higher than Psychologists, Speech-Language Pathologists and Teachers – LifeSkills. In the construct of Instrumental, Teachers- Academic rating this attribute higher than Psychologists. In the area of Advocacy, Teachers – Life Skills ranked this construct lower than Psychologists, Speech-Language Pathologists and Teachers – Behavior.

In addition, Teachers – Academic ranked the construct lower than Psychologists (Research question 1).

There was no statistical difference within the rating of Extent of principal support received between the 5 professional groups (Research question 2).

Similarly, there was no statistical difference of impact of professional group and Importance versus the Extent of principal support that they received (Research question 3).

School Level

There was no statistical difference in the mean rating of Importance in the types of principal support between special education professionals in different school levels, except in the construct of Advocacy. Special education professionals in an Elementary school level ranked Advocacy higher than those in a High School setting (Research question 1).

There was no statistical difference within the rating of Extent of principal support received between special education professionals in different school levels (Research question 2).

There was no statistical difference of impact on school levels and the rating of Importance versus Extent of principal support that they received (Research question 3).

Gender

There was no statistical difference between the mean rating of Importance between females and males in the types of principal support, except in the construct of Advocacy. Female special education professionals rated the importance of this attribute as more important than did male special education professionals (Research question 1).

There was no statistical difference within the rating of Extent of principal support received between female and male special education professionals (Research question 2).

There was no statistical difference of impact on gender and the rating of Importance versus Extent of principal support that they received (Research question 3).

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The first purpose of this study was to explore how contemporary special education professionals view aspects of principal support by updating an existing model of administrative support used in prior research. The second purpose was to determine what types of principal support are deemed as most important to special education professionals and to what extent they perceived this support was occurring in their work environment. The third purpose was to explore whether different subsets of the respondents (based on experience, school level, profession or gender) varied in their perception of the importance of principal support and the extent to which they received it. Finally, the overarching purpose of this research is to contribute to the ongoing study of how to retain special education professionals by providing additional information on the importance of various types of principal support to special education professionals.

In this chapter, the findings that address each purpose of the study are examined. Also included in the discussion is the comparison of the findings to previous research, as well as possible interpretations of the results. In addition, factors that surround principal support and special education professionals are explored. Finally, the limitations of the research and suggestions for future research are presented.

Purpose 1:

An updated theoretical model of administrative support for contemporary special education professionals

This research was based on a theoretical model of administrative support created by House (1981). House postulated that administrative support could be classified into four major categories: Emotional, Appraisal, Instrumental and Informational (p. 32), and that these four categories provide a comprehensive description of the type of support most commonly found in work sites. It was this theoretical framework of principal support used in the study by Littrell (1992) of the perception of principal support by special education and general teachers.

However, the researcher believed that this model was not comprehensive enough to capture the type of principal support that contemporary special education professionals value. As a result, two additional types of principal support were created for the survey to assess whether or not this belief was in fact valid. Specifically, the additional types of principal support were *Knowledge of Individuals with Disabilities Act* and *Advocacy for students with disabilities*.

The inclusion of these two new constructs of principal support appears to be a useful revision of the House (1981) model of administrative support. In both Littrell's (1992) and this study, emotional support was the most important form of principal support. But in this study, the two new constructs (Knowledge of IDEA and Advocacy for students with disabilities) were second and third in importance to

special education professionals. Thus, the newly revised model and associated survey may be useful in subsequent research in this area.

Purpose 2:

Exploring whether special education professionals receive the forms of principal support most important to them

Results from this study suggest that special education professionals do not believe they receive principal support to the extent that they perceive it as being important. This is similar to the study completed by Littrell (1992) who surveyed both general and special education teachers and determined that the extent of principal support was lower than the importance placed on the support. Both this study and Littrell's also found that special education professionals rated Emotional support as the highest in both importance and the extent to which it is received from the principal. Results of ratings of the importance and extent of principal support are discussed below, as well as possible explanations of the findings.

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of attributes/behaviors of principal support as Not Important (0), Minimally Important (1), Moderately Important (2) or Very Important (3). Each attribute/behavior was classified into six constructs of principal support (Emotional, Appraisal, Informational, Instrumental, Advocacy for students with disabilities and Knowledge of IDEA. The overall ratings for all the six constructs indicated that special education professionals believed that all types of principal support were between moderately and very

important. Although the differences between the mean ratings for each of the constructs were small, special education professionals ranked the six constructs of principal support in the following order for importance: Emotional, Knowledge of IDEA, Advocacy for students with disabilities, Instrumental, Appraisal and Informational.

Respondents also ranked the extent to which their principal provided them various types of support as No Extent (0), Small Extent (1), Some Extent (2) or Great Extent (3). Although principal support in all the six areas was important to special education professionals, they reported receiving such support somewhere between a small extent and to some extent for Knowledge of IDEA, Advocacy for Students with Disabilities, Instrumental, Appraisal and Informational. Emotional support was the only type reported to be received between some extent and a great extent, which is consistent with Littrell's (1992) findings.

Findings for each of the six constructs of support will be interpreted in light of previous research.

Emotional Support

Results of the study indicate that Emotional support ($M = 2.7$, $SD = .26$) is the area that special education professionals rate as most important from principals. This corroborates the results of Littrell (1992), who also found that special and general education teachers rated Emotional support as most important. Similarly, Richards (2003) surveyed 100 general education teachers to determine what

specific principal behaviors were most important in encouraging them in the work place. From this, she created subscales and found that behaviors that suggested emotional support from principals were ranked the highest. House (1981) stated that emotional support occurs when principals show teachers that they are esteemed, trusted professionals and worthy of concern by such practices as maintaining open communication, showing appreciation, taking an interest in teachers' work, and considering teachers' ideas. We can surmise that these characteristics are also valued by respondents in this study by examining individual survey items. The following Emotional attribute/behaviors were ranked highly: Is honest and straightforward with the staff ($M = 3.0$, SD = .18); Allows me input into decisions that affect me ($M = 2.9$, $SD = .31$); Is easy to approach ($M = 2.9$, $SD =$ 37); Supports me on decisions ($M = 2.8$, $SD = .37$); and Shows genuine concern for my program and students ($M = 2.8$, $SD = .38$).

Special education professionals also reported that they received comparatively more Emotional support than other types of support ($M = 2.1$, $SD =$ .77), between some extent (2) and great extent (3). Thus, special education professionals are supported in the ways that are most important to them. Littrell (1992) found that general and special education teachers in her study also believed that principals provided Emotional support more frequently than other types of support.

Knowledge of IDEA

The findings support the researcher's proposal that Knowledge of IDEA ($M = 2.6$, $SD = .39$) is a valued form of principal support for special education professionals as this construct was rated second in importance. The top rated attribute/behavior in this area was: *Follows IDEA procedures when disciplining students with disabilities* ($M = 2.8$, $SD = .22$). This is not surprising given the fact that IDEA provides certain provisions regarding disciplining students with disabilities, particularly when an expulsion is a possibility. As principals are typically the people in charge of disciplining students, it is essential that they are cognizant of certain provisions. For example, a manifestation determination must be conducted to establish how a student's disability may have impacted the decision-making that in turn led to the student behavior in question.

Special education professionals perceived their principal to exhibit this type of support ($M = 1.7$, $SD = .76$) somewhere between to a small extent (1) and some extent (2). One reason for this may be that principals are unable to provide this support to a great level as they themselves do not have a comprehensive knowledge of IDEA. Billingsley (2005) stated that many principals find special education "a daunting task, fraught with legal minefields," particularly in the area of discipline for students with disabilities, accountability, and compliance issues (p. xxi). In a study of new principals, Bateman and Bateman (2001) reported that many of them were unexpectedly "thrust into situations in which they must be the final arbiter on

matters related to issues such as IEP's 504 decisions, due process hearings, and IDEA compliance" (p. 1).

Advocacy for Students with Disabilities

Advocacy for students with disabilities ($M = 2.5$, $SD = .36$) was rated third in importance. The researcher included this construct in the survey as a result of the literature review suggesting that special education professionals consider this a very important facet of principal support. Three of the ten highest ranked individual attribute/behaviors of the 60 item scale were related to Advocacy for students with disabilities: *Accepts all children as part of the school community* ($M = 2.9$, $SD = .32$), *Believes that all children can learn* ($M = 2.9$, $SD = .26$) and *Provides a welcoming environment for all students* ($M = 2.8$, $SD = .23$). Several studies suggest that special education professionals are often discouraged by ambivalent or negative attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities into the mainstream of the school (Carter & Scruggs, 2001; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Smith & Smith, 2000). Related to this is research that demonstrates that principals play a critical role in setting a positive tone that ensures that students with disabilities are included in the school (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Gersten et al., 2001) so it is not surprising that special education professionals rated this moderately (2) to very important (3).

Special education professionals perceived their principal to exhibit Advocacy support ($M = 1.8$, $SD = .69$) somewhere between to a small extent (1) and

some extent (2). This may be for myriad of reasons, some of which will be discussed in more detail in the following section that looks at challenges for principals. One possibility may be that principals feel unprepared for the expectations to make their schools inclusive to students of all abilities (Doyle, 2001). Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) surveyed 115 principals about their knowledge and attitudes toward inclusion. They determined that the majority did not feel prepared to implement the inclusion of students with disabilities into the mainstream of the school. A similar study of more than 400 elementary principals, conducted by Praisner (2003) found that only one in five principals' attitudes toward including students with disabilities were positive, while most were uncertain. DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) found that "principals identified help and information about implementing successful special education as their greatest need" (p. 48). If principals are experiencing some ambiguity and uncertainty about the implementation of special education programs, it makes sense that they may not be able to advocate for students with disabilities to a great extent.

Instrumental Support

Instrumental support refers to providing materials, space and resources, ensuring adequate time for teaching and nonteaching duties and helping with managerial-type concerns (House, 1981). Instrumental principal support ($M = 2.2$, $SD = .45$) was ranked fourth in importance, followed closely by Appraisal ($M =$

2.2, *SD* = .38). Both types of support were ranked between moderately and very important.

Several studies indicate that special education professionals believe that they receive fewer resources, such as paper and computers than are afforded to general education teachers (Brownell, Sindelar, Bishop, Langley, & Seo, 2002; Fortune & Landaker, 2003; Griffin et al., 2003). Therefore, a principal's support in ensuring that basic needs are met is considered important to a special education professional.

Special education professionals reported a mean rating of 1.5 (*SD* = .73) for the extent to which they received Instrumental support. This places it somewhere between a small extent and some extent. One explanation may be that there is confusion in the school district as to the building versus the central office's responsibility in providing resources to special education professionals. This role ambiguity/conflict is discussed in more depth in a later section.

Appraisal Support

Appraisal support consists of principals providing feedback on teacher's performance, information about what constitutes effective teaching and clear guidelines regarding job responsibilities. Although a literature review did not indicate specific information on appraisal as it relates specifically to special education professionals, there is some research about the importance of appraisal support for teachers in general. For example, Charlotte Advocates for Education

(2004) studied the traits of principals who had been most successful in retaining teachers while continually improving student achievement. One of the characteristics common to this group of principals was that they provided continual and constructive feedback to their teachers. Blasé and Blasé (2000) surveyed more than 800 teachers as to what characteristics they valued in principals. One consistent attribute was that effective principals "hold up a mirror, serve as another set of eyes, and are critical friends" to teachers. Feedback focuses on observed classroom behavior, is specific, expresses caring and interest, provides praise, is problem solving, responds to concerns about students, and stresses the principal's availability for follow-up talk" (p. 135).

Special education professional reported a mean rating of 1.6 (SD = .76) for the extent to which they received Appraisal support. This places it somewhere between a small extent and some extent. This may be attributed to the fact that most principals were originally general education teachers (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003), so that providing feedback to special education professionals may be more difficult due to a lack of familiarity of their roles and responsibilities. In addition, the task of evaluating special education professionals has shifted back and forth between principals and special education administrators throughout the years in this district. For example, some psychologists, which accounted for 22% of the participants, along with speech-language pathologists (also 22% of the respondents) were being supervised by special education administrators at the time

of this survey. It is noteworthy that the ratings of the extent of Appraisal support from principal support were ranked lowest amongst these two groups of special education professionals.

Informational Support

Whereas Emotional support was rated the highest in importance, the lowest ranked construct of principal support was Informational ($M = 2.0$, $SD = .55$), which means that special education professionals rate it as moderately important. Littrell (1992) also found that general and special education teachers rated Informational support as least important. One explanation for the current findings may be that the majority of the participants had 3 or more years of experience (91%) versus beginning teachers (9%). As a result, the more experienced special education professionals may feel that at this stage of their career they need relatively less information support from their principal. Another possibility suggested by Fullan (2001) is that teachers may view informational support negatively if it implies that they should alter their ways of thinking and teaching. Also, individual items, such as *Provides information on up- to- date techniques* and *Provides knowledge of current legal policies and administrative regulations* were rated lower than other items, which may be because techniques and policies are generated from the central special education office or from state or federal agencies that govern special education.

Special education professionals perceived their principal to exhibit Informational support ($M = 1.4$, $SD = .79$) somewhere between to a small extent and some extent. As noted above, this may be because the information flow in school districts is set up that much of the information needed by special education professionals comes from outside the building.

In the next section, the importance and extent of principal support will be examined for subsets of participants, including experience, profession, school level and gender.

Purpose 3:

Exploring whether subsets (experience, school level, profession or gender) varied in their ratings of importance and extent of principal support.

Experience

For the most part, experience had little effect on how special education professionals rated both importance and extent of principal support. The one significant difference was that experienced (3 years of more) special education professionals perceived Advocacy support as being more important, in addition to receiving it more from principals than did their beginning peers. One explanation may be that beginning teachers are often in the survival mode as they learn the complexities of their new profession, and have had fewer experiences in their careers that warranted advocacy support from principals. Veeman (1984) analyzed 83 studies to identify what beginning general education teachers report as the most

challenging issues within their first 3 years. The eight most serious problems that new teachers reported in order of importance were as follows: "classroom discipline, motivating pupils, dealing with individual differences, assessing pupils' work, relations with parents, organization of class work, insufficient materials and supplies, and dealing with problems of individual pupils" (p. 52). Experienced special education professionals, on the other hand, may have experienced situations such as general education teachers who are resistant to including students with disabilities, and recognize the importance of having principals who advocate for the students.

School Level

As a whole, the school level (elementary, middle, high school or other) of the special education professional did not affect their perception of the importance or the extent of principal support.

Special education professionals in elementary settings did rank Advocacy as more important that did their peers at high schools. One possible explanation may be that it is primarily the role of school counselors in the high schools of this study who place students with disabilities into classes rather than the principals. This differs from elementary schools where principals often choose in which classroom to place students with disabilities. A survey by Lust (2005) also found that high school principals were less involved in the education of students with disabilities than principals at any other levels.

Gender

Male and female special education professionals have similar views of both the importance and extent of principal support. The only exception was in the area of Advocacy, which females ranked statistically higher in importance than males. The researcher was unable to find research that may explain for this difference.

Profession

Respondents' profession (Psychologist, Speech-Language Pathologist, Teacher – Academic, Teacher – Behavior and Teacher – Life Skills) did have some influence on their ranking of the importance of principal support. One general difference was that Teachers in Academic contexts rated the importance of Emotional support, Appraisal support, and Instrumental support higher than Speech-language pathologists and Psychologists. A possible reason for this is that Teachers in Academic settings may have more contact with individual principals as they are almost exclusively housed in one school, as opposed to Speech-language pathologists and Psychologists who may be at two or three sites. In addition, Speech-language pathologists and Psychologists in the district may look more toward the central special education office for support, such as Appraisal (as many are supervised by special education administrators) and Instrumental (as many supplies, such as assessment tools are provided by the special education office). Profession did not have an impact on individual's perception of the extent of the principal support received.

Limitations of the Research

One of the limitations of this study is the use of quantitative research only for something as complex as the relationships between principals and special education professionals. The advantage of using a quantitative study was that the researcher was able to gather information from a large number of special education professionals in order to generate numerical data to describe opinions. Information gathered from this survey contributes to the body of knowledge of what special education professionals value in principal support and the extent to which it's happening in their schools. However, a mixed-method design that included qualitative information may have provided a more complete picture of this subject. Creswell (2002) stated that "while quantitative research focuses on description and explanation, qualitative research examines a research problem in which the inquirer explores and seeks to understand a central phenomenon" (p. 52). By adding a qualitative component to the study, it would have been possible to also study "different social realities that individuals in a social situation construct as they participate in it" (Gall et al. 1999, p. 14). Marshall and Rossman (1999) argued that the "objective scientist, by coding the social world into operational variables, destroys valuable data by imposing her world on the subjects"(p. 57). This means that special education professionals would be able to provide information outside the confines of a set instrument. Perhaps, they may add additional

attributes/behaviors of principal support that they deem equally or more important than the ones set up by the researcher.

Another possible limitation of the study is that the researcher is an administrator in special education. To ensure anonymity, the researcher excluded information that would identify specific individuals. However, the fact that a special education administrator was seeking information about a principal may have impacted respondents' decision to participate in the study or influenced how they answered questions.

Similar to this, participation was voluntary and the return rate of the survey was 59.6%. This leads one to question who were the non-participants? Possibly, it was the special education professionals who felt that principals provided ample support and therefore they were not interested in responding.

Finally, the findings of this research are only representative of one school district, so may not be generalized to all special education professionals and principals. Other school districts may have different service delivery models for special education, so that the relationships between principals and special education professionals may be impacted accordingly.

Future Research

An important voice that is missing in this study is the principal's. Future research should examine principal's viewpoint, particularly as it relates to the type of support they believe they are providing to their staff. In addition, what

challenges do they face when it comes to providing support? For example, the number one attribute/behavior valued by special education professionals was *Is honest and straightforward with the staff.* However, would principals purport that this attribute/behavior is as simple as it appears to be? Building leaders may not be able to always be completely upfront with staff due to confidentiality issues, constraints with unions or due to the fact that their superiors are not always honest and straightforward with them! Related to this is the way that school districts structure the provision of special education services. Would systemic structural changes in the way that special education resources and services are delivered allow for building principals to create more inclusive school communities?

Secondly, as discussed in the previous section, research suggests that many principals lack the course work and field experience needed to create learning environments that emphasize academic success for students with disabilities. Monteith (2000) found a positive correlation between a principal's knowledge of special education and the amount of time involved in the special education program in their school. This was similar to a study by Praisner (2003) who found that principals who had more credit hours and professional development experiences in special education had a more positive attitude toward the education of students with disabilities. One could surmise that the working environment of special education professionals would also be affirmatively impacted.

Next, findings from research primarily conducted in the 1990s indicated that principals were often frustrated by the role ambiguity between themselves and the special education administrator. Has the role delineations between principals and special education administrators become clearer in contemporary times, or is it still an issue to be further studied?

Finally, an important rationale for this study was to examine the factors that contribute to chronic attrition of special education professionals. One facet of this conundrum is the relationship between principals and special education professionals. This research specifically focused on the importance and extent of principal support, as this was identified as one of the most important elements of jobs satisfaction for special education professionals. However, work site conditions are multi-faceted, so future research should also examine the other factors that contribute to attrition and conversely, retention of special education professionals.

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APPENDIX A

PROPOSED QUESTIONS FOR SURVEY

Proposed questions for survey

ADVOCACY

1. Provides a welcoming environment for all students
2. Believes that all children can learn.
3. Accepts all children as part of the school community
4. Believes that teachers are responsible for all students' learning
5. Advocates for full educational opportunities for all students
6. Fosters collaborative relationships between general education teachers and special education professionals
7. Encourages staff professional development that targets instruction for students of all abilities
8. Encourages integration of students with disabilities in non-academic events such as lunch, assemblies, special events
9. Fosters a sense of community for students with disabilities
10. Ensures that students with disabilities have appropriate classroom materials
11. Advocates for pre-referral interventions
12. Regularly visits special education classroom
13. Provides ideas for instructing students with disabilities
14. Encourages collaboration and co-teaching amongst teachers
15. Ensures that special education professionals have classroom environments on par with general educators
16. Participates in the design of the special education program of the school

KNOWLEDGE OF IDEA

17. Participates in pre-referral meetings (e.g. Building Screening Committees)

18. Designs schedules that allows for students with disabilities to have access to general education classes

19. Ensures that general education teachers participate in IEP meetings

20. Ensures that staff implements accommodations and modifications

21. Facilitates the development of the IEP

22. Designs schedules that allows collaboration between general education and special education teachers

23. Ensures appropriate assessments of students with disabilities

24. Ensures access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities

25. Ensures that students with disabilities have appropriate technological supplies

26. Has full knowledge of the referral-to-placement process

27. Has knowledge of timelines for complying with the legal requirements of IDEA

28. Understands the continuum of placement opportunities for students with disabilities

29. Participates in contentious parent meetings

30. Partners with parent in the implementation of the student's IEP

31. Follows IDEA procedures when disciplining students with disabilities

APPENDIX B

RATING SCALE FOR PILOT SURVEY

Rating scale for pilot survey

ADVOCACY

1. Provides a welcoming environment for all students
   Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
   Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
   How important is this attribute in a school principal?
   Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

2. Believes that all children can learn.
   Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
   Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
   How important is this attribute in a school principal?
   Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

3. Accepts all children as part of the school community
   Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
   Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
   How important is this attribute in a school principal?
   Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

4. Believes that teachers are responsible for all students' learning
   Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
   Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
   How important is this attribute in a school principal?
   Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

5. Advocates for full educational opportunities for all students
   Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
   Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
   How important is this attribute in a school principal?
   Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

6. Fosters collaborative relationships between general ed. teachers and special education professionals
   Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
   Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
   How important is this attribute in a school principal?
   Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

7. Encourages staff professional development that targets instruction for students of all abilities
   Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
   Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
   How important is this attribute in a school principal?
   Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

8. Encourages integration of students with disabilities in non-academic events such as lunch, assemblies, special events
   Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
   Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
   How important is this attribute in a school principal?
   Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

9. Fosters a sense of community for students with disabilities
   Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
   Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
   How important is this attribute in a school principal?
   Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

10. Ensures that students with disabilities have appropriate classroom materials
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

11. Advocates for pre-referral interventions
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

12. Regularly visits special education classroom
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

13. Provides ideas for instructing students with disabilities
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

14. Encourages collaboration and co-teaching amongst teachers
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

15. Ensures that special education professionals have classroom environments on par with general educators
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

16. Participates in the design of the special education program of the school
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

KNOWLEDGE OF IDEA

17. Participates in pre-referral meetings (e.g. Building Screening Committees)
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

18. Designs schedules that allows for students with disabilities to have access to general education classes
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

19. Ensures that general education teachers participate in IEP meetings
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

20. Ensures that staff implements accommodations and modifications
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

21. Facilitates the development of the IEP
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

22. Designs schedules that allows collaboration between general education and special education teachers
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

23. Ensures appropriate assessments of students with disabilities
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

24. Ensures access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

25. Ensures that students with disabilities have appropriate technological supplies
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

26. Has full knowledge of the referral-to-placement process
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

27. Has knowledge of timelines for complying with the legal requirements of IDEA
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

28. Understands the continuum of placement opportunities for students with disabilities
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

29. Participates in contentious parent meetings
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

30. Partners with parent in the implementation of the student's IEP
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

31. Follows IDEA procedures when disciplining students with disabilities
    Is the sentence clear? Yes / No
    Does the sentence describe Advocacy? Yes / No
    How important is this attribute in a school principal?
    Not important Minimally Moderately Very Important

APPENDIX C

RESULTS OF PILOT SURVEY

Results of Pilot Survey

ADVOCACY FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:	Clarity (Yes)	Accuracy (Yes)	Importance (Mean)
1. Provides a welcoming environment for all students	16	15	3
2. Believes that all children can learn	16	16	3
3. Accepts all children as part of the school community	16	16	3
4. Believes that teachers are responsible for all students' learning	13	12	3
5. Advocates for full educational opportunities for all students	11	15	2.9
6. Fosters collaborative relationships between general education and special education professionals	15	15	2.88
7. Encourages staff professional development that targets instruction for students of all abilities	16	16	2.88
8. Encourages integration of students with disabilities in non-academic events such as lunch, assemblies, special events	16	14	2.56
9. Advocates for pre-referral interventions	15	16	2.81
10. Regularly visits special education classrooms	16	14	2.69
11. Provides ideas for instructing students with disabilities	16	14	2.19
More important that teachers know this and principals support them			
Not sure principals know what's best for students with Disabilities			
If she/he know what they are talking about			
12. Encourages collaboration/co-teaching amongst Teachers	15	13	2.63
All teachers? (do all want to co-teach?)			
Maybe – depends on reason for co-teaching			
Encourages (AND SUPPORTS)			

13. Ensures that special education professionals have classroom environments on par with general Educators	13	15	2.93
Define 'on par'			
As nice as? With adequate materials?			
Do you mean curriculum and materials?			
14. Participates in the design of the special education program of the school	16	16	2.81
KNOWLEDGE OF IDEA			
15. Participates in pre-referral meetings (e.g. Building Screening Committees)	15	14	2.63
16. Designs schedules that allows for students with disabilities to have access to general education classes	16	14	2.88
Not sure if yes/no but necessary			
Possible but not necessarily true			
SPED teachers know students better and need scheduling Input			
17. Ensures that general education teachers participate in IEP meetings	16	16	3.0
18. Ensures that staff implements accommodations an modifications	16	15	3.0
In the IEP?			
19. Facilitates the development and implementation of the IEP	15	13	2.26
It's not being done now and principals have the knowledge of IDEA			
Teachers need to develop, but if principals do not support with schedules, etc. it's harder to implement			
20. Design schedules that allows collaboration between general education and special education professionals	16	13	2.62
21. Ensures appropriate assessments of students with			

disabilities	15	14	2.69
22. Ensures that students with disabilities have appropriate technological materials/supplies	16	15	2.68
Case manager will take on this responsibility			
23. Has full knowledge of the referral to placement process of special education	16	16	2.68
24. Has knowledge of timelines for complying with the legal requirements of IDEA.	16	16	2.62
25. Understands the continuum of placement opportunities for students with disabilities	16	16	2.75
26. Participates in contentious parent meetings	15	11	2.56
27. Follows IDEA procedures when disciplining students with disabilities	16	16	3.0

APPENDIX D

FINAL SURVEY

Principal Support Survey

Profession:

- O Psychologist
- O Speech-Language Pathologist
- O Special Education Teacher:
  - Type of classroom if teacher:
    - O Academic support
    - O Self-Contained Life Skills
    - O Self-Contained Behavior
    - O Self-Contained Communication/Behavior
    - O Other_____(explain)

School:

- O Elementary
- O Middle School
- O High School
- O Other _____(explain)

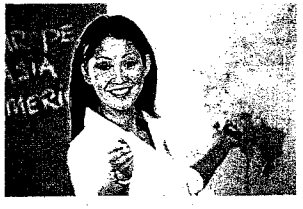
Years of Experience in Special Education:

- O Under 3 years
- O 3 years or more

Gender:

- O Female
- O Male

INSTRUCTIONS:



ATTRIBUTE/BEHAVIOR

How important is this attribute/behavior in a principal? Please mark one bubble.

To what extent does your principal exhibit this attribute/behavior? Please mark one bubble.

	IMPORTANCE				EXTENT			
	Not Important	*Minimally*	*Moderately*	*Very Important*	*No Extent*	*Small Extent*	*Some Extent*	*Great Extent*
	0	*1*	*2*	*3*	*0*	*1*	*2*	*3*
1. Acts friendly toward me.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
2. Is easy to approach.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
3. Gives me undivided attention when I am talking.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
4. Is honest and straightforward with the staff.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
5. Gives me a sense of importance and that I make a difference	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
6. Considers my ideas.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
7. Allows me input into decisions that affect me.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
8. Supports me on decisions.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
9. Shows genuine concern for my program and students.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
10. Notices what I do.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

ATTRIBUTE/BEHAVIOR	*Not Important* 0	*Minimally* 1	*Moderately* 2	*Very Important* 3	*No Extent* 0	*Small Extent* 1	*Some Extent* 2	*Great Extent* 3
11. Shows appreciation for my work.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
12. Treats me as one of the faculty.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
13. Gives clear guidelines regarding job responsibilities.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
14. Provides standards for performance.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
15. Offers constructive feedback after observing my teaching.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
16. Provides frequent feedback about my performance.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
17. Helps me evaluate my needs.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
18. Trusts my judgment in making classroom decisions.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
19. Shows confidence in my actions.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
20. Provides helpful information for improving personal coping skills.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
21. Provides information on up-to-date instructional techniques.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
22. Provides knowledge of current legal policies and administrative regulations.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
23. Provides opportunities for me to attend workshops, attend conferences, and take courses.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
24. Encourages professional growth.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
25. Provides suggestions for me to improve instruction.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
26. Identifies resource personnel to contact for specific problems he or she is unable to solve.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
27. Assists with proper identification of special education students.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
28. Is available to help when needed.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
29. Helps me establish my schedule.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
30. Helps me solve problems and conflicts that occur.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

ATTRIBUTE/BEHAVIOR	Not Important 0	Minimally 1	Moderately 2	Very Important 3	No Extent 0	Small Extent 1	Some Extent 2	Great Extent 3
31. Establishes channels of communication between general and special education teaching and other professionals.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
32. Helps me with classroom discipline problems.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
33. Helps me during parent confrontations. when needed.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
34. Provides time for various nonteaching responsibilities (e.g., IEPs, conferences).	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
35. Provides adequate planning time.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
36. Provides material, space, and resource needs	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
37. Participates in child study/eligibility/IEP meetings and/or parent conferences.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
38. Works with me to plan specific goals and objectives for my program and students.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
39. Provides extra assistance when I become overloaded.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
40. Equally distributes resources and unpopular chores.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
41. Provides a welcoming environment for all students.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
42. Believes that all children can learn.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
43. Accepts all children as part of the school community.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
44. Fosters collaborative relationships between gen. ed and sped professionals.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
45. Encourages staff professional development that targets instruction for students of all abilities.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
46. Encourages integration of students with disabilities in non-academic events such as lunch, assemblies, special events.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
47. Advocates for pre-referral interventions.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

ATTRIBUTE/BEHAVIOR	*Not Important* 0	*Minimally* 1	*Moderately* 2	*Very Important* 3	*No Extent* 0	*Small Extent* 1	*Some Extent* 2	*Great Extent* 3
48. Regularly visits special education classrooms.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
49. Provides ideas for instructing students with disabilities.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
50. Participates in the design of the special education program of the school.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
51. Participates in pre-referral meetings (e.g. Building Screening Committees).	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
52. Designs schedules that allows for students with disabilities to have access to general education classes.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
53. Ensures that general education teachers participate in IEP meetings.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
54. Ensures that staff implements accommodations and modifications.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
55. Ensures appropriate assessments of students with disabilities.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
56. Ensures that students with disabilities have appropriate technological materials/supplies.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
57. Has full knowledge of the referral to placement process of special education.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
58. Has knowledge of timelines for complying with the legal requirements of IDEA.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
59. Understands the continuum of placement opportunities for students with disabilities.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
60. Follows IDEA procedures when disciplining students with disabilities.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

APPENDIX E

COVER LETTER

May 17, 2007

Dear Colleagues;

As both a special education administrator and a doctoral student, I am very interested in ways to encourage special education professionals to remain in their jobs.

Current research indicates that principal support is one of the most important factors in job satisfaction. I am currently conducting a survey to examine what specific elements of principal support are most important to you, and to what extent these exist in your work place.

Please complete the enclosed survey, as I truly value your opinion. It should take approximately 10 – 15 minutes to finish. Responses are COMPLETELY ANONYMOUS, so please do not include your name or the name of the school.

I have enclosed a self-addressed envelope for you to return the survey.

I sincerely thank you for participating in this research.

Lauretta Manning
Special Education Administrator