

Abstract

FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE SCHOOL
ADMINISTRATORS' KNOWLEDGE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW

by

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The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between professional characteristics and training of building level school administrators in Virginia and their knowledge of special education law. The research question was, to what extent and in what manner can school administrators' knowledge of special education law be explained based upon administrative position, school level, number of special education courses, number of school law courses, and experience?

Knowledge of special education law was a total score on a survey instrument developed by Hines (1993) and updated to include eight areas of the 1997 Amendments to IDEA. A second part of the instrument collected information on professional characteristics and training. The survey was mailed to school building administrators throughout Virginia. The subjects in the study were randomly selected from Virginia public K-12 schools. Sampling was stratified by school level and wealth. The data were analyzed using a step-wise regression. Number of special education courses accounted for 4% of the variation in knowledge. Number of school law courses completed also entered into the analysis but had an inverse correlation with knowledge. The average knowledge score for administrators in this study was 18 or 56% correct.

Identification of factors which have the greatest influence on principal knowledge of special education law can be used to plan effective preparation of school building administrators. School building administrators who are knowledgeable of special education law can ensure the protection of the rights of disabled students, build positive relationships within the community, and avoid costly litigation.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Elizabeth, who always celebrated my accomplishments and to my father, Harold, who had to stop his own education to help provide for his younger brothers and sister. He encouraged me over many years as I pursued my education and I am confident that his spirit has seen me reach my goal.

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