

Assistant Principals' Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special
Education Teachers and Programming

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify assistant principals' self-reported levels of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming. "Special education is a federal mandate that is governed by state and local policies. For schools to provide a free and appropriate public education to students with disabilities, school leaders must be competent in order to effectively lead these programs" (Thompson, 2017, p. 46). In Virginia, special education is the highest critical shortage category of the top ten academic disciplines identified in the annual survey and has been since the 2006 published report (Virginia Department of Education, 2020).

This quantitative study, may help to identify strengths and areas for growth for assistant principals in one school division and guide professional learning experiences for administrators moving forward. The study will include a purposeful sample of school based, Pk-12 assistant principals. Participants were invited to complete a three-part electronic survey questionnaire. The survey tool, developed by the researcher, aligned with the Council for Exceptional Children Initial and Advanced Preparedness Standards (2015). Participants provided demographic information, a Likert scale rating of their perceptions of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming, when considering eighteen job related statements, and recommendations for professional learning. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data and identify findings and implications.

Results of the study indicated that assistant principals agree they are prepared to support all areas of special education teachers and programming with the exception of post-secondary transition planning for students with disabilities. Results also indicated that assistant principals with an endorsement in special education agreed at a higher rate that they are prepared to support special education teachers and programming. Assistant principals identified professional learning needs in the areas of post-secondary transition opportunities for students with disabilities, support in understanding and implementing new law and policy related to special education, and support in the area of development of new programs, supports and services for

students with disabilities. Findings and related implications were discussed and recommendations for future research were identified.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate assistant principals' the self-reported preparedness to support special education teachers and programming. The study results identify responsibilities related to special education and relevant topic areas where assistant principals are prepared to support teachers and programming as well as areas where they do not agree they are prepared. The study also identifies areas where participants report they need additional professional learning opportunities, provided by the school division and outside of the school division.

This study, using quantitative methodology, included a purposeful sample of school based, Pk-12 assistant principals. The research questions guiding the study were: (1) What are the self-reported perceptions of assistant principals' levels of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming? (2) What professional learning do assistant principals report that they need to increase their levels of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming? Participants were invited to complete a three-part electronic survey questionnaire. The survey tool was developed based on the Council for Exceptional Children Initial and Advanced Preparedness Standards (2015). Participants provided demographic information, a Likert scale ratings, and recommendations for professional learning. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data.

Results of the study indicated that assistant principals agree they are prepared to support all areas of special education teachers and programming with the exception of post-secondary transition planning for students with disabilities. Results also indicated that assistant principals with an endorsement in special education agreed at a higher rate that they are prepared to support special education teachers and programming. Assistant principals identified professional learning needs in the areas of post-secondary transition opportunities for students with disabilities, support in understanding and implementing new law and policy related to special education, and support in the area of development of new programs, supports and services for

students with disabilities. Findings and related implications were discussed and recommendations for future research were identified.

Dedication

To my family but especially my two little tinies, Aubrey and Kenzie.

Thank you for dance parties, the very necessary snuggles and kisses during this journey, and for loving me unconditionally. I hope that I can be an example for you of what is possible when we have the love and support of family. I cannot wait to see you both conquer the world!

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
General Audience Abstract.....	iv
Dedication.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Chapter 1 The Problem.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Overview of the Study and Statement of Purpose.....	1
Historical Perspective.....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Significance and Justification of the Study.....	3
Research Questions.....	3
Definition of Terms.....	4
Limitations of Study.....	5
Delimitations.....	6
Organization of the Study.....	6
Chapter 2 Review of Literature.....	7
Attrition of Special Education Teachers.....	7
Search Process.....	8
Background.....	8
Educational Leadership.....	9
Principal Preparation Programming.....	10
Responsibilities of Special Education Administrators.....	11
Competencies for School Administrators.....	14
Challenges for Special Education Teachers.....	16
Attrition and Retention of Special Education Teachers.....	18
Themes of Special Education Teacher Attrition.....	19
Induction Programs and Support for Teachers with Five or Fewer Years' Experience.....	22
Lack of Support Structures and Professional Development for Special Education Teachers ..	23
Analysis of Research.....	26
Summary.....	27
Chapter 3 Methodology.....	29

Methodology	29
Purpose of the Study	29
Research Design and Justification.....	29
Research Questions	30
Site and Sample Selection.....	30
Data Collection and Timeframe	30
Instrument Design	31
Instrument Validation.....	35
Data Treatment and Management	35
Descriptive Analysis	36
Timeline	36
Methodology Summary.....	36
Chapter 4 Results of the Study.....	38
Purpose of Study Review	38
Descriptive Data Analysis and Respondents.....	38
Identification of Emergent Themes.....	68
Research Question 1	68
Research Question 2	69
Summary	70
Chapter 5 Findings and Implications	71
Summary of Findings	71
Findings.....	71
Finding One.....	71
Finding Two	72
Finding Three	73
Finding Four	74
Implications for Practice	75
Implication One	75
Implication Two	76
Implication Three	77
Implication Four	77
Suggestions for Future Studies.....	78

Summary	79
Personal Reflections	80
References	81
Appendix A Certificate of Completion of the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)	86
Appendix B Virginia Polytechnic Institute and University Institutional Board Review Permission to Conduct Study.....	87
Appendix C Approval letter from school division to conduct a research study	88
Appendix D Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study.....	89
Appendix E Participant Recruitment Email.....	91
Appendix F Survey Tool, housed in Qualtrics.....	92

List of Figures

Figure 1 *Influence on Preparedness of Administrators to Support Special Education Teachers and Targeted Professional Development on the Retention of Teachers and Student Achievement 4*

List of Tables

Table 1 <i>Competencies for Principals and Special Education Administrators</i>	14
Table 2 <i>Reasons Cited in Research for Special Education Teachers Attrition</i>	21
Table 3 <i>Survey Participant Demographic Information</i>	32
Table 4 <i>Assistant Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming</i>	33
Table 5 <i>Assistant Principals Self-Reported Areas of Need for Professional Learning</i>	35
Table 6 <i>Demographic Characteristics of Participants (n=38)</i>	39
Table 7 <i>License and Mean Self-Reported Perceptions of Participants (N=38)</i>	40
Table 8 <i>Assistant Principals’ Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming (Likert Statement Ratings Items 1-3)</i>	42
Table 9 <i>Descriptive Statistics for Assistant Principals’ Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming</i>	43
Table 10 <i>Assistant Principals’ Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming (.....</i>	44
<i>Likert Statement Ratings Items 4-6)</i>	44
Table 11 <i>Descriptive Statistics for Assistant Principals’ Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming</i>	46
Table 12 <i>Assistant Principals’ Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming (Likert Statement Ratings Items 7-9)</i>	47
Table 13 <i>Descriptive Statistics for Assistant Principals’ Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming, Items 7-9</i>	48
Table 14 <i>Assistant Principals’ Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming (Likert Statement Ratings 10-12)</i>	50
Table 15 <i>Descriptive Statistics for Assistant Principals’ Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming</i>	51
Table 16 <i>Assistant Principals’ Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming (Likert Statement Ratings Items 13-15)</i>	53
Table 17 <i>Descriptive Statistics for Assistant Principals’ Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming</i>	54
Table 18 <i>Assistant Principals’ Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming (Likert Statement Ratings Items 16-18)</i>	55
Table 19 <i>Descriptive Statistics for Assistant Principals’ Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming</i>	57
Table 20 <i>Individual Participant Data including demographics, individual item response, mean response and subgroup response</i>	58

Table 21 <i>Survey Items in order of agreeability based on item mean</i>	60
Table 22 <i>Responses to open-ended question 1: Possible topics for professional learning provided by the division</i>	62
Table 23 <i>Responses to open-ended question 2: possible professional learning provided outside of the division</i>	64
Table 24 <i>Responses to open-ended question 3: Additions from participants, topics not addressed</i>	67

Chapter 1

The Problem

Introduction

The majority of site based school administrators, 88.1%, are not licensed to teach students with disabilities (Rodl et al., 2018). “Special education is a federal mandate that is governed by state and local policies. For schools to provide a free and appropriate public education to students with disabilities, school leaders must be competent in order to effectively lead these programs” (Thompson, 2017, p. 46). In Virginia, special education is the highest critical shortage category of the top ten academic disciplines identified in the annual survey and has been since the 2006 published report (Virginia Department of Education, 2020).

Special education administrators are responsible for ensuring that special education programs are provided and that special education law is followed in order for students with disabilities to access a free and appropriate public education (Thompson, 2017). In order to make a school community wholly inclusive and effective, “school divisions should focus on equipping school leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively lead special education programs” (Thompson, 2017, p. 46).

Overview of the Study and Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify assistant principals’ self-reported levels of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming. This study, using quantitative methodology, identified strengths and areas for growth for assistant principals in a suburban school division and will guide professional learning experiences for administrators moving forward. The study included a purposeful sample of site based K-12 assistant principals from across one school division.

Data collection consisted of a survey with eighteen Likert scale questions and three open-ended questions. Participants determined their level of agreement regarding their ability to perform job responsibilities and tasks related to the support of special education teachers and programming, based on competency statements aligned with the Council for Exceptional Children Initial and Advanced Preparation Standards (2015). Self-reported demographics were also gathered through the survey including details of a participant’s teaching license, school

level, experience supervising special education teachers, and percentage of students with disabilities they served at the time of completing the survey.

Historical Perspective

The relationship between the retention of special education teachers and the overall effectiveness of their supervising administrators to support special education programming has an impact on the greater school community. Teacher retention and student achievement are both a reflection of principal and assistant principal leadership. Billingsley (2004a) explained that helping principals gain a basic understanding of the expectations of special education instruction and the challenges teachers experience is essential if they are to foster teacher growth, satisfaction, and long-term retention (p. 374).

Billingsley (2004b) stated “determining the extent to which teachers exit and rearrange themselves in the workforce requires careful follow-up study that is difficult, time consuming, and costly - an obvious drawback to studying teacher attrition” (p. 40). As a means to determine potential attrition, in some studies researchers have examined existing populations of teachers to determine their career intentions (Billingsley, 1993; DeMik, 2008; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Kaff, 2004). This study goes beyond teachers to focus on the preparedness of administrators, with the possible identification of positive, long-term impacts that may influence teacher retention in the division where the administrators serve.

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), founded in 1922, developed professional preparation standards that “define the specialized expertise educators must master for the safe and effective practice of special education. These standards are used to inform preparation programs, accreditation organizations, and credentialing agencies” (CEC, 2020). These standards, though they have evolved, have existed since the onset of the organization. The CEC standards identify the essential factors that special educators must demonstrate in their practice and were therefore chosen as a resource for the development of the study tool that was used to gather data from participating administrators.

Statement of the Problem

In Virginia, special education is the highest critical shortage category of the top ten academic disciplines identified in the Virginia Department of Education annual survey and has

been since the 2006 published report (Virginia Department Of Education, 2020). In the division where the study took place, 105 of 514 exceptional education teachers, 20.4% of those serving students with disabilities K-12, were provisionally licensed in 2019-2020. It was reported that in the same division, 21.42% of exceptional education teachers leave after 3-5 years of teaching. Of the current administrators serving in the same division less than 10% are licensed in the area of exceptional education and able to relate directly to their teachers (Interview, Human Resources). The researcher was attempting to create an opportunity for all assistant principals across one division to identify their perceptions of their ability to support exceptional education teachers and programming. Through this study, the researcher may be able to provide the central office team members within this division the areas identified as strengths, those for growth, and priority topics cited as needs for further professional learning opportunities from assistant principals.

Significance and Justification of the Study

A quantitative study that gathered a self-reported measure of preparedness of the administrators in a school division and their related professional learning needs, may lead to an improvement in professional learning opportunities provided to administrators, better support and retention of highly qualified, effective special education teachers, and increased overall student achievement. The researcher identified an area of need within the division and worked to create an opportunity to allow assistant principals to focus on the topic and identify their own areas for growth along with the ways they believe those gaps can be addressed through professional learning opportunities. By focusing on the educational leadership within the division, all levels of students as well as teachers across the division might reap the supportive benefits and ultimately increase achievement.

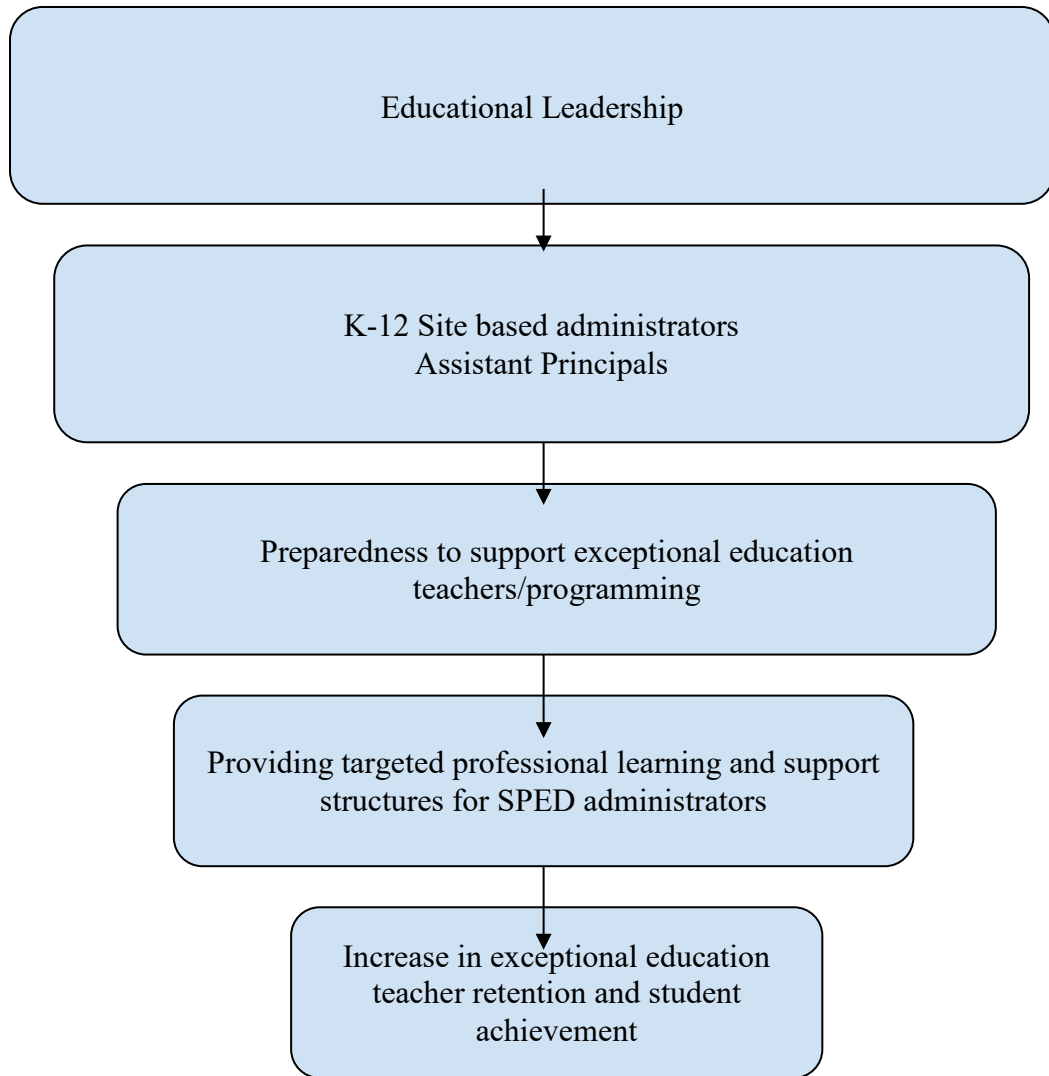
Research Questions

1. What are the self-reported perceptions of assistant principals' levels of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming?
2. What professional learning do assistant principals report that they need to increase their levels of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming?

Figure 1

Influence on Preparedness of Administrators to Support Special Education Teachers and Targeted Professional Development on the Retention of Teachers and Student Achievement

Conceptual Framework



Definition of Terms

Assistant principal. An 11-month site based administrator, serving in an elementary, middle or high school setting (host division, 2020).

General or regular education teacher. A teacher licensed to teach an age group/school level or specific content area (ie. elementary, middle school: science, secondary mathematics) (Virginia Department of Education, 2020).

Retention. Teachers who remained in the same teaching assignment and the same school as the previous year (Billingsley, 2004b, p. 40).

Special education. Specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parent(s), to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including instruction conducted in a classroom, in the home, in hospitals, in institutions, and in other settings and instruction in physical education. The term includes each of the following if it meets the requirements of the definition of special education: (§ 22.1-213 of the *Code of Virginia*; 34 CFR 300.39) (Virginia Department of Education, 2020).

Special education teacher. A teacher licensed to teach children with disabilities, who are found eligible in one or more of the fourteen federally recognized disability categories (VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, 2020).

Special education programming or specially designed instruction. Adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction: (34 CFR 300.39(b)(3))

1. To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability; and
2. To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards that apply to all children within the jurisdiction of the local educational agency (Parent's Guide to Special Education, Virginia Department of Education, 2020).

Limitations of Study

The study occurred in one division in the Commonwealth of Virginia and as a result, the data is specific to the structure of special education within that division and in the state of Virginia. The self-analysis of preparedness reported by participants might possibly be samples of underrating or overrating preparedness levels. Differences in school size or level (elementary, middle or high school) may affect the number and diversity of possible experiences with students with disabilities, teachers, and programming. It is possible that the administrators serving in secondary settings will have access to more diversified experiences. Thompson identified serving

as an administrator “at the high school level, [was] the most important training experience in [her] study” (2017, p. 46). Elementary and middle school administrators may have fewer experiences, simply as a result of having access to fewer students with disabilities. Participation was voluntary, which resulted in the involvement of fewer than the total number of K-12 administrators in the participating division.

Delimitations

The components of the study that could be controlled include completing the study within one medium sized school division. All of the participants who volunteer to participate will have access to the same professional learning experiences provided by the division where they are employed. The sample size may also be a delimitation, as only current, site-based administrators in K-12 comprehensive settings in the school division were invited to participate. Many other employees within the division hold both administrative licenses and support exceptional education but due to their role, (ie. serving in the central office in a coordinator or specialist position) were not invited to participate.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one reviews the problem, historical perspectives, statement of the problem, purpose and significance of the study, research questions, the researcher’s conceptual framework, definitions of terms, and limitations and delimitations. Chapter two presents a current literature review of pertinent research and explains the search process. Chapter 3 explains the methodology used for the study, the data collection and gathering procedures, a description of the population and division where study was conducted, instrument design and validation, and data analysis. Chapter 4 will report the resulting data from the study and an analysis of the data. Chapter 5 will describe findings of the study, including an introduction, summary of findings, discussion, implications, suggestions for future research, and reflections of the researcher.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Attrition of Special Education Teachers

Creating a qualified, diverse, and stable teaching force, and sustaining those teachers, is a critical challenge in special education today (Billingsley, 2004b, p. 39). While highly qualified candidates for some content areas, grade levels, and school divisions are plentiful, there are other content areas, levels, and school sites that struggle to fill open positions because of a significant shortage of qualified candidates (Virginia Department of Education, 2018). In Virginia, “critical shortage” may be defined in two ways: (1) shortages by subject matter as designated from the top ten academic disciplines identified in an annual survey of school divisions; or, (2) a school personnel vacancy for which a school division receives three or fewer qualified candidates for a position (Virginia Department of Education, 2018). Because of teacher shortage, educational leaders hire probationary teachers, who are not fully licensed. “According to data from the U.S. Department of Education (2003) 47,532 teachers in special education (11.4% of all teachers) lacked appropriate special education certification during the 2000-2001 school year” (Billingsley, 2004b, p. 370). In the most recent published reports, U.S. Department of Education documented that of the 374,743 special education teachers of students ages 3-21, 29,904 (7.9% of special education teachers) are not highly qualified. In Virginia, where this literature review took place, a total of 11,042 special education teachers were employed in 2016-2017, and of those teachers 697.54 (approximately 6.3%) were not highly qualified (NCES, 2017).

The focus of this literature review is the existing research centered on the shortage of, recruitment, hiring and retention of highly qualified special educators, along with the indicators identified for maintaining teachers. Special Education is the highest critical shortage category of the top ten academic disciplines identified in the annual survey (Virginia Department Of Education, 2018). This analysis will identify the trending reasons teachers cite for leaving the profession and the strategies teachers cited as possible features that could help in sustaining them in their positions. In an effort to determine the themes and topics for consideration when working to retain highly qualified special educators, this review also includes the current literature and research regarding the preparation and responsibilities of administrators as they support special education teachers. Trends and themes noted as supports provided by

administrators both directly and indirectly that help to sustain highly qualified special education teachers were also reviewed.

Search Process

An analysis of literature occurred from January 2019 through July 2020 using Google Scholar, Virginia Tech Library, Education Research Complete, and Mendeley search engines. Search terms included special education teacher and special education teacher retention, attrition, and migration, retaining special education teachers, recruiting highly qualified certified special educators, supports for special education teachers, reasoning for leaving special education, and professional development and induction programming for special educators. In addition, searches were also completed using terms and keywords including special education training and preparation for administrators, special education administrators, principal perceptions of special education, principal preparation in special or special education, special education administration, special education competencies for principals, and training and support for the evaluation of special education teachers. The total number of articles reviewed exceeded fifty. While the majority of the articles reviewed were published between 2001 and 2019, some of the research that was utilized was dated as early as 1993 due to relevance and the number of citations of those researchers in the more recent publications.

Background

Williams and Dikes (2015), in their mixed methods study, *The Implications of Demographic Variables Related to Burnout Among a Sample of Special Education Teachers*, shared from the National Center for Educational Statistics that more than 6.7 million children and students with disabilities are currently receiving educational and other support services in federally supported programs nationwide (p. 338). Similarly, DeMik (2008) included “the growing population of students with disabilities combined with the much smaller increase in the number of special education teachers is a significant factor for the high demand of qualified teachers” (p. 23). McLeskey, Tyler, and Flippin (2004), stated, “Changing student demographics have exacerbated the special education teacher shortage. For the past twenty years, the growth rate of students with identified disabilities has grown faster than the general school age population, occasionally more than three times faster, and the trend is expected to continue” (p.

233). Thornton, Peltier, and Medina (2007) reported, based on work from Bergert and Burnette (2001), Boyer and Gillespie (2000) that ninety-eight percent of school districts across the country have significant shortages and it is predicted to increase as teacher retirements increase (p. 233). In addition to attrition being impacted by the exit of retirees, “up to 9.3 percent of special education teachers leave the field at the end of their first year teaching and 7.4 percent move to general education annually” (Boyer & Gillespie, 2000). Attrition rates are higher for special education teachers than for general education teachers and have been for decades. (Andrews & Brown, 2015; Emery & Vandenberg, 2010). Studies reviewed and cited by Otto and Arnold (2005) consistently identified the highest group of special education teachers at-risk for attrition as being those with five years or less experience (p. 3).

This review includes cited research and studies that include the reported reasons special educators identify for leaving the profession, migration to different roles, and the reasons for staying for those who report satisfaction in their role. Similarly, to the review of literature by Bozonelos (2008) and the content reported by Miller et al. and Billingsley (2004b), Menlove et al. and Kaff (2004), this review also examines the lack of training in special education for educational leaders as it relates to the reported reasons for leaving, identified by special education teachers. Research regarding how special education teachers are supported by administrators and the resources and support structures administrators provide in successful and struggling settings. Suggestions for future research are provided.

Educational Leadership

“Special education leadership is an educational field bound by specific laws involving vision and collaboration” (Schulze & Boscardin, 2018, p. 4). Schulze and Boscardin asserted in the findings of their 2018 study “the complexity of the work in special education demands a multi-faceted approach to leadership” (2018, p. 6). Vision often dictates the climate and culture of a community, which are directly impacted by the leadership of the principal and administrative team. As Thornton, Peltier, and Medina (2007) stated in their article, *Reducing Special Education Teacher Shortage*, “to retain special education teachers, principals must change the realities of the role of special education and establish school climates that reflect its importance” (p. 237).

In order to make the school community wholly inclusive and effective, “school divisions should focus on equipping school leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively lead special education programs” (Thompson, 2017, p. 46). The relationship between the retention of special education teachers and the overall impact of special education programming has an impact on the greater school community and is a reflection of principal leadership. The vision for a school defined by the principal and administrative team, along with the collaboration they encourage amongst their teachers and support staff is critical for the success of a school community. Billingsley (2004a) explained that helping principals gain a basic understanding of the expectations of special education instruction and the challenges teachers experience is essential if they are to foster teacher growth, satisfaction, and long-term retention (p. 374).

Principal Preparation Programming

Educational leadership and principal preparation programming include limited, if any, special education training or experiences for aspiring leaders. Expectations for the qualification of a principal position typically requires the completion of a master's program or an equivalent certification program, an internship, and a minimum of 3 years of teaching, with very few, if any, special education experiences or requirements (Bateman et al., 2017, p. 49). “Many principals do not fully understand all components of special education, such as paperwork requirements, process requirements, legal requirements, and foundational understanding of why special education exists, and the intent of the law governing special education” (Bateman et al., 2017, p. 48). The Council for Exceptional Children reported in *Bright Futures for Exceptional Learners* (2000), administrators who lack the experience, understanding, or the time to invest in young people with special needs have a profound impact on teacher retention.

Fan, Gallup, and Bocanegra (2019) discussed in, *Using the CEC Advanced Preparation Standards for Special Education Administration to Examine Competencies for Special Education Directors*, that “the IDEA (2004) speaks specifically to the requisite skills of leaders of special education within public K-12 school such as promoting improved collaboration between special education and general education teachers, assessment and accountability, ensuring effective learning environments, and fostering positive relationships with parents” (Section 662(a)(7)) (p. 55). “It is vital that today’s special education administration programs prepare competent leaders to ensure successful implementation of special education services in schools” (Fan, Gallup, &

Bocanegra, 2019, p. 40). Though principals may not have a direct influence on the student learning occurring in the classroom, they are in a position to support and foster growth and collaboration among their teachers that can cause positive impacts and improved instruction for students of all abilities and teacher job satisfaction (Schulze & Boscardin, 2018, p. 6).

Responsibilities of Special Education Administrators

Billingsley (2004b) stated, “one of the most important challenges in the field of special education is developing a qualified workforce and creating work environments that sustain special educators’ involvement and commitment” (p. 39). Administrators have the unique challenge of developing the culture, climate, and creating a school community that allows them to fulfill their legal obligations under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004) as well as ensuring “that a highly qualified special education teacher is available for every student who receives special education services” (Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007, p. 233). DiPaola and Walther Thomas, found as a result of their 2003 study, that “administrative leadership is the most powerful predictor of positive teacher attitudes about inclusive practices, and principals play a critical role through support and reassurance for stakeholders about the value of their efforts” (p. 49). Fan, Gallup, and Bocanegra’s findings suggested that there are specific skills that are considered critical for effective special education leadership, including “legal and ethical practice, use of open communication, demonstration of conflict resolution and mentoring skills, and facilitation of cross-field collaboration” (2019, p. 55).

While these expectations for administrators exist, the available literature demonstrates that limited training and opportunities for growth in the area of special education leadership exists in educational leadership preparation programs. Dr. Thompson pointed out in her paper, *Effective Leadership Competencies of School-Based Special Education Administrators*, “in the state of Virginia, special education leadership within schools is provided by persons with supervision and administration endorsements” (2017, p. 32). Thompson (2017) includes that the Virginia Board of Education (2011) does not require a school-based administrator to have a Special Education endorsement or specific special education law training to hold a school based leadership position. Given that these special education administrators are frequently viewed as experts in implementing policies and effective practices, Crockett et al. (2009) and Fan et al. (2019) both called for more empirical research on the leadership preparation and development,

such as initial preservice training and licensure requirements (2019, p. 40). Rodl, Bonifay, Cruz, and Manchanda, in their study *A Survey of School Administrators' Training and Support Related to Evaluating Special Education Teachers*, surveyed 925 school administrators, and found that 88.1% were not licensed to teach students with disabilities (2018, p. 24). “Their results found that most school administrators did not have a background in special education, did not receive training related to evaluating special educators, and felt less confident evaluating special educators than general educators” (Rodl et al., 2018, p. 24). Thompson (2017) contended that “because of the lack of special education training needed for leadership in special education, there is a need to establish a set of universal competencies that are necessary for special education leaders to have in order to be effective at leading special education programs within schools” (p. 33).

Dr. Thompson discussed in a 2011 article, whether leaders are “participating with staff and families in IEP development, providing resources to create the programs or supervising staff to implement the IEP,” their special education contextual knowledge is critical to ensuring successful educational outcomes (p. 111). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) set high expectations for principals and other school leaders to ensure that all students, including those with disabilities, meet state expectations (Schulze & Boscardin, 2018, p. 6). “Administrators of special education are providing leadership to personnel expected to assist children in making achievement gains as outlined in the IEP, while assuring placement in the least restrictive environment” (Thompson, 2011, p. 111). Billingsley (2004a) noted Crockett’s (2002) findings in her article, stating, “that principals often have limited knowledge about special education.” Billingsley (2004a) went on to explain that “helping principals develop a basic understanding of the aims of special education instruction and the challenges that special education teachers experience is critical if they are to foster teacher growth and retention” (p. 374). It can be very challenging for leaders to serve a group of teachers, who have the pressures and challenges included in the role of a special education, with very little training of their own that prepares them. In Miller’s *Reflections on Special Education Administration*, he described how educational leadership programming was of limited value to participants in his study. “They indicated their best preparation for their administrative positions was on-the-job training” (Miller, 2018, p. 90). Miller (2018) suggested that “regional education agencies could play an important role in providing principals and other

potential education administrators with not only knowledge about special education, but also special education administration practicum experiences” (2018, p. 91).

Thompson (2017) conducted a study in which she identified an agreement from the research on eight broad competencies that special education administrators should possess at school and division levels. “These eight related to collaboration, program and individual research and evaluation, leadership and policy, professional development and ethical practice, shared vision and decision making, retention of personnel, and data analyses for planned decision making.”(Thompson, 2017, p. 32) Thompson completed the study with the goal of determining the skills and areas division level special education directors and site based special education administrators “perceive as essential to the leadership of special education programming at the school level” (2017, p. 33). Thompson’s mixed method study, surveyed special education directors in Virginia and site-based special education administrators who were identified by their directors as being proficient in the essential competencies of special educators included in the survey. “The study suggested that the special education leadership competencies developed by the CEC (1997, 2009) are still important to the effective leadership of special education programs” (p. 41).

Thompson recommended, based on the outcomes of her study, that professional development opportunities focus on the areas in which site-based special education administrators did not rate their proficiency levels as high. Interpreting case law and federal, state, and local policies was a competency that Thompson found to be rated lower by study participants, but identified as a high need area for the effective leadership of special education programs (2017, p. 45). Thompson (2017) recommended that future research include the investigation of school leadership programs that offer specific coursework in special education. She also identified that “future research could focus on site-based special education administrators at the high school level. Working at the high school level was the most important training experience in [Thompson’s] study” (p. 46). “School divisions should focus on equipping school leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively lead special education programs” (Thompson, 2017, p. 46).

Competencies for School Administrators

Nine of the analyzed studies and literature reviews identified general themes and necessary competencies for special education administrators and principals. Table 1 identifies which of these themes the researcher as competencies presented for special education administrators. Table 1 also notes whether the researcher(s) outlined or identified a need for additional supports, coursework, curriculum, or internship experiences to be added to principal preparation programming. The themes included in the table were developed based on the similarities in definitions outlined by researchers for competencies or critical characteristics of principals or special education administrators.

Table 1

Competencies for Principals and Special Education Administrators

Researcher(s)	Purpose of Study or Review	Study or Review identified the need for additions to principal preparation programming	Competencies referenced as being necessary for school administrators							
			Collaboration and open communication among stakeholders (shared leadership)	Understanding of policy and legislative requirements	Teacher and staff retention	Ethical Practices	Fostering positive Vision, School Climate and Culture	Data driven decision making and use of research based practices	Develop professional development and mentoring for special education teachers	Evaluation and support of teachers and programs
Bateman , D., Wysocki, T. A., Gervais, A., & Cline, J. L. (2017).	Literature review of related studies to special education competencies for principals (p. 48)	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Crockett, J. B., Becker , M. K., & Quinn , D. (2009).	Literature review identified themes and trends in special education leadership from 1970-2009		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	
Fan, C., Gallup, J. L., Bocanegra, J. O., Wu, I., & Zhang, Y. (2019).	Study examined the most current CEC SEA skill perceived as important for special education directors (p. 40)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

(continued)

Table 1 (cont.)

Researcher(s)	Purpose of Study or Review	Study or Review identified the need for additions to principal preparation programming	Competencies referenced as being necessary for school administrators							
			Collaboration and open communication among stakeholders (shared leadership)	Understanding of policy and legislative requirements	Teacher and staff retention	Ethical Practices	Fostering positive Vision, School Climate and Culture	Data driven decision making and use of research based practices	Develop professional development and mentoring for special education teachers	Evaluation and support of teachers and programs
Miller, K. J. (2018).	Qualitative, case study research of special education administration, recruiting and retaining future administrators	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Roberts, M.B., & Guerra, F.R., (2017).	Mixed methods study analyzed principal's perceptions of special education and suggested content for inclusion in principal preparation programs	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Rodl, J. E., Bonifay, W., Cruz, R. A., & Manchanda, S. (2018).	Study of 929 administrators and their reported training and confidence in evaluating special education teachers and programs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rinehart, T.L., (2017)	Article examined principal preparation and competencies necessary for special education leadership	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓

(continued)

Table 1 (cont.)

Researcher(s)	Purpose of Study or Review	Study or Review identified the need for additions to principal preparation programming	Competencies referenced as being necessary for school administrators							
			Collaboration and open communication among stakeholders (shared leadership)	Understanding of policy and legislative requirements	Teacher and staff retention	Ethical Practices	Fostering positive Vision, School Climate and Culture	Data driven decision making and use of research based practices	Develop professional development and mentoring for special education teachers	Evaluation and support of teachers and programs
Thompson, A. L. (2011).	Review of research of leadership in special education and recommendations for areas of focus	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Thompson, P. A. (2017).	Mixed method study examined directors and principal experiences and identified critical competencies for special education administrators	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Challenges for Special Education Teachers

Special education teachers

are charged with carefully assessing students with disabilities’ learning needs, designing interventions that integrate complex information about evidence-based practices and students’ individual learning needs, assessing the impact of those interventions, collaborating with other educators to promote students’ success in the general education curriculum, and facilitating students’ meaningful inclusion in the school community (Bettini, Crockett, Brownell, & Merrill, 2016, p. 188).

These detailed responsibilities, cited in exit surveys, were some of the reasons for special education teacher attrition; special education teachers have the highest attrition rates, when compared to their professional peers (VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION Teaching Shortage, 2018). “Many beginning special educators leave their positions (Griffin, Winn, Otis-

Wilborn, & Kilgore, 2002; Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1990), and nearly half leave in the first 5 years (Billingsley, 2004c; Singer 1992; p. 371). Bozonelos (2008) cited the *Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education* stating, “according to SPeNSE (n.d.), 46% of new special educators [included in the study] do not plan to stay in teaching until retirement, and 40% of those 46% are undecided and plan to leave as soon as they find a better job. The remaining 6% would like to leave the profession as quickly as possible” (p. 149).

In addition to the detailed responsibilities of the role of a special education teacher, there are greater chances for a special education teacher to be involved in legal proceedings than their counterparts who serve in the general education setting (Ingersoll, 2001).

Because of legalities surrounding working with special needs students and the law governing the delivery of services, special education teachers are at greater risk for reprimand, due process proceedings, or lawsuits. These additional burdens and liability potentialities place an excess of stress on special education teachers (Williams & Dikes, 2015, p. 338).

According to Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff and Harniss (2001) and Bozonelos (2008) attrition in special education is on the rise due to many factors including job design, limited resources, inadequate support, exhaustive clerical tasks, lack of professional learning opportunities, and exorbitant, diverse caseloads. Billingsley et al. (2004b) also cite several of the same issues attributed to teacher attrition including poor working conditions, ambiguous roles, and limited resources (p. 46). Ingersoll (2001) additionally proposed that factors, such as minimal administrative support and low salaries increase teacher attrition rates (p. 150). Billingsley identified (2004c), “four work-related factors that are important to special education teacher retention: (a) responsive induction programs, (b) deliberate role design, (c) positive work conditions and supports, (d) professional development opportunities” (p. 371).

In addition to the factors identified as reasons for attrition, Billingsley identified phases of dissatisfaction. The phases Billingsley (1995) defined include role overload, or having more to do than is reasonable and role conflict, which causes an educator to be unclear of the expectations of their role. Similarly, Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970) described special educators as feeling pulled between the teaching duties they feel are important and the excessive bureaucratic requirements that also put pressure on their time (p. 372). In addition to the broader expectations of the role of special educator, there is also research that identifies challenges for

teachers that are dependent upon placement. Billingsley (2004c), highlighted “that special education teachers who worked primarily in general education classrooms are at greater risk of burnout than teachers who work in [self-contained] special education settings because of having wider ranging responsibilities, being insufficiently prepared and working where they are not wanted” (p. 373).

Attrition and Retention of Special Education Teachers

Based on an extensive review of studies Billingsley (2004), in her article, *Special Education Teacher Retention and Attrition: A Critical Analysis of the Research Literature*, found that while there has been a great deal of research focused on the attrition of general education teachers, much less attention is paid to maintaining highly qualified special educators. As Ingersoll (2001), reported evidence, within state and federal reporting data, that determined special education teachers are more likely to depart than any other teacher group. More specifically “attrition is highest in the early years of teaching; about 30% of early career [special education teachers] teachers leave the classroom within the first three years of teaching, and 40% to 50% leave within five years” (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003, p. 30).

Researchers studying retention and attrition of educators use a varied set of definitions for these terms. In her earlier work, Billingsley (1993), as noted in Billingsley (2004b), “provided a four-category schematic representation of special education teacher retention, transfer, and attrition” (p. 40). Billingsley (2004b) defined retention, the first category in her research, as “teachers who remained in the same teaching assignment and the same school as the previous year” (p. 40). A transfer, the second category, moves “to another special education teaching position.” The third category “transfers to general education.” The fourth group is defined as “exit attrition, those who leave the profession altogether.” The fourth group includes teachers who also move to non-teaching positions like school counseling or administration. As much of the research showed, and as Billingsley (2004b) discussed as well, “determining the extent to which teachers exit and rearrange themselves in the workforce requires careful follow-up study that is difficult, time consuming, and costly - an obvious drawback to studying teacher attrition” (p. 40). As a means to determine potential attrition, in some studies researchers have examined existing populations of teachers to determine their career intentions. (Billingsley, 1993; DeMik, 2008; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Kaff, 2004).

The attrition of special educators carries a “substantial financial cost associated with recruiting, hiring, inducting, and professionally training replacement teachers” (Fall, 2010, p. 76). Additional nonfinancial costs include the decline of organizational stability, coherence, and morale (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, p. 686). As Billingsley (2004a) reiterated and Ingersoll (2003) also discussed, recruiting thousands of new teachers into vacant positions each year is not a solution to the teacher attrition problem. Billingsley (2004b) claimed that “a holistic look at creating positive work environments should not only reduce attrition behavior but also help sustain special educators’ involvement in and commitment to their work” (p. 55). Thornton, Peltier, and Medina (2007) found in their research that “one of the most straightforward methods to address the shortage of special education teachers is implementing systematic changes to keep those who are hired” (p. 235). In their 2008 study of teacher attrition, retention, and migration, Boe, Cook, and Sunderland concluded that “the field of education should improve its understanding of the costs and benefits of turnover and improve its management of turnover in order to reduce its costs and enhance its benefits” (p. 29).

Themes of Special Education Teacher Attrition

While there are personal and individual factors that many of the cited researchers have noted, this analysis focused on contextual factors identified by researchers as to reasons special education teachers report leaving. The combined personal factors were included in one category on Table 2. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) adopted three categories when defining teacher retention and attrition: “(a) stayers, who remain in the same school from one year to the next, (b) movers, who leave their classroom for another, (c) leavers, who leave classroom teaching” (Schaefer et al., 2012, p. 107). The NCES also identifies early career teacher attrition as those classroom teachers who leave within the first five years of teaching (Schaefer et al., 2012, p. 107). Table 2 identifies the trend reasons cited throughout the research included in this analysis, as cited by teachers in all of the NCES categories.

Within the reviewed research, seven broad themes were present. Table 2 identifies which researcher(s) cited the themes or reasons in their review or data resulting from their study. Certification status, level of education, and years of experience are included. Licensure status whether a teacher was fulling credentialed or on a probationary license and the time spent in years serving as a special education teacher (Billingsley, 1993, 2004b, 2007; Boe et al., 2008;

Bozonelos, 2008; Demik, 2008; Edgar & Pair, 2005; Fall, 2010; Haydon et al., 2018; McLeskey et al., 2004; Stephens & Fish, 2010; Thorton et al., 2007; Williams & Dike, 2015). Salary was cited when study participants or reviewed research identified the pay scale/rate and benefits being cited as a reason for leaving the profession (Andrews & Brown, 2015; Billingsley, 2004b, 2007; Boe et al., 2008; Bozonelos, 2008; Demik, 2008; Edgar & Pair, 2005; McLeskey et al., 2004; Schaefer et al., 2012; Stephens & Fish, 2010; Thorton et al., 2007). Some researchers identified, based on survey responses and other quantitative data results, that teachers cited lack of professional development and/or access to an effective mentor/induction programming as a reason for leaving the profession (Andrews & Brown, 2015; Bettini et al., 2016; Billingsley, 1993, 2004a, 2004b, 2007; Boe et al., 2008; Bozonelos, 2008; Demik, 2008; Fall, 2010; Haydon et al., 2018; McLeskey et al., 2004; Stephens & Fish, 2010; Thorton et al., 2007; Williams & Dike, 2015). Job design or workload included references to excessive paperwork, large or unmanageable caseloads, and lack of planning/preparation time for both self-contained classroom settings and co-teaching settings (Andrews & Brown, 2015; Bettini et al., 2016; Billingsley, 1993, 2004a, 2004b, 2007; Boe et al., 2008; Bozonelos, 2008; Demik, 2008; Fall, 2010; McLeskey et al., 2004; Nance & Calabrese, 2009; Schaefer et al., 2012; Stephens & Fish, 2010; Thorton et al., 2007; Williams & Dike, 2015). Administrative support was generally described as lack principal or administrator support, understanding, and/or presence (Andrews & Brown, 2015; Bettini et al., 2016; Billingsley, 1993, 2004a, 2004b, 2007; Boe et al., 2008; Bozonelos, 2008; Demik, 2008; Fall, 2010; McLeskey et al., 2004; Nance & Calabrese, 2009; Otto & Arnold, 2005; Schaefer et al., 2012; Stephens & Fish, 2010; Thorton et al., 2007; Williams & Dike, 2015). School climate included topics such as collegial support, inclusion, school culture, resource sharing and community involvement (Bettini et al., 2016; Billingsley, 1993, 2004a, 2004b, 2007; Bozonelos, 2008; Demik, 2008; Fall, 2010; McLeskey et al., 2004; Stephens & Fish, 2010; Thorton et al., 2007; Williams & Dike, 2015). Life choices and quality of life were cited in cases of teachers leaving due to family situations like spousal or parental changes, relocation, emotional stress related to job responsibilities and/or overall job dissatisfaction (Billingsley, 1993, 2004b, 2007; Boe et al., 2008; Bozonelos, 2008; Demik, 2008; Edgar & Pair, 2005; Haydon et al., 2018; McLeskey et al., 2004; Otto & Arnold, 2005; Schaefer et al., 2012; Stephens & Fish, 2010; Thorton et al., 2007; Williams & Dike, 2015).

Table 2*Reasons Cited in Research for Special Education Teachers Attrition*

Reasons cited for special education teacher attrition								
Researchers	Purpose of Study or Review	Certification Status, Level of Education, or Years of Experience	Salary	Lack of Professional Development and/or Mentoring	Job Design (Work-load)	Lack of Administrative Support	School Climate	Life Choices/Quality of Life
Andrews, A., & Brown, J. L. (2015)	Comparative research study, examined special education teachers' ideal perception of teaching		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Bettini, E. A., Crockett, J. B., Brownell, M. T., & Merrill, K. L. (2016).	Literature review examines relationships between special education teachers' working conditions and student achievement			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Billingsley (1993)	Review of research findings related to special education teacher retention and attrition	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Billingsley (2004a)	Discussion of four factors that influence special education teacher retention			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Billingsley (2004b)	Analysis of studies investigating factors that contribute to special education teacher attrition and retention	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Billingsley (2007)	Case study of special education teacher attrition in an urban district	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Boe, E. E., Cook, L. H., & Sunderland, R. J. (2008)	Research examines trends in teacher turnover in special education and general education	✓	✓	✓				✓
Bozonelos, J. (2008).	Analysis of research examined connections between administrative support and factors leading to special education teacher attrition	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
DeMik, S. A. (2008).	Study examined the attrition of special education teachers through case studies of current and former special educators	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Edgar, E., & Pair, A. (2005).	Study investigated the attrition or retention of seven cohorts of teachers graduating from the same preparation program	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓

(continued)

Table 2 (cont.)

Reasons cited for special education teacher attrition								
Researchers	Purpose of Study or Review	Certification Status, Level of Education, or Years of Experience	Salary	Lack of Professional Development and/or Mentoring	Job Design (Workload)	Lack of Administrative Support	School Climate	Life Choices/Quality of Life
Fall (2010)	Review of research examined retention of highly qualified special education teachers in high-poverty districts	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Haydon, T. Leko, M. & Stevens, D. (2018)	Qualitative case study examined sources of teacher stress and the relationship with teacher retention	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
McLeskey, J., Tyler, N. C., & Saunders Flippin, S. (2004).	Analysis of trends impacting supply and demand for special education teachers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nance, E., & Calabrese, R. L. (2009)	Qualitative study, analyzed why special education teachers leave their positions				✓	✓		
Otto, S. J., & Arnold, M. (2005).	Study investigated the level of administrative support perceived by special education teachers (in South Texas)					✓		✓
Schaefer, L., Long, J. S., & Clandinin, J. (2012)	Analysis of scholarly work on early career teacher attrition and retention		✓		✓	✓		✓
Stephens, T. L., & Fish, W. W. (2010)	Study investigated factors contributing to teachers intentions to stay or leave for special education	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Thornton, B., Peltier, G., & Medina, R. (2007).	Article discussed factors affecting teacher attrition and recommendations to address shortage.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Williams, J., & Dikes, C. (2015).	To investigate association between burnout subscales (ie. emotional exhaustion) and personal development	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Induction Programs and Support for Teachers with Five or Fewer Years' Experience

“Induction programs are built around the assumption that regardless of how well the teacher is prepared, beginning teachers face challenges that require support and assistance.

Taking time to support and cultivate early career teachers is a critical leadership activity and requires systematic efforts” (Billingsley, 2004b, p. 371). While the actual statistics vary depending on resources and researchers, one consistent finding is that young, inexperienced teachers, both general education and special education, have the highest rate of attrition (Schaefer et al., 2012, p. 106). “The discourse around teacher attrition and retention has kept the focus on seeing the problem as one of only retaining teachers, rather than sustaining beginning teachers in a profession where they will feel fulfilled and see themselves as making a strong contribution” (Schaefer et al., 2012, p. 117). “Qualified beginning special educators are a valuable resource, and cultivating these teachers is necessary if they are to develop into educators who not only have special expertise but can work within the context of their schools to use their expertise” (Billingsley, 2004a, p. 372).

“Induction support for beginning teachers should be multifaceted and address a range of goals such as (a) facilitating teacher development and improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities, (b) reducing the isolation and stress that many beginning special educators experience, and (c) improving retention” (Billingsley, 2004c; Gold, 1996; Griffin et al., 2002; White & Mason, 2001). “These retention-enhancing factors also serve to cultivate qualified special educators, by providing the conditions in which they can continue to grow professionally” (Billingsley, 2004c, p. 371). “Keeping and cultivating committed special educators requires that we prepare qualified teachers, provide responsive [induction] supports as they enter teaching, work with them to establish reasonable roles, create work environments that are characterized by supportive relationships, and provide opportunities for professional growth” (Billingsley, 2004a, p. 375).

Lack of Support Structures and Professional Development for Special Education Teachers

Many of the studies and literature reviewed, including Billingsley (1993; 2004a,b; 2007), Bozonelos (2008), Gersten et al. (2001), Kaff (2004) and Boe, Bobbitt, and Cook (1997), and Boyer and Gillespie (2000) discussed the importance of support structures and professional development provided to special education teachers and the relationship between those structures and support from administrators. Bozonelos (2008) stated that “principals need to know what teachers do and need to make teachers feel like important members of the school community’ (p. 156). “Taking care of students with disabilities requires that care also be directed toward their

teachers, what they do, and the complex and often difficult conditions in which they work” (Billingsley, 2004b, p. 371). The knowledge of what a teacher is tasked with, in serving a unique demographic of students, allows administrators to better serve teachers. Billingsley (2004a) noted that principals often have limited knowledge about special education. Billingsley (2004a) continued, “helping principals develop a basic understanding of the aims of special education instruction and the challenges that special education teachers experience is critical if they are to foster teacher growth and retention” (p. 374).

Billingsley (2004b) also identified professional development with a focus on inclusive practices and disability awareness for both special and general education teachers, as well as support through inquiry and self-assessment components, as a recurring theme throughout hers and her colleagues’ studies, whom she references. Billingsley (2004a) asserted that these practices are a critical component needed to retain special education teachers. By providing access to professional development and the structures that allow colleagues to work together in a way that encourages collaboration, educational leaders create a community where special educators are more likely to feel valued and connected.

Billingsley (2004a) explained that “helping principals develop a basic understanding of the aims of special education instruction and the challenges that special education teachers experience is critical if they are to foster teacher growth and retention” (p. 374). Thornton, Peltier, and Medina (2007) asserted that educational leaders must provide special education teachers with professional development that is continuous, reciprocal, and aligned with individual teacher’s needs. Billingsley (2004b) highlighted the importance for leaders to consider that “although administrators play important roles in supporting teachers, it is limiting to think of support as something that one person provides and another receives” (Billingsley, 2004b, p. 46). It is important that the special education teachers be actively engaged in planning what they believe to be needed and effective staff development. It is also important that the professional development programming takes into account the levels of expertise and experiences of the individuals (Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007, p. 236). By considering a teacher’s baseline of experience, the educational leaders guiding the development of the programming can be more intentional, planning content that is specific to the needs of their teachers. Acquiring specific and targeted feedback from teachers can help identify their self-reported areas of need, and guide the

development and continued learning opportunities in order to retain special education teachers (Otto & Arnold, 2005, p. 254).

Part of creating a positive school culture and facilitating the most effective development opportunities for teachers understands the “reciprocity of support among special and general educators, administrators, parents, paraprofessionals, and other service providers” (Billingsley, 2004b, p. 46). “Educational leaders need to foster the development of schools where opportunities for adult learning are plentiful, through formal programs (e.g. induction programs, professional development days, and courses), or more informally, through day-to-day work with students and colleagues (e.g. classroom observations, joint planning and development, and team teaching)” (Fall, 2010, p. 80). By working to provide avenues for learning, support opportunities for mentoring and idea sharing, and both formal and informal experiences, leaders can be sure that their special education teachers feel valued and are retained long term.

Current methods for facilitating professional learning emphasize the importance of teaching communities that are grounded in inquiry, reflection, and experimentation (Billingsley, 2004b; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Johnson & Kardos, 2002). There is limited research focused on the intentional and specific professional development needed and/or provided to special education teachers (Billingsley, 2004b; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Johnson & Kardos, 2002). “Few studies examine the specific needs of beginning special educators, and even fewer reports are available on the effectiveness of induction programs” (Billingsley, 2004b, p. 53).

In addition, just as DeMik (2008) discussed how there is very little support by way of professional development regarding the topic of special education, provided to the greater school community. “Providing general educators with more background in understanding the characteristics and needs of students with disabilities would help them feel more confident in working with all students” (DeMik, 2008, p. 31). DeMik (2008) asserted “collaborating, supporting each other, and realizing the value of each student and each teacher will promote a positive learning environment” (p. 31). Leaders who are able to provide these opportunities for their teachers are only helping to build a richer community of educators, who are more likely to be satisfied and retained, to continue serving students in the classroom. Therefore, “making schools hospitable, providing experienced and well-trained mentors, and protecting these teachers from unreasonable workloads are critical if they are to prosper and use best practices with their students” (Billingsley, 2004a, p. 372).

Analysis of Research

“Most of the special education attrition studies include relatively easy-to-obtain measures that are sometimes assumed to be basic indices of quality (e.g., certification status, degrees earned, performance on tests, experience)” (Billingsley, 2004b, p. 44). Billingsley (2004b) identified the demographic variables including age; gender, race, and personal factors were previously studied, with age being the only consistent link to exit attrition for special educators. Billingsley (2004b) also identified areas within the work environment and determined the impact these areas have on teacher retention, including salary, school climate, administrative support, colleague support, and support through induction and mentoring. Billingsley (2004b) reported that “work environment factors associated with staying include higher salaries; positive school climate; adequate support systems, particularly principal and central office support; opportunities for professional development; and reasonable role demands” (p. 50).

DeMik (2008) found in her study that “there was no pattern to the path a teacher might take toward a career in special education. Differences in personal experiences, contact with personnel, types of students, types of school settings, and educational philosophies, among other factors, combined to play a part in these teachers’ career decisions regarding special education” (p. 31). Bozonelos (2008) claimed, based on the research he reviewed, that “administrators have the ability to increase teacher retention and job commitment by implementing supportive intervention strategies” (p. 156). Also noted by Bozonelos (2008) and Miller, Brownell, and Smith (1999), teachers who choose to stay in the profession are almost four times more likely than those who leave to indicate having had supportive principals (p. 150). In a study conducted by Otto and Arnold (2005), at Texas A&M University-Kingsville, 228 experienced special educators, having five or more years of teaching experience, were asked to rate their perceptions of administrative support. The researchers found that “experienced special educators generally perceive their administrators as supportive” (p. 258). They went on to identify that their results were a “sharp contrast to the [reviewed] literature’s description of responses from beginning special education teachers, those who have less than five years of experience” (Otto & Arnold, 2005, p. 258).

Bozonelos recommended future studies that evaluate how collaborative models and relationships between general and special educators might evolve to support the success and retention of teachers. “A better understanding of the dynamics of year-to-year changes in the

national teaching force in special education would be of considerable benefit to education policymakers, administrators, and others who are concerned with the problems posed by teacher turnover” (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1997, p. 371-372). “Providing every child with a qualified teacher is a worthy goal. To meet it there must be an adequate supply of newly prepared teachers to fill the open teaching positions in the schools and careful attention to maintaining those and the experienced teachers in the teaching profession” (Edgar & Pair, 2012, p. 163).

Summary

At the completion of her literature review, Billingsley (2004b) reported finding less experienced, younger special educators are most likely to leave the field of education; much more so than their older, more experienced counterparts. Billingsley (2004b) also reported that teachers who are not certified are also more likely to leave than those who begin fully licensed and credentialed. She also found that special education teachers who achieve higher student test scores are actually more likely to leave than those achieving lower scores (p. 53). Billingsley (2004b) asserted “policymakers and administrators interested in reducing attrition must facilitate the development of better work environments for special educators” (p. 53). Bettini, et al. (2016) claimed, “as a research community, we have failed to systematically investigate the conditions under which special education teachers are best able to fulfill their responsibilities” (p. 188).

Pazey and Cole (2012) asserted, “those who stand at the helm of departments of educational administration may wish to take heed to the implied meaning behind their failure to incorporate special education and special education law into their program of study for school and district administration programs” (p. 263). A consideration for a place to continue to research in educational leadership may be principal preparation in the area of special education. By incorporating more intentional education and preparation for the leaders supporting the teachers in the classrooms, more teachers may be retained. Bozonelos (2008) claims that “administrators have the ability to increase teacher retention and job commitment by implementing supportive intervention strategies” (p. 156). Brownell, Hirsh, and Seo (2004) and Thornton, Peltier, and Medina (2007), concluded “we could increase the yearly supply of teachers if we would attend more carefully to the factors related to attrition. Efforts to improve teacher salaries and design work environments that support teachers and result in manageable workloads should reduce attrition-related shortage in special education” (p. 237). Thornton et.

al., go on to define the necessary systematic changes needed as “implementing proactive principal leadership; transforming schools and districts to support special education programs; employing fully certified teachers; establishing procedures to retain special education teachers including mentors, professional development, and support; and developing a culture that supports the status of special education” (p. 237).

This review and synthesis of literature provides foundational context for the broad topic of educational leadership and its relationship to the narrower area of special education leadership. It considers the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers and reviews the function of administrators supporting teachers in these roles. The synthesis of research also considers specific features of the role of a special educator and how it differs from that of a general education teacher, and the resulting differences in attrition rates. Research included possible strategies provided by administrators that may help to maintain highly qualified special educators in the classroom.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Methodology

This study and survey tool were aligned with the standard and advanced competencies outlined by the Council for Exceptional Children (2015). The study methodology includes: (a) purpose of the study, (b) research design and methodology, (c) research design and justification, (d) research questions, (e) site and sample selection, (f) data collection and gathering procedures, (h) instrument design, (i) instrument validation, (j) data treatment and management, (k) data analysis techniques, (l) timeline, and (m) methodology summary.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify assistant principals' self-reported levels of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming. This study, using quantitative methodology, may help to identify strengths and areas for growth for assistant principals in a suburban school division and guide professional learning experiences for administrators moving forward. The intended outcomes as a result of a non-experimental, quantitative survey include a measure of administrators self-reported levels of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming and recommendations for continued professional learning.

Research Design and Justification

The research design for this study included the use of a non-experimental, comparative quantitative design. A nonprobability sampling approach, or "sampling that does not involve random selection," was approved for the study by both the Institutional Review Board at Virginia Tech and the approving committee for the division where the study took place (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008, p. G-5). The researcher, by way of a division administrator serving a conduit, invited assistant principals at all levels: elementary, middle, and high, in the 72 schools in a majority, minority mid-sized suburban school division in central Virginia to participate in the completion of the survey questionnaire. The survey questionnaire was developed by the researcher, with the Council for Exceptional Children Standard and Advanced Competencies as a guiding resource.

The survey tool includes three portions. Part 1 collected background and demographic information about the participants. Part 2 collected administrators' preparedness to participate in or facilitate certain special education related meetings or programming, support special education teachers' instruction, interpret special education related case law, regulations and legal documents, and provide instructional leadership to and professional learning opportunities for special education teachers. Part 3 asked participants to identify recommendations for necessary professional learning opportunities based on their self-reported levels of preparedness in the different areas highlighted by their answers in part 2.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the self-reported perceptions of assistant principals' levels of preparedness to support special education teachers?
2. What professional learning do assistant principals report that they need to increase their levels of preparedness to support special education programming?

Site and Sample Selection

A non-random, convenience sampling approach was used, inviting all assistant principals in the identified school division to participate. To ensure an adequate sample size, all acting site based administrators who are not acting principals were invited to participate in the study. The school division where the researcher was approved to facilitate the study is a majority, minority mid-sized suburban school division in central Virginia that supports 72 schools and 51,786 students (Virginia Department Of Education, 2020). The 2019 fall membership for the total student population indicated that the division serves 6,659 students with disabilities (Virginia Department Of Education, 2020).

Data Collection and Timeframe

As a part of university requirements, the researcher completed the required Institutional Review Board (IRB) training to attain official certification prior to the beginning of the study. The researcher also completed the required modules for Social and Behavioral Research (see Appendix A). An *IRB Application* was submitted early Fall 2020. Once the study was approved, the researcher included the *IRB Application Approval Letter* (see Appendix B) from

the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University as appendices.

In addition to the university requirements, the application process for research studies in the division in which the study was conducted was also submitted and approved. Following university approval and prior to IRB application submission the division research study application was submitted, in late August 2020. Feedback from the division department of research and planning where the study was conducted and was considered when submitting the application to the Institutional Review Board. Following approval of the *IRB Application* and a *letter of approval from the superintendent of the school division* (see Appendix C), the study began. The *letter of approval from the superintendent of the school division*, following the *application for Research* in the school division are included in the appendices (see Appendix C).

An electronic survey questionnaire consisting of demographic questions, eighteen Likert scale questions, and three open ended questions were utilized to collect data for the study. A member of the school division's department of research and planning served as a conduit for the distribution of surveys to all K-12 site based assistant principals across the school division. Following approval from the school division and IRB approval from Virginia Tech, the survey was administered electronically by email November 30th, 2020, with one follow up electronic communication to invited participants one weeks following the initial email invitation to participate in the study.

Instrument Design

This quantitative study utilized a survey questionnaire made up of three components. Part 1 collected self-reported background and demographic information about the participants. Part 2 collected administrators' self-reported preparedness to participate in or facilitate certain special education related meetings or programming, support special education teachers' instruction, interpret special education related case law, regulations and legal documents, and provide instructional leadership to and professional learning opportunities for special education teachers. Part 3 asked participants to identify recommendations for necessary professional learning opportunities that might be provided within or outside of the division, based on their self-reported levels of preparedness in the different areas highlighted by their answers in part 2.

The part 2 component of the survey questionnaire used a Likert scale format. “The Likert scale is the most commonly used psychometric scale among psychological measurements that require self-reporting” (Wakita, Ueshima, & Noguchi, 2012, p. 534). Participants identified their level of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming by choosing a rating of 1 to 5. The scale includes *1 - agree, 2 - somewhat agree, 3 - neutral, 4 - somewhat disagree, and 5 - disagree*. Participants rated their preparedness by selecting only one answer per statement. Data resulting from the use of a Likert scale provide numerical measurements that may be used for statistical inference and are proven to provide good reliability (Li, 2013). Part 3 allowed participants to include free responses with as much or as little feedback as they wish to include for each of the three posed questions.

Table 3 details the demographic questions that participants were asked. Collecting demographic data allowed the researcher to conduct comparative analysis between groups. The demographic data may also allow for the possible professional learning opportunities recommended by participants targeted to a particular population of school leaders in the future.

Table 3

Survey Participant Demographic Information

Demographic Information
Teaching License (include all applicable information)
General Education: Subject area/level of license
Special Education: Disabilities included on license
School level (currently serving)
Elementary
Middle
High
Have you served as an administrator in an IEP meeting?
Do you or have you in a previous setting supervised special education?
Percentage of students with disabilities compared to total enrollment in current setting:
0-5%
6-10%
11-15%
16-25%

Table 4 includes the Likert scale portion of the survey tool, with eighteen individual statements for participants to consider and assign a self-reported rating. These eighteen

statements were developed by the researcher, with the Council for Exceptional Children Standard and Advanced Competencies as a guiding resource.

Table 4

Assistant Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming

	Rating Scale				
	1	2	3	4	5
Prepared to complete task or responsibility	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree
1. I understand how students' exceptionalities may interact with their development and learning needs and use that information to support our special education as they provide meaningful and challenging learning experiences.					
2. I create safe, inclusive, culturally responsive learning environments that allow all students, including those with exceptionalities, to be active and engaged learners, who develop emotional well-being, positive social interactions, and self-determination.					
3. I am able to implement case law and federal, state, and local policies that guide the support and protection of students with exceptionalities and the development of their Individualized Education Programs.					
4. I lead my teachers in the development of general and specialized curricula to improve programs, supports, and services at the classroom, school, community, and system levels, when possible, to contribute to the individualize learning for students with exceptionalities.					
5. I continue to broaden and deepen my professional learning and expand my knowledge of instructional technologies, curriculum standards, effective evidenced-based teaching strategies, and assistive technologies to support access to and learning for students with exceptionalities.					
6. I am able to effectively participate in planning for students with exceptionalities through the IEP process and development of meaningful learning progressions.					
7. I am able to understand the multiple methods of assessment and data sources used to guide the decision making process employed when developing IEPs for students with exceptionalities.					

(continued)

Table 4 (cont.)

	Rating Scale				
	1	2	3	4	5
Prepared to complete task or responsibility	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree
8. I am able to lead and support the teachers I supervise in selecting, adapting, and developing a broad set of evidence based instructional strategies to advance the learning of students with exceptionalities.					
9. I provide ongoing supervision and support of personnel working with students with exceptionalities and their families, and am able to effectively coach these professionals to improve in identified areas for growth when it is necessary.					
10. I understand and am well versed in the variety of post-secondary transition opportunities and services available to students across a wide range of settings and learning experiences.					
11. I understand and exceed the expectations of professional, ethical principles, and practices that inform special education practice.					
12. I am able to successfully collaborate with families, other educators, related services providers, students with exceptionalities, and personnel from community agencies in culturally responsive ways to address the needs of students across a range of learning experiences.					
13. I am an active part of the continued improvement process for special education programs, supports, and services at the classroom, school, and system levels for students with exceptionalities, keeping in mind relevant laws and evidence-based practices.					
14. I advocate for the allocation of resources for the preparation and professional learning of all personnel who serve our students with exceptionalities.					
15. I can confidently develop and conduct professional learning experiences, in collaboration with central office support staff and/or colleagues from across the division, for the special education teachers and paraprofessionals within my building and my administrative colleagues when necessary.					
16. I lead my special education teachers and service providers to formulate goals, set and meet professional expectations, advocate for effective and evidenced-based practices, and create positive learning environments.					
17. I have a comprehensive understanding of special education, legal policies, ethical standards, and emerging issues that inform special education practices.					
18. I am able to promote collaboration and understanding, resolve conflicts, and build consensus for improving programs, services, and outcomes for students with exceptionalities.					

Table 5 includes the one open-ended question that participants had the option to answer with their self-reported ratings identified in part 2 of the survey questionnaire in mind.

Table 5

Assistant Principals Self-Reported Areas of Need for Professional Learning

Open Ended Question
1. Based on your individual ratings, what professional learning topics/experiences would you need from the school division to improve your level of preparedness?
2. Based on your individual ratings, what professional learning topics/experiences would you need from outside professional learning resources and/or organizations to improve your level of preparedness?
3. Is there anything you would like to add that was not asked?

Instrument Validation

The researcher completed an instrument validation with a cohort of fifteen doctoral students who currently serve in school-based and central office administrative roles in divisions across the Commonwealth of Virginia. The cohort members who validated the tool were not invited to participate in the study. The instrument validation process allowed for feedback provided to the researcher, to identify alignment of the tool with the outlined purpose statement and research questions. The researcher used feedback from the cohort members, following two rounds of review and validation, to modify, add, and delete demographic questions and rating statements or portions of rating statements.

Data Treatment and Management

All of the data collected during this study continue to remain confidential and secure to maintain the integrity of the study and to protect the anonymity of the participants. The researcher electronically on a personal computer and with the use of back-up digital tools, using a data platform provided by the university, maintains data. All data and analysis associated with the research were maintained through the successful defense of this dissertation and for a period of five years following the completion of the study.

Participants were informed of their implied consent prior to completing the survey. Documentation of implied consent was a component of the application for research studies for the division's department of research and planning. The *Implied Consent Agreement* will be included in the email communication which also included directions for participation in the study. The email communication was sent by a member of the department of research and

planning, serving as a conduit for the researcher to facilitate the study. All participants were notified that their participation is entirely voluntary and they had the option to forego participation at any time during their participation in the study questionnaire.

Descriptive Analysis

Data were collected using the Qualtrics platform provided by Virginia Tech. Upon a participant's completion of the survey questionnaire, data were automatically collected in a database. The format allowed the researcher to review and analyze the data while maintaining confidentiality and security. Descriptive statistics were used to describe and summarize the analysis of data from the survey results. The researcher was able to determine the mean scores, percentages and frequencies of responses with the whole population and in subgroups, identified by the demographic question responses. Data were also organized by research questions and discussed in Chapter Four.

Timeline

The researcher completed and presented the prospectus exam to the dissertation committee in August of 2020. Prior to the participation in the prospectus exam, the researcher developed the survey tool and initiated the validation process in early summer 2020. Following successful completion of the prospectus exam, the researcher submitted the application for research study to the school division for approval late August of 2020. Following school division approval, the survey tool and related application documents were submitted to Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board in early Fall of 2020. Once all approvals were received, the survey was conducted beginning November 30th, 2020. Participants had two opportunities by email communication serving as invitations to participate in the voluntary study. Chapters Four and Five of the study were completed January and February 2020, and the dissertation was presented to the university committee in March of 2020.

Methodology Summary

A quantitative, non-experimental methodology was utilized for this study to measure the self-reported preparedness of assistant principals to support special education teachers and programming, in one division in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The study consisted of an electronic, voluntary survey questionnaire, with three parts. The survey collected demographic

data, self-reported Likert scale ratings of preparedness to facilitate or complete special education related responsibilities or tasks, and three open ended responses regarding recommendations for professional learning experiences that might be provided both within and outside of the division to increase administrative preparedness. Data analysis focused on the descriptive statistics.

Chapter 4

Results of the Study

Purpose of Study Review

This chapter reports the results of this quantitative, non-experimental study, which included a non-random, convenience sampling approach where all assistant principals in the identified school division were invited to participate. The purpose of this study is to identify assistant principals' self-reported levels of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming. The research questions were: (1) What are the self-reported perceptions of assistant principals' levels of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming? (2) What professional learning do assistant principals report that they need to increase their levels of preparedness to support special education programming?

Descriptive Data Analysis and Respondents

All participants (n=38) were employed by the participating school division. They received an electronic invitation (see Appendix E) to participate along with an International Review Board Information Sheet (see Appendix F). All participants held positions as site based assistant principals, defined in chapter three. Surveys were distributed to 110 potential participants with 38 survey respondents yielding a response rate of 34.5%.

Participants responded to five items on the survey questionnaire (see Appendix A) that provided demographic information including: (a) teaching license: general education or special education, (b) school level: elementary, middle, high school, (c) experience serving as an administrator in an IEP meeting, (d) experience supervising special education (e) the percentage of students with disabilities served at their school site. Table 6 (below) summarizes the reported demographic data. Of the 38 respondents, 76.3% (n=29) participants identified as general education teachers and 23.7% (n=9) identified as special education teachers. Table 6 goes on to show that 50% of the survey participants (n=19) serve as administrators in elementary schools, while 18.42% (n=7) serve in middle schools and 31.58% (n=12) serve in high school settings. Of the total participants only one identified as having not participated in an IEP meeting in the administrative role, while 97.37% (n=37) responded they had served in a meeting as the administrator. Table 6 also indicates that 63.16% (n=24) serve or have served as the supervising

administrator for special education in their buildings. More than one third of the participants, 36.84% (n=14) indicated that they serve in a school with 16-25% of the total school population made up of students with disabilities. The remaining 24 participants responded as having fewer than 16% of their school's total population made up of students with disabilities. The remaining participants included 34.21% (n=13) with 11-15% of the total school population being students with disabilities, 23.68% (n=9) having 6-10% of the total school population being students with disabilities and 5.26% (n=2) having less than 5% of the total school population being students with disabilities.

Table 6

Demographic Characteristics of Participants (n=38)

Characteristics	n	%
Teaching License		
General Education	29	76.3%
Special Education	9	23.7%
School Level		
Elementary	19	50%
Middle	7	18.42%
High	12	31.58%
Served in IEP Meeting		
Yes	37	97.37%
No	1	2.63%
Experience Supervising Special Education		
Yes	24	63.16%
No	14	36.84%
Percentage of students with disabilities served at school site		
0-5%	2	5.26%
6-10%	9	23.68%
11-15%	13	34.21%
16-25%	14	36.84%

Table 7 illustrates the demographics of teaching license types in each level of school and their overall reported mean score, based on their responses to the 18 Likert scale items (included in Appendix A). The participants who currently serve in elementary schools (n=17) are made up of 14 general education teachers and 5 special education teachers. The general education teachers now serving as assistant principals had a mean score of 1.859 on the Likert scaled items, when 1 is chosen to indicate the participant agrees with the statement and 5 is chosen when the

participant disagrees with the statement. The special education teachers serving as elementary assistant principals have a mean score of 1.256, indicating they agreed they are more prepared than their general education elementary assistant principal counterparts. Three of the participants, all general educators, did not respond to all of the survey items and as a result, their mean response score is not represented in the table. Of the middle school assistant principals (n=8), six are general education teachers with a mean score of 1.741 and one is a special education teacher with a mean score of 1.11, when 1 represents that respondents agree with the statement and 5 represents that they disagree. One middle school assistant principal did not respond to all of the survey items and a mean response was not recorded. Of the high school assistant principals (n=12), the nine general education teachers have a mean score of 1.636 and three special education teachers have a mean score of 1.040. Of all respondents, the high school assistant principals with special education licenses had the most agreeable responses, identifying themselves as most prepared to complete the tasks and responsibilities outlined in the eighteen survey items based on their self-reports when comparing them to their colleagues in other demographic groups that also participated.

Table 7

License and Mean Self-Reported Perceptions of Participants (N=38)

Characteristics	n	M
Elementary		
General Education	14	1.859
<i>GenEd No Response</i>	3	---
Special Education	5	1.256
Middle		
General Education	6	1.741
<i>GenEd No Response</i>	1	---
Special Education	1	1.11
High		
General Education	9	1.636
Special Education	3	1.040

The Likert scale items in part two of the survey questionnaire were developed in alignment with the Council for Exceptional Children Standard and Advanced Competencies (2020). The Likert scale items in part two were not grouped by theme, but were meant to be independent of one another. They are represented in order in the following tables. As such, tables

8-19 include two types of data. Each pair of tables includes the data from three of the Likert scale items included in the survey questionnaire (see Appendix A). The first in each pair (see example Table 8) provides the percentage rate of response for each of the five possible response options and the corresponding (n) number of participants that chose that response option. The table immediately following in each pair (see example Table 9) provides the descriptive statistics for the same three-Likert scale items including the mean score for that item, the standard deviation and the (n) number of respondents who completed that item.

Tables 8 and 9 provide the data for Likert scales items 1-3. Of the total participants, 34 responded to these three items. The data included in Table 8 indicates that 70.59% (n=24) agree and 17.65% (n=6) somewhat agree that they understand how students' exceptionalities may interact with their development and learning needs. None of the respondents disagreed with the statement and only one respondent who represents 2.94% of total respondents somewhat disagree with the statement. The mean for item one was 1.44 with a standard deviation of 0.77.

Statement 2, which had the highest agreement rate of all 18 statements, asked participants to rate their agreement with their ability to create a safe and inclusive learning environment for students with exceptionalities where they can be engaged, active learners. Of the 34 total respondents, 85.29% (n=29) agreed with the statement and 14.71% (n=5) somewhat agreed. None of the participants chose the neutral, somewhat disagree or disagree response options. It was clear that when comparing responses to other statements that the participants who responded to item two feel prepared to provide the type of environment described in the statement, regardless of the level of school in which they serve, license type, or percentage of students with disabilities.

Item three asked that assistant principals identify their agreement with their ability to implement federal, state and local case law as it relates to the protection of students with disabilities. Just more than 78% of assistant principals agreed or somewhat agreed to being able to implement case law with 55.88% (n=19) choosing that they agreed and 23.53% choosing that they somewhat agreed, while 20.59% (n=7) identified as being neutral for item 3. The mean for item 3 is 1.65 with a standard deviation of 0.80. Of the total 18 items, item three was the tenth most agreeable item, causing it to fall within the middle third of items when put in an agreeability order.

Table 8

Assistant Principals' Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming (Likert Statement Ratings Items 1-3)

Statement	Agree [1]	Somewhat Agree [2]	Neutral [3]	Somewhat Disagree [4]	Disagree [5]	Total
1. I understand how students' exceptionalities may interact with their development and learning needs and use that information to support our special education as they provide meaningful and challenging learning experiences.	70.59% (n=24)	17.65% (n=6)	8.83% (n=3)	2.94% (n=1)	0% (n=0)	34
2. I create safe and inclusive learning environments that allow all students, including those with exceptionalities, to be active and engaged learners, who develop emotional well-being, positive social interactions, and self-determination.	85.29% (n=29)	14.71% (n=5)	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	34
3. I am able to implement case law and federal, state, and local policies that guide the support and protection of students with exceptionalities and the development of their Individualized Education Programs.	55.88% (n=19)	23.53% (n=8)	20.59% (n=7)	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	34

The descriptive statistics for Likert items 1-3 are illustrated in Table 9. Of the three items, statement two was the most agreeable, while also proving to be most agreeable when all

assistant principal responses were considered for all items. Statement three had the least agreeable mean, when a choice of 1 indicates a response of agree along with the widest standard deviation of the three statements.

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics for Assistant Principals' Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming

Item#	Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
1	I understand how students' exceptionalities may interact with their development and learning needs and use that information to support our special education as they provide meaningful and challenging learning experiences.	1.44	0.77	34
2	I create safe, inclusive, culturally responsive learning environments that allow all students, including those with exceptionalities, to be active and engaged learners, who develop emotional well-being, positive social interactions, and self-determination.	1.15	0.35	34
3	I am able to implement case law and federal, state, and local policies that guide the support and protection of students with exceptionalities and the development of their Individualized Education Programs.	1.65	0.80	34

Table 10 and 11 include statement items 4-6 from part two of the survey questionnaire. Table 10 provides the percentage of each Likert scale response and the number of participants who chose that option, out of the 34 participants that answered these three items. Item 4 asked assistant principals to rate their agreement with their ability to lead teachers in the development of curricula to improve programs, supports, and services at the classroom, school, community, and system levels to individualize the learning for students with disabilities. Of the 34 participants, 50% (n=17) agreed and 29.41% (n=10) somewhat agreed that they are able to lead in this task. The remaining seven respondents identified in the following areas: 2.94% (n=1) was neutral, 14.71% (n=5) somewhat disagreed, and 2.94% (n=1) disagreed that they are prepared and able to meet this need within their school setting. Item 4 had a mean of 1.91 and a standard

deviation of 1.71, placing it in the bottom 1/3 of agreeability, 16 of 18, when compared with the total 18 statements.

Statement 5 asked that assistant principals rate their agreement with their ability to broaden and deepen their knowledge of instructional technologies, curriculum standards, effective evidence-based strategies, and assistive technologies to support access to and learning for students with disabilities. For statement 6, of the total 34 respondents, 50.82% (n=20) agreed and 23.53% (n=8) somewhat agreed to the statement while 5.88% (n=2) identified as neutral and 11.76% (n=4) indicated that they somewhat disagreed. None of the respondents disagreed with the statement. The item asked that assistant principals rate their agreement with their ability to effectively participate in the planning for students with disabilities, both in the IEP process and their learning progressions.

Table 10

Assistant Principals' Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming (Likert Statement Ratings Items 4-6)

Statement	Agree [1]	Somewhat Agree [2]	Neutral [3]	Somewhat Disagree [4]	Disagree [5]	Total
4. I lead my teachers in the development of general and specialized curricula to improve programs, supports, and services at the classroom, school, community, and system levels, when possible, to contribute to the individualize learning for students with exceptionalities.	50% (n=17)	29.41% (n=10)	2.94% (n=1)	14.71% (n=5)	2.94% (n=1)	34

(continued)

Table 10 (cont.)

Statement	Agree [1]	Somewhat Agree [2]	Neutral [3]	Somewhat Disagree [4]	Disagree [5]	Total
5. I continue to broaden and deepen my professional learning and expand my knowledge of instructional technologies, curriculum standards, effective evidenced-based teaching strategies, and assistive technologies to support access to and learning for students with exceptionalities.	61.76% (n=21)	29.41% (n=10)	2.94% (n=1)	5.88% (n=2)	0% (n=0)	34
6. I am able to effectively participate in planning for students with exceptionalities through the IEP process and development of meaningful learning progressions.	50.82% (n=20)	23.53% (n=8)	5.88% (n=2)	11.76% (n=4)	0% (n=0)	34

Table 11 includes the descriptive statistics for the same three detailed in Table 10, Likert statements 4, 5, and 6. Item 4 had a mean of 1.91 and a standard deviation of 1.71, placing it in the bottom $\frac{1}{3}$ of agreeability, 16 of 18, when compared with the total 18 statements. Statement 5 placed within the top one third of agreeability when compared to all other statements, with a mean response of 1.53 and a standard deviation of 0.81, which is reflected in Table 11. The Likert scale choices placed 61.76% (n=21) of the assistant principals in agreement with the statement, 29.41% (n=10) somewhat agreeing, 2.94% (n=1) as neutral, and 5.88% (n=2) as somewhat disagreeing, with none reporting that they disagree completely with the statement. For statement 6 the mean response was 1.71 with a standard deviation of 1.02, placing this statement

at the bottom of the middle third of statements, 12 of 18, when put in order of agreeability by participants, the highest item being most agreeable and the lowest being least agreeable or most disagreeable.

Table 11

Descriptive Statistics for Assistant Principals' Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming

Item#	Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
4	I lead my teachers in the development of general and specialized curricula to improve programs, supports, and services at the classroom, school, community, and system levels, when possible, to contribute to the individualize learning for students with exceptionalities.	1.91	1.17	34
5	I continue to broaden and deepen my professional learning and expand my knowledge of instructional technologies, curriculum standards, effective evidenced-based teaching strategies, and assistive technologies to support access to and learning for students with exceptionalities.	1.53	0.81	34
6	I am able to effectively participate in planning for students with exceptionalities through the IEP process and development of meaningful learning progressions..	1.71	1.02	34

Tables 12 and 13 detail the responses of participants as it pertains to items 7-9 of the likert scale statements. Item 7 asks assistant principals to rate their ability to understand the multiple methods of assessment data and sources used to guide the decision making process employed when developing IEPs for students with disabilities. Sixteen assistant principals or 47.06% of participants identified that they agreed, while 38.24% (n=13) somewhat agreed, 5.88% (n=2) were neutral, 8.82% (n=3) somewhat disagreed, with no participants choosing that they disagreed entirely. Item 8, which asked assistant principals to rate their ability to lead teachers in selecting, adapting, and developing a broad set of evidence-based instructional strategies to advance the learning of students with disabilities. Item nine asked that participants rate whether they agree or disagree that they are able to provide ongoing support and supervision of personnel working with students with disabilities along with their ability to effectively coach

teachers and other relevant professionals to improve in areas for growth when necessary. Of the 34 participants, 64.71% (n=22) agreed they are able to facilitate this task; 17.65% (n=6) somewhat agreed, and 11.76% identified as neutral. Two participants, 5.88%, somewhat disagreed in their ability to complete the task.

Table 12

Assistant Principals' Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming (Likert Statement Ratings Items 7-9)

Statement	Agree [1]	Somewhat Agree [2]	Neutral [3]	Somewhat Disagree [4]	Disagree [5]	Total
7. I am able to understand the multiple methods of assessment and data sources used to guide the decision making process employed when developing IEPs for students with exceptionalities.	47.06% (n=16)	38.24% (n=13)	5.88% (n=2)	8.82% (n=3)	0% (n=0)	34
8. I am able to lead and support the teachers I supervise in selecting, adapting, and developing a broad set of evidence based instructional strategies to advance the learning of students with exceptionalities.	47.06% (n=16)	38.24% (n=13)	5.88% (n=2)	8.82% (n=3)	0% (n=0)	34

(continued)

Table 12 (cont.)

Statement	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Total
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	
9. I provide ongoing supervision and support of personnel working with students with exceptionalities and their families, and am able to effectively coach these professionals to improve in identified areas for growth when it is necessary.	64.71% (n=22)	17.65% (n=6)	11.76% (n=4)	5.88% (n=2)	0% (n=0)	34

Table 13 illustrates the mean scores, standard deviation, and number of respondents for items 7, 8, and 9. The mean response for items 7 and 8 were 1.76 with a standard deviation of 0.91, which illustrated a more balanced response represented in each response area. Likert items 7 and 7, having an identical response rate, place them both in the bottom 1/3 of agreeability when compared to all 18 survey items, 14 and 15 of 18. The mean response for item 9 was 1.59 with standard deviation of 0.91.

Table 13

Descriptive Statistics for Assistant Principals' Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming, Items 7-9

Item#	Item	M	SD	N
7	I am able to understand the multiple methods of assessment and data sources used to guide the decision making process employed when developing IEPs for students with exceptionalities.	1.76	0.91	34
8	I am able to lead and support the teachers I supervise in selecting, adapting, and developing a broad set of evidence based instructional strategies to advance the learning of students with exceptionalities.	1.76	0.91	34
9	I provide ongoing supervision and support of personnel working with students with exceptionalities and their families, and am able to effectively coach these professionals to improve in identified areas for growth when it is necessary.	1.59	0.91	34

Table 14 includes the data for responses to items 10-12 of the survey questionnaire. Item 10 asks that assistant principals rate their agreeability of their ability to understand the variety of post-secondary education and transition opportunities and services available to students across the wide range of settings and learning experiences within the division. Item 10 was the item found least agreeable across participants. Elementary (n=19) and middle school (n=7) assistant principals were more likely to choose neutral 8.82% (n=3), somewhat disagree, 20.59% (n=7) or disagree, with 14.71% (n=5), and represent 12 of the 15 participants who did not feel prepared to meet the expectations of the statement. High school assistant principals (n=12) were more likely to identify that they agreed they have an understanding of and are able to speak to the transition opportunities available for students with disabilities.

Item 11 asked assistant principals to rate their agreement with their ability to exceed the expectations of professional, ethical principles, and practices that inform special education practice. Twenty-two or 64.71% of participants agreed while 20.59% (n=7) somewhat agreed. Three or 8.82% were neutral, 5.88% (n=2) somewhat disagreed and zero disagreed.

Item 12 required that the assistant principals consider their ability to successfully collaborate with families, other educators, related service providers, students with disabilities, and representatives from community agencies when addressing the needs of students across a range of learning experiences and rate their agreement. When 34 assistant principals responded, 70.59% (n=24) agreed and 23.53% (n=8) somewhat agreed that they are able to do the outlined tasks successfully. Only 1 participant, 2.94% somewhat disagreed and one also representing 2.94%, disagreed.

Table 14

Assistant Principals' Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming (Likert Statement Ratings 10-12)

Statement	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Total
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	
10. I understand and am well versed in the variety of post-secondary transition opportunities and services available to students across a wide range of settings and learning experiences.	17.65% (n=6)	38.24% (n=13)	8.82% (n=3)	20.59% (n=7)	14.71% (n=5)	34
11. I understand and exceed the expectations of professional, ethical principles, and practices that inform special education practice.	64.71% (n=22)	20.59% (n=7)	8.82% (n=3)	5.88% (n=2)	0% (n=0)	34
12. I am able to successfully collaborate with families, other educators, related services providers, students with exceptionalities, and personnel from community agencies in culturally responsive ways to address the needs of students across a range of learning experiences.	70.59% (n=24)	23.53% (n=8)	0% (n=0)	2.94% (n=1)	2.94% (n=1)	34

Table 15 reflects the descriptive statistics for items 10, 11, and 12. Based on the responses of 34 assistant principals in the division, when considering all 18 statements, item 10 had the highest mean score of 2.76 with a standard deviation of 1.35. The mean for item 11 was 1.56 with a standard deviation of 0.88, placing the item as the seventh most agreeable statement when compared to the other statements the assistant principals considered. The mean response for item 12 was 1.44 with a standard deviation of 0.88. Item 12 was the fifth most agreeable item amongst the participating assistant principals when compared to all 18 items.

Table 15

Descriptive Statistics for Assistant Principals' Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming

Item#	Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
10	I understand and am well versed in the variety of post-secondary transition opportunities and services available to students across a wide range of settings and learning experiences.	2.76	1.35	34
11	I understand and exceed the expectations of professional, ethical principles, and practices that inform special education practice.	1.56	0.88	34
12	I am able to successfully collaborate with families, other educators, related services providers, students with exceptionalities, and personnel from community agencies in culturally responsive ways to address the needs of students across a range of learning experiences.	1.44	0.88	34

Tables 16 and 17 include the data resulting from responses to items 13, 14, and 15, of the Likert scale items. Item 13 had a broad range of responses to the statement asking assistant principals to rate their agreement with their ability to serve as an active part of the continued improvement process for special education programs, supports, and services at the classroom, school, and system levels for students with disabilities, keeping in mind relevant laws and evidence-based practices. Thirty-four assistant principals responded to this item with 58.82% (n=20) agreed, 26.47% somewhat agreed, 8.82% (n=3) were neutral, 2.94% (n=1) somewhat disagreed, and 2.94% (n=1) disagreed. The mean response was 1.65 with a standard deviation of 0.97. Item 13 was the 11th most agreeable statement, placing the item in the middle 1/3 of the

items relevant to the agreement to their ability to complete the tasks when considered by the identified group of assistant principals.

Item 14 asked that assistant principals rate their ability to advocate for the allocation of resources for the preparation and professional learning of all personnel who serve students with disabilities. Item 14 proved to be the third most highly agreed to statement of the 18 considered in the survey. The mean response was 1.35 with a standard deviation of 0.68. Twenty-six participants or 76.47% agreed with the statement, 11.76% (n=4) somewhat agreed, 11.76% (n=4) were neutral, with no responses indicating somewhat disagreeing or disagreement with the statement. Elementary assistant principals with general education licenses were the sub-group with the least agreement when considering item 14.

Assistant principals were asked to rate their agreement with their ability to confidently develop and conduct professional learning experiences in collaboration with central office support staff and colleagues from across the division for special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrative colleagues when necessary, in item 15. The responses included 61.76% (n=21) of participants agreeing they are able to facilitate the task, 23.53% (n=8) somewhat agreeing, 11.76% (n=4) identifying as neutral, and 2.94% (n=1) somewhat disagreeing in their ability to complete the tasks. Item 15 falls within the middle $\frac{1}{3}$ of items when they are ordered by agreeability. Elementary assistant principals with general education licenses (n=14) were also least confident when considering this statement.

Table 16

Assistant Principals' Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming (Likert Statement Ratings Items 13-15)

Statement	Agree [1]	Somewhat Agree [2]	Neutral [3]	Somewhat Disagree [4]	Disagree [5]	Total
13. I am an active part of the continued improvement process for special education programs, supports, and services at the classroom, school, and system levels for students with exceptionalities, keeping in mind relevant laws and evidence-based practices.	58.82% (n=20)	26.47% (n=9)	8.82% (n=3)	2.94% (n=1)	2.94% (n=1)	34
14. I advocate for the allocation of resources for the preparation and professional learning of all personnel who serve our students with exceptionalities.	76.47% (n=26)	11.76% (n=4)	11.76% (n=4)	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	34
15. I can confidently develop and conduct professional learning experiences, in collaboration with central office support staff and/or colleagues from across the division, for the special education teachers and paraprofessionals within my building and my administrative colleagues when necessary.	61.76% (n=21)	23.53% (n=8)	11.76% (n=4)	2.94% (n=1)	0% (n=0)	34

Table 17 includes the mean responses, standard deviation and total response for the Likert items 13, 14, and 15. The mean response for item 13 was 1.65 with a standard deviation of 0.97. Item 13 was the 11th most agreeable statement, placing the item in the middle ⅓ of the items relevant to the agreement to their ability to complete the tasks when considered by the identified group of assistant principals. Item 14 asked that assistant principals rate their ability to advocate for the allocation of resources for the preparation and professional learning of all personnel who serve students with disabilities. Item 14 proved to be the third most highly agreed to statement of the 18 considered in the survey. The mean response was 1.35 with a standard deviation of 0.68. Item 15, which focused on the ability of an assistant principal to provide professional learning for teachers, falls within the middle ⅓ of items when they are ordered by agreeability. Elementary assistant principals with general education licenses (n=14) were also least confident when considering this statement.

Table 17

Descriptive Statistics for Assistant Principals' Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming

Item#	Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
13	I am an active part of the continued improvement process for special education programs, supports, and services at the classroom, school, and system levels for students with exceptionalities, keeping in mind relevant laws and evidence-based practices.	1.65	0.97	34
14	I advocate for the allocation of resources for the preparation and professional learning of all personnel who serve our students with exceptionalities.	1.35	0.68	34
15	I can confidently develop and conduct professional learning experiences, in collaboration with central office support staff and/or colleagues from across the division, for the special education teachers and paraprofessionals within my building and my administrative colleagues when necessary.	1.56	0.81	34

The data represented in tables 18 and 19 indicate the results of ratings associated with items 16-18 of the survey questionnaire. Item 16 asked assistant principals to rate their agreement with their ability to lead special education teachers and service providers to formulate

goals, set and meet professional expectations, and advocate for effective and evidence based practices, while creating positive learning environments. Of the 34 participants who responded to this item, 47.06% (n=16) agreed they were able to facilitate the expectations of the statement, while 32.35% (n=11) somewhat agreed and 20.59% chose the neutral response. None of the participants disagreed or somewhat disagreed.

Assistant principals considered their comprehensive understanding of special education legal policies, ethical standards, and emerging issues that inform special education practices when identifying their agreement to item 17. With 34 responses, 38.24% (n=13) agreed, 35.29% (n=12) somewhat agreed, 11.76% (n=4) were neutral, and 14.71% (n=5) somewhat disagreed. None of the respondents disagreed.

The final item, number 18, asked that assistant principals consider their ability to promote collaboration and understanding, resolve conflicts, and build consensus for improving programs, services, and outcomes for students with disabilities. The statement resulted in 85.29% (n=29) of participants in agreement, 5.88% (n=2) somewhat in agreement, and 8.82% (n=3) of participants identified as neutral. None of the participants responded that they somewhat disagreed or disagreed with the item.

Table 18

Assistant Principals' Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming (Likert Statement Ratings Items 16-18)

Statement	Agree [1]	Somewhat Agree [2]	Neutral [3]	Somewhat Disagree [4]	Disagree [5]	Total
16. I lead my special education teachers and service providers to formulate goals, set and meet professional expectations, advocate for effective and evidenced-based practices, and create positive learning environments.	47.06% (n=16)	32.35% (n=11)	20.59% (n=7)	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	34

(continued)

Table 18 (cont.)

Statement	Agree [1]	Somewhat Agree [2]	Neutral [3]	Somewhat Disagree [4]	Disagree [5]	Total
17. I have a comprehensive understanding of special education, legal policies, ethical standards, and emerging issues that inform special education practices.	38.24% (n=13)	35.29% (n=12)	11.76% (n=4)	14.71% (n=5)	0% (n=0)	34
18. I am able to promote collaboration and understanding, resolve conflicts, and build consensus for improving programs, services, and outcomes for students with exceptionalities.	85.29% (n=29)	5.88% (n=2)	8.82% (n=3)	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	34

The descriptive statistics of items 16, 17, and 18 are included in Table 19. Item 16 required assistant principals to identify their agreeability with their ability to lead in the formulation of goals in the IEP process. Item 16 fell within the bottom $\frac{1}{3}$ of items when they were placed in order of agreeability, 13 of the 18 total items when considered by participants. The mean score was 2.03 with a standard deviation of 1.04. Elementary (n=14) and middle school (n=6) assistant principals with general education licenses were least agreeable to this statement. Item 17 is the second most disagreeable statement, rated 17 of the 18 considered by assistant principals. The mean score for item 18 was 1.24 with a standard deviation of 0.60, making it the second most agreeable statement of the 18 considered by participants who responded (n=34).

Table 19

Descriptive Statistics for Assistant Principals' Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming

Item#	Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
16	I lead my special education teachers and service providers to formulate goals, set and meet professional expectations, advocate for effective and evidenced-based practices, and create positive learning environments.	1.74	0.78	34
17	I have a comprehensive understanding of special education, legal policies, ethical standards, and emerging issues that inform special education practices.	2.03	1.04	34
18	I am able to promote collaboration and understanding, resolve conflicts, and build consensus for improving programs, services, and outcomes for students with exceptionalities.	1.24	0.60	34

Table 20 illustrates the individual responses of each participant while also providing the participants school level and type of teaching license. The table indicates each participant's mean rate of agreeability, as well as a subgroup mean for each school level and license type. The table allows for school level analysis and teaching license subgroup analysis in more detail. At all three school levels assistant principals with general education licenses (n=29) are less agreeable to the statements they considered than their assistant principal colleagues with special education teaching licenses (n=9). The table also illustrates that as school level increases, from elementary, to middle, to high, relative agreeability also increases amongst assistant principals with both general education and special education licenses. High school assistant principals have the highest agreeability rate, both for administrators with general education licenses, with a mean of 1.636, and administrators with special education licenses being the most agreeable, with a mean of 1.037.

Table 20

Individual Participant Data including demographics, individual item response, mean response and subgroup response

Current Level	License Type	Likert Scale Item																		Mean Response	Subgroup Mean
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18		
Elementary	gened	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1.22		
Elementary	gened	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	4	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1.33		
Elementary	gened	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	3	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1.39		
Elementary	gened	2	2	3	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	3	3	2	2	4	2	3.28		
Elementary	gened	3	1	2	3	3	2	2	2	3	4	1	2	4	3	4	3	3	2.67		
Elementary	gened	2	1	2	4	1	3	3	3	2	5	2	2	3	3	3	3	1	2.56		
Elementary	gened	2	1	3	2	1	4	4	3	3	5	2	1	1	2	3	3	4	2.61		
Elementary	gened	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1.22		
Elementary	gened	3	1	3	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	3	1	1.89		
Elementary	gened	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.06		
Elementary	gened	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1.22	1.8585	
Elementary	gened	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	0.00		
Elementary	gened	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	0.00		
Elementary	gened	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	0.00		
Elementary	sped	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	5	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1.39		
Elementary	sped	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1.22		
Elementary	sped	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	4	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1.33		
Elementary	sped	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1.28		
Elementary	sped	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.06	1.2555	
Middle	gened	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.22		
Middle	gened	1	1	3	4	1	2	2	2	2	4	3	2	2	1	1	3	3	2.17		
Middle	gened	4	1	3	4	1	3	2	4	3	5	3	1	1	2	2	4	1	2.50		
Middle	gened	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	0.00		
Middle	gened	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	4	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	1.72		
Middle	gened	1	1	1	4	4	4	2	4	4	2	3	2	3	3	3	4	3	2.83	1.7407	
Middle	sped	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.11	1.1111	
High	gened	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1.44		
High	gened	3	2	3	4	1	4	3	2	1	2	4	5	1	1	2	4	1	2.50		
High	gened	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	3	1	1	2	5	1	2	1	2	1.78		
High	gened	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	3	1	1	1.28		
High	gened	1	1	1	2	2	2	4	2	2	4	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	1.89		
High	gened	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	3	2	1.44		
High	gened	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.28		
High	gened	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1.44		

(continued)

Table 20 (cont.)

Current Level	License Type	Likert Scale Item																		Mean Response	Subgroup Mean
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18		
High	gened	1	1	3	1	2	2	2	2	1	3	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	1.67	1.6358
High	sped	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.00	
High	sped	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.06	
High	sped	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.06	

Table 21 orders the mean for each item from most agreeable to the least agreement statement. Item topics are included. The items means range from the most agreeable at 1.15 for item 2 to least agreeable, item 10 with a mean of 2.76. Item 2 asks participants to rate their agreement with their ability to create and provide safe and inclusive educational settings for students with disabilities. Items within the first third of the ordered statements include topics such as resolving conflict and building consensus within IEP teams, advocating for resources, understanding exceptionalities and how they affects development and learning styles, collaboration, and participation in professional learning. The middle third of statements include topics regarding the principles and practices that inform special education, conducting professional learning, coaching teachers, and implementing policy and legal requirements related to special education. The least agreeable statements ask assistant principals to rate their ability to form evidence-based goals for students, understand data sources used to develop IEPs, leading the development of programming and services, and understanding new case law. The item with the least agreeable response referred to understanding postsecondary transition options for students.

Table 21*Survey Items in order of agreeability based on item mean*

Order of Agreeability	Survey Item	Mean	Item Topic
1	2	1.15	safe and inclusive environment
2	18	1.24	resolve conflict, build consensus
3	14	1.35	advocate for resources
4	1	1.44	understand exceptionalities
5	12	1.44	collaborate with team members
6	5	1.53	participate in continued professional learning
7	11	1.56	ethical principles and practices that inform special education
8	15	1.56	conduct related professional learning
9	9	1.59	coach teachers
10	3	1.65	implement law/policy
11	13	1.65	lead continued improvement for special education
12	6	1.71	understand and help with meaningful learning progressions
13	16	1.74	form evidence-based goals
14	7	1.76	understand data sources used to develop IEPs
15	8	1.76	lead in instructional strategies
16	4	1.91	lead in development of programs, support, and services
17	17	2.03	understand new case law, federal, state, and local law, policy
18	10	2.76	understand postsecondary transition options

In the final three items of the survey, participants had the opportunity to answer three open-ended questions. Participants were able to identify, based on their self-reported preparedness as evidenced in part two of the survey with their responses to the Likert scale questions, possible topics for professional learning. In the first open-ended question, participants could identify possible topics that might be provided by the division. In the second open-ended question, the possible topics that might be provided by programming offered outside of the division, and in question three, participants were able to discuss anything they believe relevant that had not been asked or address in the items of the survey.

Table 22 provides a representation of the topics or themes referenced by participants in open-ended question one. Of the thirty-eight participants, the 21% (n=8) discussed the need for increased professional learning in the area of IEP development and monitoring. Participant 23

reported that they would benefit from “EXED Admin 101 ongoing professional learning, IEP development and monitoring, training on supporting students who are in integrated services classrooms” (Survey responses, 2020). Additionally, the theme of post-secondary opportunities was one of the two most common amongst respondents with 21% (n=8) participants discussing a need for increased training in transition opportunities for students with disabilities. Participant 24 responded, “I would need additional training in post-secondary options for students with disabilities since I primarily work with students at the middle school level” (Survey responses, 2020).

Seven of the participants, making up 18% of total sample, discussed the need for increased professional learning on the topic of specially designed instruction. Participant 20 stated, “Since I work at the elementary level, some training on what secondary exceptional ed looks like and what opportunities are available for students beyond high school” (Survey participant 20, 2020). These responses discussed the importance of training on how to provide specially designed instruction, how to determine what is appropriate for a student, and how to coach special education teachers and collaborative teams in providing the instruction. The third most common theme referenced by 13% of respondents (n=5) was the need for professional learning with a focus on how to determine the best assessments for the eligibility process along with how to examine the resulting data once assessments are administered to students. In response to open-ended question 1, Participant 3 stated they want “more PD on determining results of assessments for eligibility” while Participant 14 stated “I would like training on the variety of testing that is available for students who are undergoing the eligibility process. I would like to know more information of what is available for a student with a disability once they are no longer in elementary school.” (Survey participants 3 & 14, Survey responses, 2020). Participant 26 identified many of the themes also noted by their peers when they reported, “As an Administrator with a General Education background, I would particularly like assistance with understanding how to write/develop an IEP and the goals associated with it. I'd also like to know more about the assessments and data collections tools that are used to determine strengths and weaknesses for students with exceptionalities. In particular, I would like a deeper understanding on how to interpret a psychological report, a social history report and any extra data used to determine eligibility” (Survey response, 2020).

In addition, the theme of eligibility and assessment also included responses that identified a need for administrators to know more about how to support the initial eligibility and reevaluation process for students, families, case managers, and relevant team members. Other themes for needed professional learning referenced in open-ended question one included coaching of teaching, new or updated laws and policy to include local, state, and federal regulations, how to increase support, how to support integrated services programming, programming to support students with disabilities, hiring and retention of teachers, and co-teaching collaborative practices. For open-ended question one, 18% (n=7) of respondents chose not to respond, leaving the question blank.

Table 22

Responses to open-ended question 1: Possible topics for professional learning provided by the division

			Themes from Open-ended question 1										
Level	License	Non-response	SDI	Assessment for eligibility	Coaching	new laws and policy: local, state, federal	increased support	IEP development, monitoring	integrated services	post-secondary & transition options	programs to support SWDs	Hiring, Retention	co-teaching collab practices
1	Elem	gened	✓					✓					
2	Elem	sped		✓									
3	Elem	gened	✓										
4	Elem	gened	✓										
5	Elem	gened	✓										
6	High	gened	✓										
7	Middle	gened	✓										
8	Middle	gened	✓										
9	Elem	gened	✓										
10	High	gened		✓									
11	Middle	gened			✓								
12	Middle	gened				✓					✓		
13	Elem	gened		✓						✓			
14	Elem	gened			✓								
15	High	gened	✓										✓

(continued)

Table 22 (cont.)

			Themes from Open-ended question 1											
Level	License		Non-response	SDI	Assessment for eligibility	Coaching	new laws and policy: local, state, federal	increased support	IEP development, <small>monitoring</small>	integrated services	post-secondary & transition options	programs to support SWDs	Hiring, Retention	co-teaching collab practices
16	Elem	gened			✓									
17	High	gened					✓							
18	Middle	gened		✓										
19	Elem	sped									✓			
20	High	gened				✓			✓					
21	Elem	sped				✓		✓						
22	Elem	gened							✓					
23	Middle	sped									✓			
24	High	sped		✓										
25	Elem	gened			✓				✓					
26	Elem	gened							✓					
27	Elem	sped		✓							✓			
28	High	gened					✓							
29	Elem	gened											✓	
30	High	gened		✓					✓					
31	High	gened	✓											
32	High	gened					✓							
33	High	gened			✓				✓		✓			
34	Elem	sped									✓			
35	High	gened		✓					✓					
36	Elem	gened						✓						
37	Elem	gened								✓				
38	Elem	gened					✓				✓			
	N		8	7	5	4	4	2	8	1	7	1	1	1
	%		21%	18%	13%	11%	11%	5.2%	21%	2.60%	18%	2.60%	2.60%	2.60%

Table 23 presents the themes gleaned from responses for open-ended question two, which asked participants to identify the topics of professional learning that are needed based on their self-reported levels of preparedness according to how they may have answered the Likert items in part two of the survey. The most prevalent theme in the responses for question two include the need for more professional learning focused on post-secondary and/or transition

opportunities for students with disabilities, with 15.8% (n=6) participants including this topic in their response. Participant 3 reported needing, “Transition planning for students as they exit school programs,” while Participant 16 stated they needed to “Continue to learn about the transition service outside of the school in the surrounding area” (Survey responses, participants 3 & 16, 2020). Participant 21 reported they needed “Transition information and what programs are available to students” (Survey response, 2020). Five respondents, representing 13% of participants, identifying coaching of teachers a need for professional learning. Five respondents or 13% of participants included the need for professional learning in the area of new and/or updated law and policy regarding students with disabilities as a need for administrators. Participant 2 stated they would benefit from increased professional learning in the area of “Legality issues.” Participant 13 reported, “I’d need to know more about laws that pertain to teachers, students, and families” and Participant 20 said, “An update or refresher on recent changes in exceptional education policies and laws would be helpful” (Survey responses, participants 2, 13, & 20, 2020). Other topics and themes included assessment for eligibility, coaching, IEP development and monitoring, programming to support students with disabilities, private day and residential educational facilities, collaboration with other divisions, resource allocation and budgeting, and behavioral support all had response rates of 11% or less. Thirteen respondents, representing 34% of the total participants did not respond to open-ended question two, leaving the question blank.

Table 23

Responses to open-ended question 2: possible professional learning provided outside of the division

		Themes from open-ended question 2											
Level	License	Non-response	SDI	Assessment for eligibility	Coaching	new laws and policy: local, state, federal	IEP development, monitoring	post-secondary & transition options	programs to support SWDs	private day & residential	collaboration with other divisions	resource allocation and budgeting	behavioral support
1	Elem gened					✓							
2	Elem sped							✓					

(continued)

Table 23 (cont.)

			Themes from open-ended question 2										
Level	License	Non-response	SDI	Assessment for eligibility	Coaching	new laws and policy: local, state, federal	IEP development, monitoring	post-secondary & transition options	programs to support SWDs	private day & residential	collaboration with other divisions	resource allocation and budgeting	behavioral support
3	Elem	gened	✓										
4	Elem	gened	✓										
5	Elem	gened	✓										
6	High	gened	✓										
7	Middle	gened	✓										
8	Middle	gened	✓										
9	Elem	gened	✓										
10	High	gened									✓		
11	Middle	gened			✓								
12	Middle	gened				✓			✓				
13	Elem	gened								✓			
14	Elem	gened			✓								
15	High	gened						✓					
16	Elem	gened		✓									
17	High	gened							✓				
18	Middle	gened	✓										
19	Elem	sped				✓							
20	High	gened						✓					
21	Elem	sped											✓
22	Elem	gened	✓										
23	Middle	sped						✓					
24	High	sped		✓									
25	Elem	gened		✓		✓	✓						
26	Elem	gened			✓								
27	Elem	sped											
28	High	gened	✓										
29	Elem	gened					✓						
30	High	gened		✓									
31	High	gened	✓										
32	High	gened			✓				✓				
33	High	gened						✓	✓	✓			

(continued)

Table 23 (cont.)

			Themes from open-ended question 2											
Level	License		Non-response	SDI	Assessment for eligibility	Coaching	new laws and policy: local, state, federal	IEP development, monitoring	post-secondary & transition options	programs to support SWDs	private day & residential	collaboration with other divisions	resource allocation and budgeting	behavioral support
34	Elem	sped	✓											
35	High	gened			✓	✓		✓						
36	Elem	gened						✓						
37	Elem	gened												✓
38	Elem	gened					✓				✓			
		N	13	3	2	5	5	4	6	4	2	1	1	1
		%	34%	8%	5.2%	13%	11%	15.8%	11%	5.2%	2.6%	2.6%	2.6%	

The final table represents the themes from the final open-ended question three. Question three asked participants to include any other information about topics that may not have been addressed or questions that had not been asked within the survey items. Of the total 38 participants of the survey, 21% (n=8) respondents provided an answer for question three while the remaining 79% (n=30) did not answer the question, leaving it blank. Topics of the responses included participants identifying the importance for administrators to understand the legal ramifications that can sometimes occur when supporting special education programming (Participant 11), the experience of on the job training for administrators (Participant 12), and the need for more coaching for all administrators, not just those supervising special education (Participant 16). Participant 17 also referenced the importance of all administrators receiving the same training and preparation, regardless of whether they supervise special education. Two respondents, participants 22 and 25 responded with very similar answers. Participants 22 shared, “The volume of information/knowledge that is needed to support staff who work with students who have IEP's is extensive. Ongoing training is needed at various support levels (depending on your background and experience). The information must be provided in manageable doses in order to absorb it and apply it in the work setting. Ideally, the basics that need to be covered right away could be done in the summer leading up to the beginning of the school year. identifying the need for continuous training, referencing consideration for experience when determine who should have a particular professional learning opportunity” (Survey response, 2020).

Participant 26 stated “In graduate school you are only given the opportunity to study Ex Ed with one class. Most of our learning is done through on site/on the job experience often times without the concrete knowledge base of most Ex Ed teachers. It would behoove the district to provide consistent trainings that prepare Admin for the role. The job is enormous” (Survey response, 2020). Participant 29 shared and posed a question, “An IEP is individual to the student and funding should not be part of the services discussion, however, in most ExEd decisions funding is a factor. How can we provide students the education they are entitled to while balancing the funding issue?” (Survey response, 2020). Participant 35 discussed the importance of mentorship and the utilization of veteran administrators being critical for the training of new administrators in their response.

Table 24

Responses to open-ended question 3: Additions from participants, topics not addressed

	Level	License	
1	Elem	gened	no answer
2	Elem	sped	no answer
3	Elem	gened	no answer
4	Elem	gened	no answer
5	Elem	gened	no answer
6	High	gened	no answer
7	Middle	gened	no answer
8	Middle	gened	no answer
9	Elem	gened	no answer
10	High	gened	no answer
11	Middle	gened	It is important to understand legal ramifications.
12	Middle	gened	We experience a lot of on the job training.
13	Elem	gened	no answer
14	Elem	gened	no answer
15	High	gened	no answer
16	Elem	gened	There should be more coaching for all administrators.
17	High	gened	All admin should be trained the same way, whether supervising exed or not.

(continued)

Table 24 (cont.)

	Level	License	
18	Middle	gened	no answer
19	Elem	sped	no answer
20	High	gened	no answer
21	Elem	sped	no answer
22	Elem	gened	There should be continuous training, specific to experience.
23	Middle	sped	private day
24	High	sped	no answer
25	Elem	gened	There should be continuous training, specific to experience.
26	Elem	gened	no answer
27	Elem	sped	no answer
28	Middle	gened	no answer
29	Elem	gened	A concern: why is funding part of the services discussion?
30	High	gened	no answer
31	High	gened	no answer
32	High	gened	no answer
33	High	gened	no answer
34	Elem	sped	no answer
35	High	gened	Mentorship and support from veteran administrators is critical.
36	Elem	gened	no answer
37	Elem	gened	no answer
38	Elem	gened	no answer

Identification of Emergent Themes

Research Question 1

What are the self-reported perceptions of assistant principals' levels of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming?

The responses of participants were presented using descriptive statistics, which allowed the researcher to share demographics as well as mean response for each Likert scale item, the percentage of respondents choosing each agreeability level for each Likert scale item, and the standard deviation for each Likert Scale item in part two of the survey, within Tables 6-20. The overall mean for each participant is provided, in Table 21. While the mean agreeability rating for each individual item was provided in order of most agreeable to least agreeable in Table 21. The themes resulting in these data include assistant principals agreeing that they are most

prepared to provide the support for safe and inclusive environments in their schools (Likert Item 2) with an overall mean of 1.15 with 1 representing completely agree and 5 representing completely disagree (see Table 21). Assistant principals agreed they were also most prepared to resolve conflict and build consensus through the IEP process, represented with an overall mean of 1.24 with 1 representing completely agree, as identified in the responses to Likert item 18. The assistant principals who participated agreed that they were thirdly most prepared to advocate for resources for their teachers and students, with a mean response of 1.35, with 1 representing completely agree, based on responses to Likert item 14. The topics that assistant principals agreed they were least prepared to provide in support of special education teachers and programming include Likert item 4, Likert item 17, and Likert item 10. These topics included leading the development of programs, supports, and services for students with disabilities, with an overall mean of 1.91, with one representing completely agree. Understanding case law, federal, state, and local law/policies, which resulted in and with an overall mean of 2.03. Lastly, understanding post-secondary transition options for students with disabilities; Likert item 10 resulted in an overall mean of 2.76, representing the item with the least agreeability of preparedness by the participants.

Research Question 2

What professional learning do assistant principals' report that they need to increase their levels of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming?

With the final three questions of the survey, assistant principals had the opportunity to indicate what areas of professional learning they will need from the division and from providers outside of the division in the area of supporting special education. These responses were based on their own reflections and self-reported levels of preparedness represented by their responses to the Likert scale questions included in part two of the survey. Themes resulting from the responses of assistant principals included the need for professional learning on assessments for eligibility, coaching of special education teachers, IEP development and monitoring, new/updated laws and policy including local, state, and federal regulations, and post-secondary transition opportunities for students with disabilities.

These topics were addressed in the Likert scale items and all occurred in the bottom half of responses when items ordered by agreeability, with one representing completely agree (see

Table 21). Likert item nine asked assistant principals to identify their agreeability of their preparedness to coach teachers. The item was the ninth most agreeable item, causing it to fall at the midpoint of the items when ranked by agreeability, with an overall mean response of 1.59. IEP development and monitoring were topics addressed in Likert items 7 and 16, supporting the process of developing evidence-based goals and understanding data sources used to develop IEPs, respectively. Item seven, which had an overall mean of 1.76 (see Table 21), also addresses the topic of assessments for eligibility which participants identified as an area of need for professional learning as well. Lastly, the least agreeable item when the Likert items were placed in order using their mean was item 10, with a mean of 2.76. Item ten asked participants to determine their level of preparedness to understand and support the decision-making, goal setting process for post-secondary and transition opportunities for students with disabilities. Assistant principals identified this topic in both open-ended question one (see Table 22) and open-ended question two (see Table 23).

Summary

Chapter 4 reported the data collected through the researcher's three-part quantitative survey, identifying the self-reported levels of preparedness of assistant principals to support special education teachers and programming. The study yielded a response rate of 34.5% (n=38) of the total 110 invited assistant principals participating. The responses of the participants identified areas where assistant principals agree they are most prepared to support special education teachers and programming, where they are less prepared to do the same, as well as topics or themes in which they believe they may benefit from increased professional learning opportunities. Chapter 5 of this document will discuss the data as they relate to findings aligned with research questions, the implications of those findings, and future study recommendations.

Chapter 5

Findings and Implications

The purpose of this study was to identify assistant principals' self-reported levels of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming. This study, using quantitative methodology, identified the strengths and areas for growth for a sample of assistant principals in a suburban school division. The study results may also guide professional learning experiences for administrators moving forward, based on the recommendations of the participants for future professional learning opportunities. With the outcomes including an individual and mean measure of a sample of assistant principals' self-reported levels of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming and recommendations for continued professional learning, the data presented may potentially lead to increased teacher retention and student achievement. The research questions guiding the study were:

1. What are the self-reported perceptions of assistant principals' levels of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming?
2. What professional learning do assistant principals report that they need to increase their levels of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming?

Summary of Findings

According to the data presented in Chapter 4, this study's significant findings support that the assistant principals agree or somewhat agree that they are prepared to support special education teachers and programming. Chapter 5 will go on to outline the findings derived from the descriptive statistics resulting from the researcher-developed survey, in which 38 of 110 assistant principals from one school division in Virginia participated. Data analysis led to four findings and five related implications, as well as suggestions for future studies and personal reflections.

Findings

Finding One

Assistant principals with an endorsement in special education report higher levels of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming than assistant principals without a special education endorsement. Based on demographic data provided by

participants identifying the license type they hold and the content areas in which they are certified to teach, those who reported having a special education license, 24% (n=9), reported a higher level of preparedness than their general education peers, 76% (n=29) at both elementary and secondary levels. While participants reported they agree or somewhat agreed that they are prepared to support special education and programming. In all three school levels of administration, the assistant principals with endorsements in special education reported being 0.5+ more agreeable, with elementary $m=1.256$, middle $m=1.11$, and high $m=1.040$, when compared to their general education administrative peers at elementary $m=1.859$, middle $m=1.741$, and high $m=1.636$.

Dr. Patrice Thompson (2017) reported in the state of Virginia, special education leadership within schools is provided by persons with supervision and administration endorsements” (p. 32). Thompson (2017) also included that the Virginia Board of Education (2011) does not require a school-based administrator to have a Special Education endorsement or specific special education law training to hold a school based leadership position. Thompson’s findings contradict find one of this study, reporting that “school based special education administrators with a degree in the field of special education self-reported proficiency levels on competencies lower than individuals without degrees in the field of special education” (2017, p. 40).

While Finding One does not align with Thompson’s research, it does aligns with research from Rodl et al., (2018), where their “results found that most school administrators did not have a background in special education, did not receive training related to evaluating special educators, and felt less confident evaluating special educators than general educators” (p.24). Thompson (2017) suggests that “because of the lack of special education training needed for leadership in special education, there is a need to establish a set of universal competencies that are necessary for special education leaders to have in order to be effective at leading special education programs within schools” (p. 33).

Finding Two

Assistant principals report some level of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming in all areas except in the area of post-secondary transition.

Likert Item 10, which asked participants to identify their understanding of post-secondary

transition options for students with disabilities was the least agreeable task or responsibility. Item 10 had an overall mean of 2.76, when 1 represented agree, 3 represented neutral and 5 represented disagree. Of the total 38 participants, eleven respondents identified that they either somewhat disagreed or disagreed with their preparedness to support in the area of post-secondary transition. The second to least agreeable item, Likert Item 17, which referred to understanding new case law, federal, state, and local law and policy had an overall mean of 2.03. The mean for Likert Item 17 indicates that all but one participant agreed or somewhat agreed that they are prepared to support special education teachers and programming in this area.

Typically, only high school assistant principals are participating with teams that are considering transition planning for students. High school administrators participate on IEP teams for students preparing to leave the comprehensive setting as a result of diploma completion, program completion, or the conclusion of eligibility as a result of age, for post-secondary programming and experiences. While transition planning begins much earlier than a student's exit year in most cases, high school administrators have the most direct experience with the topic during IEP team discussion. Thompson's (2017) study identified that "working at the high school level was the most important training experience" for administrators (p. 46).

Finding Three

Assistant principals report that they are most prepared to support special education teachers and programming in the following three areas:

- (1) providing a safe and inclusive environment
- (2) resolving conflict and helping IEP teams to build consensus in the support of students
- (3) advocating for resources that allow for effective programming

The three statements that assistant principals identified as having the highest level of preparedness to provide all have mean scores below $m=1.4$, when 1 represents that the participant agrees and 5 represents disagree. Assistant principals report they are most prepared to provide and support a safe and inclusive environment for students with disabilities resulted in a mean of 1.15 with $n=39$. They are also prepared to support in the resolution of conflict and building of consensus with IEP teams and stakeholders involved in the special education process, a mean of 1.24 with $n=38$. They also report they are prepared to advocate for resources that allow for effective programming, a mean of 1.35 with $n=38$.

Thompson's (2017) study asked site-based special education administrators to identify the competencies outlined by the CEC standards as most important for special education administration. The study results included:

implementation of programs to assess the strengths and weaknesses of individuals with disabilities, the development of collaborative general education and special education programs, collaboration and engagement in shared decision making to support programs for students with disabilities, support school personnel in implementing a range of strategies that promote positive behavior, and develop and provide effective communication with parents and families of individuals with disabilities (2017, p. 41).

The resulting competencies identified in Thompson's study similarly aligned with the three topic areas assistant principals reported being prepared to support in this study, specifically the areas of collaboration in shared decision-making and effective communication with parents and families.

Finding Four

Assistant principals report that they are least prepared to support special education teachers and programming in the following three areas:

- (1) leading teachers and IEP teams in the development of programs, support and services
- (2) understanding new case law, federal, state, and local law/policies
- (3) understanding postsecondary transition opportunities for students with disabilities

The topics that assistant principals agreed they were least prepared to provide in support of special education teachers and programming include Likert item 4, Likert item 17, and Likert item 10. These topics included leading the development of programs, supports, and services for students with disabilities, with an overall mean of 1.91, with one representing completely agree. Understanding case law, federal, state, and local law/policies, which resulted in an overall mean of 2.03. Lastly, understanding post-secondary transition options for students with disabilities. Likert item 10 resulted in an overall mean of 2.76, representing the item with the least agreeability of preparedness by the participants.

The areas where assistant principals reported being least prepared to support special education teachers and programming aligned once again with Thompson's (2017) study. Thompson (2017) identified "three competencies [that] were rated lower by both

special education directors and site-based special education administrators: developing and implementing transition plans, developing parent/family education programs, and implementing conflict resolution programs between families and the school” (p. 41-42). Thompson recommended based on the outcomes of her study, that professional development opportunities focus on the areas in which site-based special education administrators did not rate their proficiency levels as high (2017, p. 45). Similarly to Finding Four of this study, Thompson (2017) found “interpreting case law and federal, state, and local policies was a competency rated lower by study participants, but identified as a high need area for the effective leadership of special education programs” (2017, p. 45). Study participants who responded to the open-ended question opportunities in this study addressed these same topics when they identified their needs for increased professional learning, as well.

Implications for Practice

This study’s findings reflect assistant principals ‘self-reported perceptions of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming. Participants responded to survey items in which they identified their demographic information, rated their preparedness when considering 18 statements outlining responsibilities or tasks of assistant principals, and responded to three open-ended questions allowing for the identification of what participants identified as needed professional learning. The following implications are based upon the findings of the study.

Implication One

School divisions should provide professional learning opportunities for assistant principals driven by individual experiences and background. This is especially important for those who do not have a background or endorsement in special education. Finding one indicated that assistant principals with endorsements in special education report being more prepared than their peers with general education teaching credentials. The results of both the Likert statements and the open-ended questions identified that participants have varying strengths and areas for growth, which align with their demographic information and professional experiences. Finding Two identifies that assistant principals report being prepared to support special education teachers and programming in all areas except post-secondary transition

planning for student with disabilities. Research recommends that “providing general educators with more background in understanding the characteristics and needs of students with disabilities would help them feel more confident in working with all students” (DeMik, 2008, p. 31). School divisions have the opportunity and responsibility to add variety and choice to their professional learning offerings that allow administrators the chance to own their learning and grow in areas where they identify feeling less prepared or knowledgeable. Just as Thornton, Peltier, and Medina, (2007), asserted that educational leaders must provide special education teachers with professional development that is continuous, reciprocal, and aligned with individual teacher’s needs, leaders have the similar needs and should have access to relevant and continuous learning opportunities.

Implication Two

School divisions should utilize assistant principals with special education endorsements and experience as mentors for new or less experienced assistant principals.

Finding one indicates that assistant principals with general education licensure reported less preparedness, on average, than their peers with special education teaching endorsements. The reported preparedness of participants decreased as age group or school level of students went from the high school, to middle, to elementary settings. Additionally assistant principals with general education teaching licenses reported being the least prepared than their peers at the same level with a special education endorsement. “Because special education administration is located at the intersection of the disciplines of special education, general education, and educational administration (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003), the use of an integrative approach to identify standards that support the profession is warranted to ensure comprehensiveness (Boscardin, et al., 2009, p. 68). School divisions have the opportunity to integrate mentorship with professional learning experiences to increase the preparedness of their assistant principals in areas where they have fewer professional experiences. Having the access to more experienced peers, who serve in the same or a similar same roll, may diversify a less prepared assistant principal’s opportunities for support. Mentorship may be especially effective when administrators face a new experience in supporting special education in their building.

Implication Three

School divisions should consider on the job training when broadening professional learning opportunities. Assistant principals should have more opportunities to share ideas and learn from the real-time experiences of their peers serving at different school levels.

Finding one indicates a need for assistant principals without an endorsement in special education to have increased support as they report feeling less prepared than their colleagues with special education teaching licenses. Additionally, finding two, three and four indicate that while assistant principals report feeling prepared in most areas, there are specific topics and responsibilities related to special education that assistant principals feel they are somewhat prepared or not prepared to support. While some of these areas affect all administrators supporting special education, the topic of post-secondary transition opportunities for students with disabilities most directly affects assistant principals serving in the high school setting. School division leadership have the opportunity to support continuous on the job training for assistant principals by broadening professional learning experiences beyond typical yearly items, conferences, and required modules, that are facilitated in isolation.

“Because behavior change is slow and relies on opportunities for practice and reinforcement, leadership preparation, professional development, and mentoring are mechanisms for facilitating movement along the leadership continuum” (Schulze & Boscardin, p. 24). Leaders should be brought together in small professional learning communities regularly to share ideas and brainstorm more effective research-based strategies for improving special education programming; these opportunities should be provided across levels with a vertical planning approach. School divisions should consider how educational organizations such as “CEC and NCATE have joined together to develop special education administration leadership standards that provide guidelines for creating a vision, accountability mechanisms, flexibility, and options, supported by disciplinary research” (Boscardin, et al., 2009, p. 70). School divisions should then use these recommended standards, or ones similar, that align with the larger division vision, mission, and strategic plan to guide professional learning

Implication Four

School divisions should provide professional learning opportunities related to post-secondary training and opportunities for students with disabilities for assistant principals

at all school levels. Findings 2 and 4 of the study indicates that assistant principals feel least prepared to support special education teachers and the programming in the area of post-secondary training and opportunities for students with disabilities. School divisions have a responsibility to provide professional learning to assistant principals with a focus on the opportunities for students beyond their high school education. Regardless of the school level, assistant principals serve as a member of a team whose shared goal is to ensure that all decisions for students driven by data with the goal of preparing a student for what comes after their public education experiences. While it may be most relevant to assistant principals serving in a high school setting, all administrators are supporting IEP teams as they make decisions about a student's long-term education plan. Assistant principals cited in their responses to the open-ended questions that the area of post-secondary transition planning could be a focus of professional learning provided from within and outside of the school division. Miller suggested in a 2018 study that "regional education agencies could play an important role in providing principals and other potential education administrators with not only knowledge about special education, but also special education administration practicum experiences" (2018, p. 91). School division leadership should leverage opportunities available to their leaders that exist outside of the county provided professional learning, especially in the cases of transition planning, as so many opportunities for students are available in partnership with agencies and organizations that work in tandem with school systems.

Suggestions for Future Studies

A limitation of this study was the primarily quantitative method. Future studies could incorporate a qualitative component to include individual interviews or focus groups with assistant principals. These groups could be made of members with similar demographic identifications or mixed demographic identifications. Interviews or focus groups may broaden the response information and possible recommendations for professional learning. A second limitation of this study is the sample size. The participants represent assistant principals in one school division in Virginia. Future studies could consider increasing the sample to more than one division in Virginia. Researchers might consider conducting research in a group of smaller divisions or compare the results of this study with research conducted in a division with

demographics of students or employees. It might also be a consideration to conduct research with assistant principals in a state other than Virginia.

It might also be a consideration of future research to broaden the sample of leadership roles within a division. A researcher may include the perspectives of prospective leaders, administrative aides, interns, or aspiring leaders to determine if they feel prepared for the position they are hoping to attain and compare their reported levels of preparedness to current assistant principals who have real-time access to on the job training. Future studies might also consider adjusting the Likert scale format for the survey items. Due to a participant having to choose one of only five response options, the variety of responses may have been limited. Researchers might consider removing the neutral option or adding a wider range of choices.

Summary

“IDEA (2004) mandated that individuals with disabilities have access to a free and appropriate public education. Special education leaders are critical in ensuring this access. For special education leaders to be able to effectively lead special education programs, there are competencies that should be acquired by these leaders” (Thompson, 2017, p. 44-45). Research indicates that while assistant principals agree they are prepared to support special education teachers and programming, they are not equally prepared in all areas.

The purpose of this study was to examine assistant principals’ self-reported levels of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming. The study also sought to allow participants the opportunity to identify the necessary professional learning experiences related to supporting special education that should be provided by the school division and outside of the school division. The study found that assistant principals agree they are prepared to support special education teachers and programming in all areas except the area of post-secondary transition planning for students with disabilities. The study also found that assistant principals with special education teaching endorsements report being more prepared than their colleagues with general education teaching licensure.

Additionally, assistant principals identified needing professional learning opportunities from within the school division on the topics of supporting post-secondary transition opportunities, IEP development and monitoring, and supporting specially designed instruction. Assistant principals also identified needing access to professional learning opportunities centered

on special education law and policy updates, post-secondary transition opportunities, and private day options from outside of the school division.

Personal Reflections

I had the privilege of moving into the role of a high school assistant principal five years ago. When I started as an administrator, I had very limited experience with special education. It was almost immediately apparent to me that the topic of special education was going to become incredibly important in my work. Beyond the impact special education has had on me in my daily responsibilities as an administrator, supporting the teachers and programming in my building, the young people I serve along with their families and the teachers that make the magic happen, special education have become my preferred realm and responsibility. I commit to continuing to grow and deepen my understanding.

Special education teachers play a critical role in the greater school community. They directly affect the success of our students and the experiences of their families. With that in mind, I take on the responsibility of ensuring that our teachers feel supported and valued. With that responsibility, it is critical that we identify the areas of need for our school leaders to fulfill this responsibility. Research indicates that the more teachers feel connected and supported by their administrators, the more likely they are to stay. When teachers stay, the results are countless positive impacts on young people. With the impact administrators have on teachers, it is critical that we are evaluating the opportunities available to our administrative teams and providing experiences for growth and community with other leaders whenever and however possible.

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Appendix A

Certificate of Completion of the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)



Completion Date 07-Oct-2020
Expiration Date 07-Oct-2023
Record ID 38406642

This is to certify that:

Jessica Burbic

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Social & Behavioral Research (Curriculum Group)
Social & Behavioral Research (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TransCelerate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).

Under requirements set by:

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech)



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w956c6764-4714-45ea-a150-fe988ec7b928-38406642

Appendix B

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and University Institutional Board Review Permission to Conduct Study



Division of Scholarly Integrity and
Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-3732
irb@vt.edu
<http://www.research.vt.edu/hirc/hrpp>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 16, 2020
TO: Carol S Cash, Jessica Elizabeth Burbic
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires October 29, 2024)
PROTOCOL TITLE: Assistant Principals' Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming
IRB NUMBER: 20-906

Effective November 16, 2020, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104 (d) category(ies) 2(I),2(II).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit an amendment to the HRPP for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All Investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(I),2(II)
Protocol Determination Date: November 16, 2020

ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

Appendix C

Approval letter from school division to conduct a research study



Department of Assessment, Research and Evaluation

September 14, 2020

Ms. Jessica Burbic
3904 Redstone Drive
Henrico, VA 23294

Dear Ms. Burbic:

The Department of Assessment, Research and Evaluation has reviewed and approved your research study entitled *Assistant Principals' Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming*. Your study was approved by the review committee with one revisions. Please see the attached document for the revision. Once the revisions are completed and approved and IRB is on file, you can start your research.

Approval to conduct the study is limited to one year from the time of proposal submission. If the research timeline or any other aspect of your study changes during the time frame, please contact Helen Whitehurst and submit the changes for review prior to proceeding. If you are affiliated with an organization with an Institutional Review Board (IRB), the IRB approval letter must be on file in our office prior to beginning the study. Although your study has been approved, participation by individuals and schools is completely voluntary. Reports and publications generated from this study should not identify the individuals, schools, or the division and all research materials should accurately represent the party conducting the study. It is our expectation that you will submit a final report upon completion of the study to the Department of Assessment, Research and Evaluation.

Please contact Helen Whitehurst at hwhiteh@henrico.k12.va.us or 804-652-3831 who will assist you in the process of beginning your research studies in the schools or offices that you have requested.

Thank you for your interest in Henrico County Public Schools.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Hinton, Ph.D.
Director of Assessment, Research and Evaluation
Henrico County Public Schools
804-652-3835

Helen Whitehurst, Ph.D.
Educational Specialist - Research
Henrico County Public Schools
804-652-3831

Appendix D

Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study



Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study

Principal Investigator: Dr. Carol Cash, Dissertation Chair; Jessica Burbic, M.Ed. - VT Doctoral Student/Researcher

Telephone Numbers: Dr. Cash (804) 836-3611; Ms. Burbic (804) 389-2814

Email Addresses: ccash48@vt.edu; jeburbic@vt.edu

IRB#20-906 and Title of Study: Assistant Principals' Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming

You are invited to participate in a research study. This form includes information about the study and contact information if you have any questions. I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Tech, and I am conducting this research as part of my course work.

➤ WHAT SHOULD I KNOW?

If you decide to participate in this study, you will participate in a short digital survey questionnaire.

The questions and statements included in the survey require participants to self-report via a five option Likert scale, their preparedness to the support of special education teachers and programming. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes. Each participant will also be asked demographic information related to their own teaching license/certifications, their current placement (elementary, middle, or high school) and their experience serving as an administrator in an IEP meeting and/or supervising special education teachers in their building. Participants will also have the opportunity to identify what they believe to be needed professional learning experiences that may be provided within or outside of the school division. Data collected in survey responses will remain completely anonymous and confidential through the survey period and for the three year period following the publication of the completed dissertation.

We do not anticipate any risks from participating in this study.

Your participation in the survey is totally voluntary. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time by closing the survey browser without consequences of any kind. Data from incomplete surveys will not be used in the study results.

Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program Protocol No. 20-906 Reviewed on November 16, 2020

1 of 2

➤ CONFIDENTIALITY

All data collected during this research study will be kept confidential by the researcher. Your survey data will be password protected within the VT Qualtrics database, for which the researcher is the only individual with password access. No personal identifiers, including names or email addresses, will be collected with survey data. Only generalized data analyses will be provided to the school division, following the successful defense of the dissertation by the researcher. All data will be destroyed three years after the publication of the dissertation.

➤ WHO CAN I TALK TO?

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Jessica Burbic, jeburbic@vt.edu or Dr. Carol Cash, ccash48@vt.edu. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact the Virginia Tech HRPP Office at 540-231-3732 (irb@vt.edu).

Please print out a copy of this information sheet for your records.

Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program Protocol No. 20-906 Reviewed on November 16, 2020

Appendix E
Participant Recruitment Email

Greetings administrator,

My name is Jessica Burbic and I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Tech. I am requesting your help in my doctoral dissertation research by participating in a short survey questionnaire. My study focuses on the self-reported levels of preparedness to support special education teachers and programming. I hope to gain information from survey responses that will help drive professional learning for administrators in this division moving forward.

I have completed my application and received an approval letter from the IRB for my research study **IRB #20-906**. Participation in this research is completely voluntary.

If you agree to participate, you will complete the survey at this link:
https://virginiatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_ePUq0p1m8xuzGaV

Data and results will be used as part of my dissertation research. When the dissertation process is completed the information will be shared with your school division and made available to all research participants, upon request.

Your participation in this brief survey questionnaire will anonymously inform your school division on the effectiveness of the current professional learning and potentially lead to positive changes for the future. Your responses may also inform the larger field of educational leadership, providing information about how site based administrators may be better served by professional learning opportunities with a focus on special education.

Please contact me at jeburbic@vt.edu or 804-389-2814 if you have any questions. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration in completing my dissertation study. As an administrator myself, I understand your time is valuable. I greatly appreciate your consideration for participating in this study.

Respectfully,
Jessica E. Burbic, M.Ed
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Helen S. Whitehurst, Ph.D.

Education Specialist - Research
Henrico County Public Schools
Department of Assessment, Research, and Evaluation (D.A.R.E)
(804) 652-3831 (work)
(804) 514-1062 (cell)

Appendix F
Survey Tool, housed in Qualtrics

Part I: *Survey Participant Demographic Information*

Demographic Information

Teaching License (include all applicable information)

 General Education: Subject area/level of license

 Special Education: Disabilities included on license

School level (currently serving)

 Elementary

 Middle

 High

Have you served as an administrator in an IEP meeting?

Do you or have you in a previous setting supervised special education?

Percentage of students with disabilities compared to total enrollment in current setting:

 0-5%

 6-10%

 11-15%

 16-25%

Assistant Self-Reported Levels of Preparedness to Support Special Education Teachers and Programming

	Rating Scale				
	1	2	3	4	5
Prepared to complete task or responsibility	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree

1. I understand how students' exceptionalities may interact with their development and learning needs and use that information to support our special education as they provide meaningful and challenging learning experiences.
2. I create safe, inclusive, culturally responsive learning environments that allow all students, including those with exceptionalities, to be active and engaged learners, who develop emotional well-being, positive social interactions, and self-determination.
3. I am able to implement case law and federal, state, and local policies that guide the support and protection of students with exceptionalities and the development of their Individualized Education Programs.
4. I lead my teachers in the development of general and specialized curricula to improve programs, supports, and services at the classroom, school, community, and system levels, when possible, to contribute to the individualize learning for students with exceptionalities.

5. I continue to broaden and deepen my professional learning and expand my knowledge of instructional technologies, curriculum standards, effective evidenced-based teaching strategies, and assistive technologies to support access to and learning for students with exceptionalities.
6. I am able to effectively participate in planning for students with exceptionalities through the IEP process and development of meaningful learning progressions.
7. I am able to understand the multiple methods of assessment and data sources used to guide the decision making process employed when developing IEPs for students with exceptionalities.
8. I am able to lead and support the teachers I supervise in selecting, adapting, and developing a broad set of evidence based instructional strategies to advance the learning of students with exceptionalities.
9. I provide ongoing supervision and support of personnel working with students with exceptionalities and their families, and am able to effectively coach these professionals to improve in identified areas for growth when it is necessary.
10. I understand and am well versed in the variety of post-secondary transition opportunities and services available to students across a wide range of settings and learning experiences.
11. I understand and exceed the expectations of professional, ethical principles, and practices that inform special education practice.
12. I am able to successfully collaborate with families, other educators, related services providers, students with exceptionalities, and personnel from community agencies in culturally responsive ways to address the needs of students across a range of learning experiences.
13. I am an active part of the continued improvement process for special education programs, supports, and services at the classroom, school, and system levels for students with exceptionalities, keeping in mind relevant laws and evidence-based practices.
14. I advocate for the allocation of resources for the preparation and professional learning of all personnel who serve our students with exceptionalities.
15. I can confidently develop and conduct professional learning experiences, in collaboration with central office support staff and/or colleagues from across the division, for the special education teachers and paraprofessionals within my building and my administrative colleagues when necessary.
16. I lead my special education teachers and service providers to formulate goals, set and meet professional expectations, advocate for effective and evidenced-based practices, and create positive learning environments.
17. I have a comprehensive understanding of special education, legal policies, ethical standards, and emerging issues that inform special education practices.

18. I am able to promote collaboration and understanding, resolve conflicts, and build consensus for improving programs, services, and outcomes for students with exceptionalities.

Assistant Principals Self-Reported Areas of Need for Professional Learning

Open ended Question

1. Based on your individual ratings, what professional learning topics/experiences would you need from the school division to improve your level of preparedness?
 2. Based on your individual ratings, what professional learning topics/experiences would you need from outside professional learning resources and/or organizations to improve your level of preparedness?
 3. Is there anything you would like to add that was not asked?
-