



2020

The importance of administrative support for special education teachers

Shari E. Lujan

University of the Pacific, ladybuglujan@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/uop_etds



Part of the [Disability and Equity in Education Commons](#), [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons](#), [Elementary Education Commons](#), [Special Education Administration Commons](#), and the [Special Education and Teaching Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lujan, Shari E.. (2020). *The importance of administrative support for special education teachers*. University of the Pacific, Dissertation. https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/uop_etds/3669

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of the Pacific Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact mgibney@pacific.edu.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT FOR
SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

By

Shari E. Lujan

A Dissertation Submitted to the

Graduate School

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Benerd College

Educational Administration and Leadership

University of the Pacific
Stockton, California

2020

THE IMPORTANCE OF ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT FOR
SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

By

Shari E. Lujan

APPROVED BY:

Dissertation Advisor: Christina Rusk, Ed.D.

Committee Member: Heidi Stevenson, Ph.D.

Committee Member: Shane Conklin, Ed.D.

Senior Associate Dean of Benerd College: Linda Webster, Ph.D.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT FOR
SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

Copyright 2020

By

Shari E. Lujan

DEDICATION

First and foremost I would like to thank our God above who was with me every step of the way, for without his love and support I would not have finished. I would like to thank my family for their love, support and prayers throughout the four years that it took to embark on this long and arduous journey.

I would like to especially thank my husband, Allen Lujan who is an inspiration to me and my work since he is also a special education teacher and understood the many challenges that I faced: Most notably working full time during the day and taking classes at night after an already long day of teaching. I thank him for without his understanding, patience and guidance I would not have been able to complete this doctoral program. He lovingly took on a lot more home responsibility since I was not there to participate. I would also like to thank our daughters, Leilani and Kalilah. Thank you for taking on more home responsibilities and for understanding the numerous amounts of times that I had to pass on family/friend get togethers or trips so I could stay home or go to the local coffee shop and work on my dissertation. Thank you to our daughter Marina Lumbus who was also working on her special education teaching credential at the same time, so she and her husband Chad understood about missing out on family get togethers since we were all in school. I would also like to thank my parents: Don and Lora Most. My father was alive and a good source of encouragement when I set sail on this journey but soon after I began the program he passed on. However, my mom continued to encourage me throughout the duration. I would never have been able to have completed this work if it weren't for each one of them and their love, support, prayers and understanding.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Once my first three chapters were complete, I got handed off to the professor that would become my chairperson, Dr. Christina Rusk. She graciously read through my chapters and made suggestions for improvement. She helped assure me that I would be able to find principals who would participate in my study, even though I did not personally know any elementary school site principal within the three school districts that I chose to focus my study on. I thank her for her guidance thorough out the whole long process. I would also like to thank my other two committee members Dr. Heidi Stevenson and Dr. Shane Conklin. Each member was chosen for a specific purpose: Dr. Rusk was chosen for her knowledge in special education, Dr. Stevenson for her knowledge in qualitative studies and Dr. Conkin for his knowledge in administration since he is also an elementary site principal.

I also must acknowledge another professor, Dr. Linda Skrla for her guidance during my journey since she played a vital role in teaching several of the classes that our cohort took. She continued to bring us back to reality and reminded us to focus on filling a “small” hole in the research and not trying to fill the whole cavern.

I would like to acknowledge all the other students in Cohort 2 through Teachers College of San Joaquin (TCSJ) that embarked on this journey with me...some of you have become life-long friends. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank Regina Gearheard who spent numerous hours with me at our local coffee shop, Common Grounds, writing our papers and pouring over our statistics homework. You made this journey so much more enjoyable.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

Abstract

By Shari E. Lujan

University of the Pacific
2020

Since the inception of special education laws in the 1970's, special education teachers have been given the responsibility of educating children with exceptional needs. Those needs range from children with mild to moderate disabilities to children with moderate to severe disabilities. There are 13 categories that a child can qualify for special education services through an Individual Education Program (IEP). The majority of children with exceptional needs are educated on general education campuses. With high stakes testing and the push for academic excellence, one may wonder how a child with exceptional needs fits into a general education campus. The Education of Handicapped Act (EHA) was passed in 1970 and guaranteed that every child was entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) at any public-school facility. Since that time, more laws have been updated and renamed giving a child with a disability more access and rights to a FAPE. Special education can be very complex, and teachers must work with students who have a varying degree of disabilities. Special education teachers are responsible for creating lessons to address the academic and behavioral needs of each of their students on their caseloads. They must also collaborate with the general education teachers to make sure they are aware of the needs and goals of the students in their classes. They are responsible for writing the IEP for each student on their caseload. They must evaluate their

students throughout the school year on their goals and update their progress. Another role that the special education teacher has is to train the instructional assistance to work with the students and their unique needs (Capper & Frattura, 2009; Prather-Jones, 2011). Research shows that the main reasons special education teachers gave for leaving was lack of administrative support, huge caseloads, the demands of the IEP (Individual Education Program) paperwork, followed by isolation, too much diversity of student needs and the lack of appreciation by co-workers and administrators for all their hard work (Billingsley & Cross, 1991, 2007; Crocket, 2007; Prather-Jones, 2011).

This study looked at the role of the site administrator and why it is important to support their special education teachers. Seven site elementary principals were interviewed to see what their perception was in helping their special education teachers with the special needs' students on their respective school campuses. After conducting two interviews with each participant for a total of 14 interviews these are the themes that emerged: communication, mental health issues, lack of support/or delay in receiving help, culture between special education and general education teachers, support for special education programs and teachers, curriculum, funding and on the job training. This study used the lens of transformational leadership to see how principals perceived their role in helping their special education teachers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables.....	13
Chapter 1: Introduction	14
Background to the Study.....	16
Research Problem.....	17
Theoretical Framework.....	19
Purpose of the Study.....	20
Research Questions.....	20
Description of the Study.....	21
Significance of the Study.....	22
Summary.....	22
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature.....	23
Historical Background.....	23
Beginning of Special Education.....	26
Background of Special Education Laws.....	26
Free Appropriate Public Education.....	28
A Policy Review in Education.....	30

Special Education Teachers' Experiences.....	32
Special Education and School Leadership.....	34
Theoretical Framework.....	40
Transformational Leadership.....	40
Transformational Leadership as a Vision.....	42
Summary.....	45
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	49
Research Questions.....	49
Methods.....	50
Description of Participants.....	51
Data Collection.....	52
Analysis of the Data.....	54
Trustworthiness.....	56
Limitations.....	57
Summary.....	57
Chapter 4: Results.....	59
Setting.....	60

	10
Administrator Participants.....	62
Themes that Emerged from the Interview Process.....	72
Identifiable Themes Among the Participants.....	73
Communication.....	73
Mental Health Issues.....	74
Lack of Supports/Delay in Receiving Help.....	77
Culture Between Special Education and General Education.....	82
Supports for Special Education Teachers and Programs.....	85
Curriculum.....	88
Funding.....	91
On the Job Training.....	95
Transformational Leadership.....	97
Conclusion.....	100
Summary.....	101
Chapter 5: Conclusion and Discussion.....	103
Transformational Leadership.....	104
Challenges that Principals Face.....	104

Principal Preparation Programs.....	105
Mental Health.....	106
Funding Continues to be an Issue.....	108
Hiring Concerns.....	110
Lack of Curriculum.....	110
Communication and Transformational Leadership.....	111
Barriers to Transformational Leadership.....	113
Limitations to the Study.....	115
Recommendations and Possible Areas of Future Research.....	117
Answers to Research Questions.....	121
Implications of Findings.....	123
Social Change Implications.....	123
Principal Implications.....	124
District Implications.....	124
University Implications.....	125
Conclusion.....	125
References.....	128

Appendices

A. Interview 1 Qualitative Questions.....142

B. Interview 2 Qualitative Questions.....143

C. Agreement to Participate in Research.....144

LIST OF TABLES

Table

1. Characteristics of Leadership.....	48
2. Administrator Profile.....	69
3. Demographics of State, County and School Districts.....	70
4. Site Type, Numbers and Percent of Special Education Students.....	71
5. Recommendations for Future Research.....	121

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

According to the NCES (National Center for Education Statistics), there are over 100,000 people who serve in a principal role. Research has found that the number one gain in student achievement is an effective principal (Banbrick-Santoyo, 2012; Capper & Fattura, 2009; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Fullman, 2014). An effective principal supports their staff in meeting the educational needs of all the students who enter their respective schools. Research has further found that an effective principal can make educational gains in as little as one school year (NCES, 2016).

In 1975, P.L. 94-142 (Public Law 94-142) also known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was signed into law. This law ensured that the millions of special education students were now eligible to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE). By 1990, this law was renamed Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and reauthorized in 2004. In 2015, according to the National Center Education Statistic (NCES), 6.6 million students with exceptional needs ages 3-21 received an education in the United States. This number is approximately 13% of the total student population across all states enrolled in the public-school system (NCES, 2017). Prior to these laws these children were not included in the public-school system; they were either educated at home or in institutions depending on the income level of the family and what they could afford (Torres & Barber, 2017). Sadly, these children were locked away and forgotten by society because it was once believed that they could not function in or be a contributing member of society (Eklind, 1998; Torres & Barber, 2017).

This study examines the administrator's role in supporting special education teachers. I review laws and legislature that pertains to this population. Special education teachers play a vital role in helping this population of students succeed, but it can be difficult to retain these

teachers (Frost & Kersten, 2011). The role of the special education teacher has become more complex since more responsibility is placed on them. Special educators need to support grade level instruction which means they need an extensive knowledge base of general education academic subjects (Benedict et al., 2014). According to Sindelar

et al. (2010), these teachers are expected to know how to work with a variety of students with diverse needs. They need to know how to provide specific interventions and need to evaluate students with an array of assessments in a timely manner. According to DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2003), special education teachers have complex job responsibilities with an enormous load of paperwork which tends to be overwhelming. Prather-Jones (2011), conducted a qualitative investigation to find out why special education teachers vacate their jobs. The main reasons they gave for leaving was lack of administrative support, huge caseloads, the demands of the IEP (Individual Education Program) paperwork, followed by isolation, too much diversity of student needs and the lack of appreciation by co-workers and administrators for all their hard work (Billingsley & Cross, 1991). These teachers require support from their site administrator to ensure that their exceptional needs students get what they need in order to learn and be successful (Billingsley, 2007; Crockett, 2007). Crockett (2007), goes on to comment that administrative authority continues to remain highly influential among their teachers and staff. Leadership is important to any organization and poor leadership will lead to disaster (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Kellis & Ran, 2012). “Leaders in organizations can play an important part in affecting organizational members” (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 34). What seems to be difficult to define is what it means by administrative support (Billingsley, 2004; Prather-Jones, 2011). Prather-Jones, (2011) goes on to define what special education teachers mean by administrative support. It encompasses three areas:

Teachers look to principals to enforce reasonable consequences for student misconduct, and to include them in the decision making behind these consequences. Teachers felt supported by principals who made them feel respected and appreciated. Teachers need support from the other teachers in their schools, and principals play an important role in developing these relationships.

This study will ultimately look at leadership as a way of helping to retain and support special education teachers in their role of educating students with exceptional needs. This study will also look at how principals view compliance when it comes to special education laws.

Background of the Study

Special education teachers are tasked with a host of responsibilities across multiple contexts, so it is no wonder that they would need a multitude of supports (Sweigart & Collins, 2017). Many special education teachers need to be knowledgeable in all academic subjects, as well as needing to deal with a wide arrange of disabilities and behavioral needs in their classrooms (Benedict et al., 2014). According to Billingsley and Cross (1991, 2004), there always seems to be a need to recruit good quality special education teachers, but once they are obtained they end up leaving the profession at a much higher rate than general education teachers; she has found the causes to be complex but they continue to leave the field at a faster rate than any other teacher group.

In a survey of 1,500 former special education teachers the main reasons they gave for leaving was lack of administrative support, huge caseloads, the demands of the IEP (Individual Education Program) paperwork, followed by isolation, too much diversity of student needs and the lack of appreciation by co-workers and administrators for all their hard work (Billingsley & Cross, 1991). Many authors point to these same reasons for special education teachers leaving the field either all together or into a general education position (Billingsley, 2004; Lentz, 2013; Sweigart & Collins, 2017). It would be beneficial for the school administrator to help support

their special education staff by giving them reasonable caseloads, which would then keep the IEP paperwork manageable. Also, it would be helpful if they supplied the special education teacher with the supplies and materials that they need to teach the population they serve. Another factor that would help, is if they served as the liaison between the special education teacher and the general education teacher (DiPoala & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Lentz, 2013).

Research Problem

Special education teachers leave the field of education at a higher rate than their general education colleagues (Billingsley, 2004; Weintraub, 2012). According to Billingsley (2004), special education teachers leave their teaching assignments at a rate of 12% more often compared to general education teachers. This shortage has far reaching implication and consequences for the exceptional needs' population. According to Darling-Hammond and Sclan (1996), this teacher shortage may cause districts to reduce services to students with disabilities or to raise class sizes placing even more strain on the already overloaded special education teacher. Half of special education teachers leave the field within three years because of poor administrative support, large caseloads and huge quantities of IEP paperwork (DiPaola et al., 2004). This shortage impacts students with exceptional needs by the fact they are getting inadequate educational experiences which results in reduced student achievement levels and competent graduates seeking employment (Billingsley, 2004)

Most of the qualitative literature in looking at the area of special education leadership was done in the Southern states and Eastern Coast of the United States. California is the most populated state in the union. According to the California Department of Education (CDE), the student population was 6,228,235 in the 2016-17 school year. According to the CDE (2017), 734,422 special education students; newborn through 22 years of age received services for the

school year 2015-16. Federal law states that these students are entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and should get their education alongside their typically developing peers in the least restrictive environment (LRE) for their disability (Capper & Frattura, 2009; Torres & Barber, 2017). There is a lot that the school administrators and teachers need to think about when educating the special education population in keeping to the spirit of state and federal laws.

The gap in the literature points to the fact that special education teachers leave the field at a much higher rate than their general education teacher counterparts. Lack of administrative support is cited as the number one reason special education teachers leave the field (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). The literature even explains why they leave, what seems to be elusive is the perception that principals see as their role in supporting their special education teachers. According to Capper and Frattura (2009), in order for teachers to be successful, they need ongoing administrative support. Administrators cannot expect their teachers to practice excellent teaching practices without site and district support (Capper & Frattura, 2009). Administrative support is important to keep and retain special education teachers (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). According to Bateman and Bateman (2001), principals must maintain an attitude toward the special education teachers that they are important and appreciated. They go on to state that all educators should be treated equally. They should provide time for teachers to plan. Teachers need to be presented with opportunities for professional development. They need to make sure that the special education teacher has ample materials and supplies to teach this diverse population. Another helpful thing for administrators to do is to ensure that instructional aides are qualified and are frequently evaluated (Bates & Bates, 2001).

This study will extend the body of knowledge by looking at special education leadership and how school principals support their special education teacher in their role of educating students with exceptional needs at their perspective school sites. This study will also look to see how principals perceive their role in staying compliant with state and federal laws.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that this study will use is transformational leadership. Transformational leadership starts with a vision and the goal is to attract potential followers who also believe in and wish to implement the vision (Bass, 1990; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Changing Minds, 2017; Lentz, 2013). The goal of transformational leadership is to not only change the organization but to change or transform the people involved in the process by inspiring them to be better at their jobs and to also develop their own capacity to be a leader (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Changing Minds 2017; Lentz, 2013).

According to Bass (1990), transformational leaders have the ability to change the landscape of the organization by developing a vision that encompasses everyone's abilities. They have a way of coming up alongside those who need help and providing the appropriate levels of support. Bass (1990) goes on to state that those leaders who gain charisma in the eyes of their employees tend to be the most influential. This type of leadership will elicit a great deal of trust and confidence from their employees. They excite and inspire their employees to believe that they can accomplish great things with extra effort.

Transformational leaders have the ability to change the culture of the school through mutual respect (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Leadership in special education needs to be based on students and their preferred outcomes that are expressed by parents and school personnel (Lentz, 2013). Since the inception of special education laws beginning in the 1970's, students with

disabilities are now guaranteed a right to educational opportunities which were once denied them (Capper & Frattura, 2013; Torres & Barber, 2009). According to Crockett (2007), more than 20,000 administrators across the United States are responsible for making sure that the special education students at their school sites are receiving an appropriate education with suitable related services. Since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB 2001), principals assume an even greater responsibility for making sure that children with disabilities are educated appropriately with the correct supports as well as monitoring their progress on district and statewide testing (Torres & Barber, 2017; Crockett, 2007). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has been replaced by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). After 18 months of developing the ESSA with California's educational stakeholders, California submitted their plan to the United States Department of Education on Friday September 15, 2017.

Administrative leadership tends to have a powerful and predictive factor in maintaining positive attitudes for special educators (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003).

This is why transformational leadership in special education is so important (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Lentz, 2013). This theoretical framework will be addressed in more depth in Chapter 2.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how a school site administrator views their role in supporting special education teachers and what their perspective on compliance and the barriers that may exist.

Research Question

- In what ways do principals provide support to their special education teachers?
 - In what ways do principals put value on the special education team?
 - In what ways do principals comply with special education laws and practices?

Description of the Study

According to Creswell (2013), a phenomenological study describes a person's lived experience. In this type of study, the researcher focuses on what the participants all have in common as they experience the phenomenon. This study will focus on principals who currently hold jobs at a public elementary school site who support special education teachers on their campuses.

The nature of the study looks at the lives of the participants who are currently serving as a site principal. It looks at the principal and their role in supporting the special education teachers at their school site. The study will also look at principal's perception of how they should support special education teachers and how they perceive the laws that accompany this niche of education.

The assumptions are based on the fact that each participant who is interviewed is giving an accurate description of their current assignment and how they see their role in supporting the special education teachers at their school site. Because the researcher is also a special education teacher it is important that I do not bring in my own prejudices and biases into the study. The limitations exist since this is not a random assignment population. The principals were asked if they would like to participate in the study and only those who wished to participate were chosen as long as they met the criteria of serving as a site administrator for three or more years and prior to that had held a teaching position for at least three years. In addition, they needed to hold a position as an elementary school principal serving either in a K-6 setting or a K-8 setting in a Central Valley school in Northern California. Lastly, they needed to have at least two or more special education classes/programs on their campus. They should have at least one RSP and one SDC class on their respective campuses.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study would be to look at ways site administrators can help support their special education teachers in their complex role of supporting students with special needs. Also, to look at how they could increase the retention rate of highly qualified special education teacher. This study would benefit administrators, both general education and special education teachers, students with disabilities, parents of students with disabilities and possibly society given the fact that the better educated these students are the more independent, they will be. With a better education they will be able to function better in society and may hold down a job which could cut down their need for government assistance (Opuda, 1994). According to Frost and Kersten (2011), One cannot expect these children to reasonably succeed in life without the benefit of a public education.

Summary

This study looks at transformational leadership style as coined by James McGregor Burns in 1978 and was mostly used in business and politics. By 1985, Bass, Avolio and Leithwood expanded on it to include education. Bass suggests that transformational leadership in education helps leaders and teachers see a bigger vision. He goes on to state that type of leadership is interested in the needs of the follower and is concerned about morally uplifting others so they can achieve beyond what even they thought possible (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Chapter Two will look at the historical background as well as the beginning and background of special education. It will look at the inception of special education laws and how it pertains to a Free Appropriate Public Education. The chapter will also look at policy review in education. Next it will look at special education teacher experiences and likewise special education and school leadership. This chapter will conclude with transformational leadership as a vision.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter will cover topics centered on the importance of leadership in education. Leadership has been found to be the second most important element in schools with only direct classroom instruction being the first most important element (Leithwood et al., 2004). These same authors go on to state that leadership has an indirect impact on student success and achievement (2004). This chapter will examine the historical background, it will look at the beginnings of special education as well as special education law. This chapter will also look at the meaning of Free Appropriate Public Education as well as a policy review. Finally, it will analyze transformational leadership as a theoretical framework.

Historical Background

According to McCann (2014), Education in the United States began in 1647. The General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed a decree that every town that had at least fifty families should have an elementary school. In 1679, a church in Rowley, Massachusetts prosecuted a schoolteacher by the name of Phillip Nelson for his efforts to try to “cure” his deaf student. Mr. Nelson was guilty of trying to help his student, Isaac Kilbourne learn to speak. From fear of prosecution, teachers refused to help these students, and so began the treatment of disabled children in America (McCann, 2014).

In the 17th Century, children who exhibited physical or mental abnormalities were seen as deviating from the normal childhood realm (Elkind, 1998). Elkind (1998), states that society viewed these children as deviating from the idealized standard child, so they became separate from the norm and not just a mere deviation from it. These children were largely ignored in society (Torres & Barber, 2017). If a child was blind, deaf or retarded they were placed in special

schools where they were forgotten by society. There was no thought that these children could be taught to be a part of society (Capper & Frattura, 2009; Elkind, 1998; Torres & Baber, 2017).

Students with disabilities were not guaranteed the right to a public education. If a disabled child showed up at the school door and the teacher felt that they were “uneducable” they would inform the parent not to bring them back. Upon hearing such news, the parent would take their disabled child home and “educate” them to the best of their ability or place them in institutions (McCann, 2014; Torres & Barber, 2017).

McCann (2014), goes on to state that special education would develop very slowly in the United States. Sadly, almost two centuries would pass since the conviction of Phillip Nelson before President Lincoln in 1864, signed into law an act that Congress passed opening the doors of Columbia Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb and Blind, now called Gallaudet University (McCann, 2014). It would take a series of successful court rulings and 107 more years before the eight million children identified as disabled would receive an education. Prior to these laws these children were denied educational opportunities (Billingsley, 2004; Capper & Fattura, 2009; Crockett, 2007; Torres & Barber, 2017). Parents of children with disabilities have not always found sympathy from the public, “critics have claimed that special education is a ‘bloated bureaucracy’, squandering limited public resources on individuals who have little possibility of becoming contributing members of society” (Opuda, 1995, p. 1).

Post-World War II is considered the beginning of the postmodern era. In 1954, the Supreme Court passed the law *Brown vs. State Board of Education in Topeka*, which put a stop to racial segregation that was happening in the United States school system. Black children were now allowed to be educated alongside the white children in the US (Antosh & Imparato, 2014) The Supreme Court through a unanimous ruling stated that it was a violation of the 14th

amendment to segregate black children into their own schools which separated them from their typically developing white peers (*Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka*, 1954). This law paved the way for many special education laws that came into existence to ensure that all students, including those with exceptional needs got a free and appropriate public education (Antosh & Imparato, 2014). This law also broadened the vision to include children with exceptional needs being mainstreamed into general education classes (Antosh & Imparato, 2014).

During the 1940's, when the United States was faced with World War II, Elkind (1998), acknowledged that the attitudes and beliefs toward people with exceptional needs began to change (Torres & Barber, 2017). The war called for a nation-wide draft of all eligible men to serve in the armed forces. Along with the physical screenings, they also used psychological screenings and what they found was some shocking results (Elkind, 1998). Many men were either identified with physical or mental problems which prevented them from serving. Prior to these screenings, these men had gone to school and had been productive members of society. This truth began to open doors for special needs children (Elkind, 1998; Torres & Barber, 2017). During and after World War II, many of our young men came home exhibiting the effects of war; amputated limbs and psychological problems (Elkind, 1998). At that time there was a societal shift toward helping the not so perfect individual. Teacher preparation programs began teaching skills to individuals so they could work with the special needs' child. Society now saw it as a challenge and an obligation to educate these children, not just hide them away behind closed and locked doors (Torres & Barber, 2017).

Beginning of Special Education

Special education students were discriminated against because of their learning issues. At times they were treated like outcasts on a campus (Frost & Karsten, 2011). By the late 1950's, there seemed to be a concern for the general welfare of the handicapped by the efforts of the National Association for Retarded Children and The Council for Exceptional Children (Willenberg, 1966). Most of the funds these groups appropriated were earmarked for research related to educating the handicapped. Unfortunately, there followed a succession of years where the funding was drastically cut. By 1962, funding for children with exceptional needs research had been reduced to a point of insignificance. In response, by executive order, President Kennedy established the Division of Exceptional Children and Youth in the US Office of Education to address the educational needs of the handicapped. Within eighteen months, the program was left barely visible and with no real authority or leadership. After all these seemingly fruitless efforts, it became clear that in order to get something permanent for exceptional needs students it would have to be anchored by a legislative enactment (Willenberg, 1966).

A Student with exceptional needs was excluded from the American public-school system. "In perspective, the United States put a man on the moon six years before a federal initiative was passed by Congress to ensure that all students have a right to a public education" (Lentz, 2013, p. 72). Since the passing of these laws much has been accomplished with and for our exceptional needs' population of students (Capper & Frattura, 2009; Lentz, 2013; Torres & Barber, 2017).

Background of Special Education Laws

Since the passing of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* outlawing racial segregation it took another seventeen years before the Supreme Court heard the 1971 case of *Pennsylvania*

Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The fight for the rights of special education students started with this case which was a class-action lawsuit filed by the parents of several children with mental disabilities. The plaintiffs sought declaratory and injunctive relief, claiming that certain state and federal laws unconstitutionally denied a free publicly funded education to their children who had mental disabilities. They also claimed that the school district unfairly classified their children as “uneducable and untrainable”, and also denied public education to students who did not reach the mental age of a five-year-old by the time they turned eight years-old. The court entered a consent decree which was agreed upon by the parties that declared that several laws were unconstitutional and required the state to evaluate and to place all students with mental disabilities ages 6-21 in a proper public funded educational setting. The Consent Decree of this case became the foundation for the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), which eventually led to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (*Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, 1971). This was the court case that P.L. 94-142 (Public Law 94-142) was founded on. In 1972, *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* was the second case to help pave the way for special education laws.

In the *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* case, this was another class action lawsuit that was brought on behalf of seven children and other students who resided in the District of Columbia. The students were identified as having behavioral problems, emotional disturbance, mentally retardation or hyperactivity. All of these students had been excluded from school or denied educational services that would have addressed the needs that arose from their identified disabilities. The parents successfully filed suit arguing that the school district failed to provide their children with a public-school education therefore, their children’s rights to an

education were being denied. The federal district court in the District of Columbia made it very clear that the deprivation suffered by the children clearly violated their right to a public-school education under the laws of the District of Columbia. The court likened the treatment of the special education students as that suffered by the segregation which was outlawed by the *Brown v. State Board of Education of Topeka* case (*Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia*, 1972).

“When it was passed in 1975, P.L 94-142 (Public Law 94-142), guaranteed a free appropriate public education to each child with a disability. This law had a dramatic, positive impact on millions of children with disabilities in every state and each local community across the country” (Law & Guidance, 2007). Finally, after all these years of fighting for the educational rights for children with disabilities, this was the first modern federal law that would formally address special education and the laws to come. At the time of the original passage of this law in 1975, it was realized that the cost to educate a child with disabilities was not insignificant. It was estimated that the cost to educate a special education child was roughly twice of what it cost to educate a child without disabilities (Zirkel, 2014, p. 505).

Free Appropriate Public Education

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) means special education and related services that are provided at public expense through state and federal income taxes. An appropriate education may be served in a regular classroom or a special education classroom or a combination of the two. “It may be accompanied by related services such as speech therapy, occupational and physical therapy, psychological counseling, and medical diagnostics services necessary to the child’s education” (Lentz, 2013, p.23). It needs to meet the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) standards which include preschool, elementary, and secondary

education which needs to be commensurate with nondisabled students and needs to include comparable facilities, along with appropriate materials and equipment (Cameron, 2016). These services are provided to these children through an Individual Education Program (IEP) document which should be reviewed and updated at least annually (Lentz, 2013; Opuda, 1995).

The major case to address the FAPE issue was the 1982 landmark decision in *Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley*. Amy Rowley was a deaf student who attended a public school in Peekskill, New York. The judge ruled that in his opinion, Rowley was not receiving a “Free Appropriate Public Education” which he then defined in her case as “an opportunity to achieve her full potential commensurate with the opportunity provided to other children” (*Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley, 1982*). The school district then appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court for a ruling (*Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley, 1982*).

Judge Rehnquist explained that he and other members of the Supreme Court saw that the “related services” that were required under EAHCA was to help disabled students benefit from instruction, but not necessarily reach their full potential. The belief of the Court was that “the intent of the Act was more to open the door to public education to handicapped children on appropriate terms than to guarantee any particular level of education once inside” (*Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley, 1982, para, 4*).

This is the first case where the U.S. Supreme Court actually looked at and defined the term FAPE. Since the ruling of *Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley*, courts continue to look to this case to determine whether a school district has met its obligation of FAPE. As a result of this case, the U. S. Supreme Court provided a two-part test to determine whether a school district was providing FAPE to a student. “First, the IEP

must comply with regulatory requirements in IDEA, and second, the student's IEP should be reasonably calculated to enable a child to receive education benefits" (Sumbera et al., 2014, p. 299). The Rowley case supported the idea that students with disabilities would have equal access to education which was the goal of IDEA, and it also guaranteed a "basic floor of opportunity" for these students. More than three decades have passed since the U.S. Supreme Court provided a definition of FAPE and numerous cases have been brought before the courts to determine if a student's FAPE was violated (Office for Civil Rights, 2008).

A Policy Review in Education

By 1990, EAHCA (Education for All Handicapped Children Act) was renamed IDEA (Individual with Disabilities Education Act). By 2004, with the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA), performance levels were no longer just limited to general education students but also included special education students (Boscardin et al., 2011). After the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, accountability for performance and high standards was not just limited to general education students but to special education students as well (Capper & Frattura, 2009; DiPaola et al., 2004; Torres & Barber, 2017) In 2009, there was a framework created for administrators of special education students which was approved and released by the Council for Exceptional Children. The title of the framework: *What Every Special Educator Know: Ethics, Standards, and Guidelines for Special Educators*. It is divided into six standards that address the following domains: Standard 1 includes leadership and policy, Standard 2 includes program development and organization, Standard 3 includes research and inquiry, Standard 4 includes evaluation, Standard 5 includes professional development and ethical practice, Standard 6 includes collaboration (Boscardin et al., 2011). Standard 2, program development and organization look at all positive outcomes and does not look to just one

leadership model to create an effective program for students with exceptional needs (Boscardin et al., 2011). According to the Council for Exceptional Children, Standard 6 received the highest ranking as all stakeholders recognized the value of collaborating with all school personnel along with families in providing an appropriate education for children with disabilities (Boscardin et al., 2011).

Edwards (2007), found that “Special education is a very complicated type of leadership where the stakes are very high” (p. 121). She also found that many superintendents and principals who did not have any special education experience often times did not understand their role in helping the special education staff. A welcoming atmosphere and positive school culture must be felt by all parents. At times and in some cases the fear of non-compliance to state and federal laws through consequences may set the tone of being unwelcoming (Lentz, 2013). Administrators must remember that respect is the cornerstone of setting a welcoming school culture (Lentz, 2013). The most important thing that these leaders needed to do was to keep up with the ever-changing laws of special education. Special education laws show that each child needs to be looked upon as an individual and not looked upon as a mass of students like general education tends to look at children. With that said, it is also important to make sure that there is enough staff to spread the work around so that no one staff member’s caseload is too large. In non-compliant districts it was found that each member’s caseload was too high, the average number of children was in the high 50’s to mid-60’s (Edwards, 2007). There is not a lot of research that points to what effective special education leadership looks like. It does state that public education has changed in the past 35 years and has had to conform to different mandates since having to include students with disabilities (Frost & Kersten, 2011).

With the passing of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975, school district became responsible for not only educating the general education students who reside within their boundaries but for educating the exceptional needs students as well. At the time of the original passage of IDEA back in 1975, Congress estimated the cost to be about twice the amount of money to educate exceptional needs children versus general education students. Congress agreed that the federal government could fund 40% of the excess expense. To date the federal government has never funded any school district 40% of what it cost to educate special education children, they have never even funded any school district 20% of what it cost to educate a special education child (McCann, 2014).

After the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, accountability results applied to all students, not just students with disabilities (Boscardin et al., 2009). Boscardin et al. (2009), goes on to state that there are six standards of leadership which are as follows: Standard 1, leadership and policy, Standard 2, program development and organization, Standard 3, research and inquiry, Standard 4, evaluation, Standard 5, professional development and ethical practice and Standard 6, collaboration. Out of all of these standards, the one that ranked the highest was collaboration. Collaboration is involved in all educational planning, implementation and evaluation which helps to strengthen all advocacy groups including parents (Boscardin et al., 2009; Lentz, 2013; Zaretsky, 2004). This literature review focuses on the importance of special education leadership and how administrators need to understand laws and practices that special education teacher need to help support them in their role.

Special Education Teachers' Experiences

According to Thornton et al., (2007), the shortage of special education teachers is a national epidemic in the United States. Annually, universities and colleges do not graduate

enough special education teachers to fill the demand. Many special education vacancies get filled by substitute teachers leaving special education students without the benefit of a highly qualified teacher (Katsiyannis et al., 2003).

The demands of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 required that all children be proficient by the school year 2013-14 including all special education students. This requirement was very difficult for the 6.6 million students with exceptional needs to achieve so schools were not meeting their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) (Simpson et al., 2004). With this kind of demand and pressure, more special education teachers will either leave the profession or transfer into general education jobs (Thornton et al., 2007).

Many special education teachers did not feel that they had adequate teacher induction programs to meet the demands of their job nor did they have access to effective mentoring programs (Billingsley et al., 2004). These same authors went on to state that many special education teachers leave the profession because they are expected to make commitments far beyond those of their general education teachers without appropriate compensation (2004).

Another reason given for special education teachers to leave their position is lack of administrative support. Teachers felt that their site principal was not aware of their unique needs and responsibilities (Thornton et al., 2007). Special education teachers felt that there should have been basic extrinsic motivators that “included appropriate instructional materials, suitable classroom space, reasonable caseloads, realistic access to support, time for meetings, and clerical support for paperwork” (Thornton et al., 2007, p. 237). Brownell et al., (2004) recommend implementing proactive principal leadership to try and support this population of teachers which in turn will help support this unique population of students.

Special Education and School Leadership

The landscape of special education has changed over the years with the topic of inclusion becoming a priority in recent years (Crockett et al., 2009). Compliance also becomes another hot button topic that separates special education from general education. Compliance refers to the special education laws that are outlined in IDEA that needs to be adhered to. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law that helps to protect and ensure that special education students receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Students who qualify for FAPE are those who have been identified as having “a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment” (Office for Civil Right (2008).

The site administrator’s job is to make sure that all the students, including special education students, receive all the support they need to be successful in their education (Capper & Frattura, 2009; Crockett, 2007; Frost & Kersten, 2011; Lentz, 2013). This is at times problematic in the fact that many general education principals don’t understand special education themselves. “Typically, many administrators do not have a lot of experience first-hand with special education. They’re just sort of wandering around blind, trying to follow the laws but really without a picture, it is like they’re putting a jigsaw puzzle together without ever having seen the box top” (Balt, 2000, p. 72).

Educational leadership needs to change with the times, sometimes it needs to look at and change the knowledge base of teaching (Caldwell, 2007). Every administrator should be interested in obtaining teachers who possess high quality skills. Teachers who possess high quality skills are going to have an equity consciousness and use it to deliver an equal education to all students (Skrla et al., 2011). Darling-Hammond (2010), mentions that one of best ways to

ensure equity among students is to ensure that teachers are well prepared and supported. “As many as half of all new special educators leave the field within the first 3 years because of poor administrative support, limited preparation, complex job responsibilities, and overwhelming paperwork requirement” (DiPaola et al., 2004).

What seems to be lacking in the literature is a principal’s perspective on what their role is in helping to support their special education teachers. This study will look at the “lived experiences” of principals and ask them what their perspective is on helping their special education teachers educate this vulnerable population of students. By asking this question directly of those participants who occupy a leadership position will then help special education teachers, general education teachers and district administrators understand from a principal’s perspective how they view their role. This research hopes to look at the perspectives of those in a leadership role and try to understand from their perspective. By looking at the data across the interview process, I hope to come up with themes that can be explored to help with the retention of special education teachers, so they are more likely to stay in their current role of educating this salient population of students.

When administrators are looking at teacher mentors to help the new teacher, it is helpful to remember that general education mentors need to help general education teachers and special education mentors need to help special education teachers (Bowser et al., 2014). These mentors should hold a credential that the new teacher is seeking plus possess a minimum of three years of experience in that area (Bowser et al., 2014). Brownell et al. (2013) recognizes that the most effective special education teachers are also the most committed to learning. They constantly strive to gain more knowledge about how to educate their students exceptional needs. Mayer (2009), mentions that these are the teachers who are quick to recognize their own limitations and

are willing to seek out assistance and will push the limits to gain even more knowledge than they already possess. Educators of children with disabilities are constantly trying to puzzle out the specific programs that will help their exceptional needs students (Sasso, 2001). Principals should recognize what a valuable asset that special education teachers can be to them and their school sites. These teachers constantly seek knowledge by asking questions, but they are also willing to share their own knowledge with others to help ensure the success of all students (Brownell et al., 2013).

Special education has many laws that need to be adhered to, most importantly IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). With the reauthorization of that law in 2004, it may have intended to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities but in fact may have very well have limited school leaders' abilities to provide the highest possible quality of education (Harper, 2012, Torres & Barber, 2017).

Most IEP's are a convoluted mess, full of statements and check boxes that ensure that all of the federal regulations and any additional state regulations have been considered. These documents are typically designed to reflect compliance rather than a truly individualized program for the students with a disability. Many teachers say that IEP documents are not meaningful and tend to all look alike. Parents may say that the document is not user-friendly and is difficult to read and comprehend (Torres & Barber, 2017, p. 131).

It has been recognized that special education litigation is both costly and time consuming to all parties involved (Riley, 2008). This alone can cause great stress on both school administrators and special education teachers as they need to show up and testify at due process hearings (Zirkel, 2014). In many schools and school districts it has become common practice to exclude children with disabilities from general education classes. One cannot expect these children to reasonably succeed in life without the benefit of a public education (Frost & Kersten, 2011).

Lawsuits occurred when all students were expected to be tested on the same standards, yet some students did not have the same opportunities as others. With the passing of *Brown vs. Board of Education* came the argument that if all students were required to meet the same standards than they all had to be ensured an equal education (Darling-Hammond, 2010). “Everything we teach is incomplete if we do not constantly foreground issues of prejudice and violence in our schools and society” (Slattery, 2012, p. 150).

Administrators of special education always face a host of responsibilities that come with the trials of trying to assist children in making educational gains while adhering to the outline of a student’s IEP making sure that the student is educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Thompson, 2011). With the ever-increasing number of students being identified with disabilities especially in the area of autism, administrators are faced with a fair amount of litigation that has increased by ten times what was anticipated with the increase in students diagnosed with autism (Thompson, 2011). Since the category of autism was added into IDEA in 1990, there have been an increasing number of programs that have caught the attention of both school districts and parents. Parents started advocating more for the education and instruction of their child who was diagnosed with autism and wanted the school district to “buy” specialized programs for their child. If there was disagreement between the parents and the school district then parents would start the litigation process (Thompson, 2011).

According to Bateman and Bateman (2001), the site principal needs to be a liaison between the special education teachers and the general education teachers. They need to make sure that there is time for collaboration between the two entities as they try to educate this diverse population of students. Another way that a site administrator can help the special education programs at their school site is to get involved with the IEP process and observe

students in their respective settings. It is helpful to evaluate instructional assistance to make sure they have the supports they need to be effective with both teachers and students. The more a site administrator gets involved in the IEP process and listens to the concerns of the parent the better the outcome for everyone involved (Bateman & Bateman, 2001; Fullman, 2014; Lentz, 2013; Torres & Baber, 2017).

The special education teacher is a student's most valuable resource. It has also been shown that many poor, minority or non-English speaking special education students do not have access to highly qualified teachers based on the fact that special education teachers are in high demand and choose not to work in those hard-to- staff schools (Mason-Williams, 2015). These teachers are a valuable resource since they have concrete knowledge about how to teach students with disabilities. These teachers tend to have a broad knowledge base in how to teach reading skills to this population of students (Benedict et al., 2014). One long term practice that tends to be used in special education classroom is the use of long-term substitute teachers. This one practice alone tends to hinder the ability of special education students to succeed based on the fact they are denied access to a highly qualified special education teacher who is credentialed in that area (Mason-Williams, 2015).

Special education students are covered under IDEA which is a federal law that mandates they get certain provisions in their educational programs (Cameron, 2016). There is the ongoing struggle to try and interpret special educational law so that it meets the needs of not only the pupil, but the teacher and parent as well (Cameron, 2016; Lentz, 2013; Torres & Barber, 2017; Zaretsky, 2004). Teachers and educational leaders need to be very clear on what those laws are and to be sure and include the parents in IEP meetings (Cheatham et al., 2012; Lentz, 2013). The challenge is for leaders through collaboration to bridge the gap between general education

teachers and special education teachers to meet the needs of all students (Cameron, 2016).

According to Prather-Jones (2011), Special education leaders try to improve academic and social outcomes of students through the implementation of federal, state and district mandates.

Among all of special education is the question of how does inclusion fit into a student's program? The big debate seems to be in regard to integrations versus inclusion. Inclusion is defined as being a location and integration being the acceptance of the whole child into the environment (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Topping & Moloney, 2005). Special education students should be assigned to general education classes as much as possible and as much as their disability allows (Capper & Frattura, 2009). In order to be equitable, if the school population is made up of 12% special education than no more than 12% of special education students should occupy a general education class at the same time (Capper & Frattura, 2009; Torres & Barber, 2017).

Communication, collaboration and compliance are among the most important areas in supporting special educators in their perspective roles (Edwards, 2007).

If you don't have a well-functioning team, the people in the team have to have the same thought process and we all have to work together in the best interest of the students. If we're not all on the same page then it's not going to work for the students. (Tudryn et al., 2016, pp.15-16)

Administrators seem to be moving toward technology to help both staff and students be successful (Crockett et al., 2009). Special education leaders need to be aware that technology is seen as paramount regarding special education. There is a host of software out on the market to help the special education teacher case manage their loads more effectively and more efficiently. There is an increase in technology websites which have shown to help special educators' better service their students with exceptional needs (Billingsley et al., 2011).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that this study will use is transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership starts with a vision and the goal is to attract potential followers who also believe in and wish to implement the vision (Bass, 1990; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Changing Minds, 2017). The goal of transformational leadership is to not only change the organization but to change or transform the people involved in the process (Bass, 1990; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Changing Minds, 2017).

According to Bass (1990), transformational leaders have the ability to change the landscape of the organization by developing a vision that encompasses everyone's abilities. They have a way of coming up alongside those who need help and providing the appropriate levels of support. Bass (1990) goes on to state that those leaders who gain charisma in the eyes of their employees tend to be the most influential. This type of leadership will elicit a great deal of trust and confidence from their employees. They excite and inspire their employees to believe that they can accomplish great things with extra effort.

Transformational Leadership

The question has been raised and asked, why aren't leaders leading? One reason may be that leaders do not know how to lead. John Garner observed that leadership in our society is not perfectly understood (Burns, 1978). Leadership is important to any organization and poor leadership will lead to disaster (Kellis & Ran, 2013). Burns (1978) states that "leading does not mean managing" (p. 451). Lentz (2013), reminds us that management consists of a manager telling a subordinate what to do whereas, leadership works cooperatively and collaboratively with others to try out ideas that they think will work. Burns (1978) holds to the truth that "Power is ubiquitous; it permeates human relationships. It exists whether or not it is requested for. It is

the glory and the burden of most humanity” (p. 15). Burns (1978) goes on to quote Kenneth Janda who defines power as “the ability to cause other persons to adjust their behavior in conformance with communicated behavior patterns” (p. 19). Burns (1978) continues on with his own definition, “I define leadership as leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and motivations-the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations-of both leaders and followers (p. 19).

Transformational leadership was founded by James McGregor Burns in 1978. It was originally based in politics but eventually spread to business and education. Bass, Avolio and Leithwood were the first to apply it to education. Burns (1978), acknowledges that he looked at transformational leadership as transforming both the leader and the follower who were led through moral levels of conduct and ethical aspirations. “Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins, defined transformational leadership as leadership that implies major changes in the form, nature, function and/or potential of some phenomenon; applied to leadership, it specifies general ends to be pursued although it is largely mute with respect to means”(Denmark, 2012, p. 1). In 1998, Bass extended transformational leadership to include trust, admiration, and respect. In 1994, Leithwood expanded on seven characteristics for an educational leader to possess: building school vision and establishing goals, creating a productive school culture, providing intellectual stimulation, offering individualized support, modeling best practices and important organizational values, demonstrating high-performance expectations, and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions. The seven dimensions or characteristics that Leithwood came up with pertaining to transformational leadership clearly align to the AdvancED Standards for Quality (see Table 1) (Denmark, 2012).

According to Burns (1978), he sees power as equal and should not be used coercively. He sees power as a relationship with others and not as a thing to own. He quotes William James: “The deepest principal in human nature is the craving to be appreciated” ... First, arouse in the other person an eager want:-then satisfy it” (p. 447).

Transformational leadership is a type of leadership that causes a change in an organization and in individuals within the organization (Bass, 1990). It raises the follower up through levels of morality, where leaders and followers are dependent on each other. Whatever separate interests each person holds, they become united in a “higher” goal which serves to represents their collective interests as leaders and followers (Burns, 1978). The goal of transformational leadership is to raise up its followers into leaders (Bass, 1990). This is the notion that is at the very heart of the paradigm of transformational leadership that it will grow leaders out of subordinates (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Leadership in special education needs to be based on students and their preferred outcomes that are expressed by parents and school personnel. This is the reason why transformational leadership in special education is so important (Lentz, 2013).

Transformational Leadership as a Vision

“The rarest leader is the ‘visionary leader’ who is not content to relate a current story...and achieve at least a measure of success in conveying the story effectively to others” (Edwards, 2007, p. 121).

According to Burns (1978) and Bass (1990), transformational leaders have a vision of what they wish to achieve and the ability to clearly communicate with staff what they have envisioned for their organization so everyone is on the same page. According to Bass and Riggio (2006), transformational leaders have the ability to motivate others to go beyond what

they thought was possible. They inspire their followers to believe in themselves to be able to accomplish great things. Transformational leaders will have more committed followers because they help empower them by paying attention to their needs and lifting them up to be leaders themselves (Bass & Riggio, 2006). They have courage to make tough decisions and to take on challenges. They are self-motivated who are passionate about their vision. Transformational leaders because of their own passion, have a way of inspiring others to buy in to their vision. They know how to make people feel important by listening to them and their ideas, but most importantly, they relate to them on a personal level (Bass, 1990; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Crowley (2011), states that “money most often is not the most powerful motivator of human achievement in the workplace, feeling genuinely valued and cared for more often is” (p. 29). Transformational leaders tend to make people feel safe, appreciated, understood and valued, which leads them to draw out greatness in those they lead (Crowley, 2011). They set a standard for everyone to follow by clearly communicating their vision and expectations. Follow through is probably one of the most important aspects of leadership. It is easy to say something, but it is the follow through that people watch to see if it happens. This is ultimately what causes a lot of the “buy in” to the vision that is being communicated. Most importantly this type of leadership brings on a positive change (Hogg, 2016). The ultimate goal and primary responsibility of leaders in special education is to pave the way for students with exceptional needs to be successful in their adult life (Lentz, 2013).

Transformational leaders must look at time as a period or duration, not as minutes or hours on a ticking clock. Time is not to be seen as a single moment in space but as an expanse of it. A transformational leader must see how time will impact or effect teaching over days, a month or even an entire school year not just hours or minutes in any given solitary day (Bass,

1990; Bass & Riggio, 2006). According to Leithwood and Jantzi (2005), transformational leadership looks at elevating followers to the position of leaders. They go on to state that Maslow's hierarchy moves them from a need of safety and security to a need of achievement and self-actualization.

“Albert Bandura and Richard Walters have shown that behavior is learned not only by conditioning but by imitating persons with whom the learner identifies and whom he takes as models” (Burns, 1978, p. 63). Burns (1978) goes on to state that Bernard Bass recognized that people with high self-esteem appear to be more likely to influence and lead others than to be led or changed by them. Part of changing the culture may be also changing individual attitudes (Lentz, 2013). Attitudes or perceptions of those working in an organization must transform or align with the values and beliefs of the learning organization or there will be shortsightedness and the vision will fail (Lentz, 2013).

There is a misconception that what special education students need is a “program” that allows them to work at a much slower pace that covers different concepts than their typically developing peers in general education (Torres & Barber, 2017). Educators need to continually make sure that instruction matches the needs of the child and their disability; this can best be done with the help of the site administrator (Torres & Barber, 2017). Students with disabilities are entitled to an education just like all students, so at times teachers need adequate supplies and curriculum to teach this population of students in a fair and equitable way (Capper & Frattura, 2009).

According to Burns (1978), Woodrow Wilson called for leaders to lift themselves out of their everyday selves. He goes on to state, “That people can be lifted into their better selves is the secret of transforming leadership and the moral and practical theme of this work” (p. 462).

Transformational leaders do more than just agree or make simple exchanges they inspire others to do superior work and to become leaders in their own right (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Litigation continues to be an ongoing expense for school districts. It is better for the transformational leader to invest time up front on educating parents, staff and students on how to fully participate and collaborate in the IEP team meeting process than to undergo unwanted hearings, grievances and due process cases. School districts spend hundreds of school administrator's hours, plus many dollars from educational resources for mediators and for courts to decide a parent complaint (Lentz, 2013). "While the present is conditioned by the past, every moment is also full of future possibilities for change and new direction" (Slattery, 2012, p. 282).

Summary

Most American schools have a mixture of general education students and special education students on their campuses. Literature continues to point out that it is the site administrators' job to make sure that special education students are receiving a free and appropriate education in their least restrictive environment. Special education students cannot be segregated into "special classes" if their IEP stipulates that they be educated with their general education peers.

Administrators need to be cognizant of the fact that special education is governed by a pre-existing set of laws. These laws started in the 1970's and with each passing year, more laws are added on through the litigation process. Because of the evolving laws of special education that happen yearly, an administrator needs to keep their knowledge base current regarding special education laws (Lentz, 2013; Torres & Barber, 2017).

Leadership through communication and collaboration seems to be the dominant force behind the success of running an efficient special education program (Edwards, 2007; Capper & Frattura, 2009; Lentz, 2013; Torres & Barber, 2017). Transformational leadership is one form of

leadership that looks at trust, admiration and respect as being key elements. Most people seek and respond in positive ways when their hard work is appreciated. When leaders genuinely appreciate the work of those under their leadership then they get a group of people who are satisfied and tend to work harder to make the transformational leader's vision a reality (Bass, 1990; Bass & Riggio; 2006; Burns, 1978).

Many special education administrators are viewed by parents and colleagues as someone who is knowledgeable in the field of special education by just their title alone. What often times is not revealed or known is the nature of what they are taught in their leadership preparation program (Crockett et al., 2009). These same authors went on to state that more needs to be known and researched in leadership preparation programs since it does not appear that enough is being done to help these administrators assist and support their special education teachers in how to best improve and deliver instruction to their students with exceptional needs. Due to the vast array of disabilities that IDEA covers, special education student's needs vary greatly, and instruction continues to be a challenge in educating this population of students which requires relentless refinement even today (Torres & Barber, 2017).

There seems to be a lot of literature pointing to the fact that special education teachers leave the field of education at a higher rate than their general education colleagues. They either move into general education jobs or leave education all together (Billingsley, 2004; Crockett, 2007; Mason-Williams, 2014). The main reasons special education teachers give for leaving was lack of administrative support, huge caseloads, the demands of the IEP (Individual Education Program) paperwork, followed by isolation, too much diversity of student needs and the lack of appreciation by co-workers and administrators for all their hard work (Billingsley, 2004; Billingsley & Cross, 1991; DiPaola et al., 2004; Lentz, 2013; Torres & Barber, 2017).

The literature points to the reasons why special education teachers leave the field of special education, but it doesn't definitively give a principal's perspective of what their role is in helping to support their special education teachers. By interviewing principals who hold current or past positions as a site administrator, I hope to gain insight into their perspective. By learning about their personal perceptions about how they see their role in helping to educate children with exceptional needs, I would like to analyze the data and see if any themes emerge. By looking for themes then possibly there can be some suggestions of how to retain special education teachers and keep them in their current positions to continue to educate this population of students.

Table 1

Characteristics of Leadership (Denmark, 2012)

AdvancED Standard of Quality	Seven Dimensions
Standard 1 ➤ Purpose and Direction	Building School Vision and Establishing School Goals
Standard 2 ➤ Governance and Leadership	Creating a Productive School Climate
Standard 3 ➤ Teaching and Assessing for Learning	Providing Intellectual Stimulation
Standard 3 ➤ Teaching and Assessing for Learning Standard 4 ➤ Resources and Support Systems	Offering Individualized Support
Standard 1 ➤ Purpose and Direction Standard 2 ➤ Governance and Leadership Standard 3 ➤ Teaching and Assessing for Learning	Modeling Best Practice and Important Organizational Values
Standard 1 ➤ Purpose and Direction Standard 3 ➤ Teaching and Assessing for Learning Standard 5 ➤ Using Results for Continuous Improvement	Demonstrating High Performance Expectations
Standard 1 ➤ Purpose and Direction Standard 2 ➤ Governance and Leadership Standard 3 ➤ Teaching and Assessing for Learning	Developing Structures to Foster Participation in School Decisions

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The approach used in this research study is the hermeneutical phenomenological approach. This study looked at the lived lives of the participants as well as the researcher (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of a phenomenological study is to look at the common meaning that emerged from all the participants and what they experience from their lives (Creswell, 2013). This study focused on the effectiveness of leadership by the site principal in supporting teachers in their daily life in assisting special education students and their varied needs. The study also looked at what a principal's perspective is on compliance and the barriers in meeting the law. Only principals who help support the special education teachers were selected to participate. The research looked at the themes that emerged from the leadership style principals' use to help support their special education teaching staff. Special education teachers also must comply with a number of laws at both the federal and state levels. Principals who hold a special education credential are more knowledgeable and prepared to deal with the demands of supporting their special education teachers and staff (Frost & Kersten, 2011).

Research Questions

- In what ways do principals provide support to their special education teachers?
 - In what ways do site school administrators put value on the special education team?
 - In what ways do principals comply with special education laws and practices?

The chapter overview includes the methodology that was used to conduct the research; a qualitative study using interviews as a basis for gaining information. The purpose statement and the rationale provided a foundation to conduct this study regarding principals and their perceptions of the role they play in supporting special education teachers. This chapter also

includes the description of the participants, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness. The limitations and chapter summary will round out the rest of the chapter.

Methods

This was a qualitative research study. This study used a hermeneutical phenomenological approach. According to Gadamer (1976), the hermeneutic process looks at the researcher and the prejudgments that may have been made about the topic under investigation. The researcher must give up some of their preconceived prejudices of what they see as the truth. In the process, new pre-understandings are continually being formed (Gadamer, 1976). The phenomenological approach looked at the lives and the experience of both the researcher and the researched. This principle tries to make it possible to understand the meaning of the experiences by all involved in the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The essence of research is to inquire about something and then to investigate it in a systematic way (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Basic research looks at a phenomenon and tries to understand it and add to a body of already existing knowledge. Applied research looks to improve the quality of what is being studied so that policy makers will improve the way things are done (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By looking at both basic and applied research, I hoped to gain a perspective on how principals interpret their role in helping their special education teachers including the topic of compliance. “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6).

This study looked at the lives of principals and how they perceive their role in helping special education teachers who help to educate the special needs population. It also looked at how they perceive the area of compliance in helping their teachers in the area of special

education law. By using interviews, I hoped to see patterns and themes emerge that showed how a principal perceives their role in helping the special education teachers on their school sites. Getting a principal's perspective helped to understand how they see their role in staying compliant with state and federal special education laws. According to Creswell (2013), a phenomenological study describes a person's lived experience. In this type of study, the researcher focused on what the participants all have in common as they experience the phenomenon. According to Guba (1978), a study is naturalistic in nature if it takes place outside of a laboratory. I could not control or manipulate what was being investigated and studied therefore, the findings could not be predetermined. This design hoped to gain knowledge in a principal's perception of their role in supporting the special education teachers who work at their school sites.

The design of the study is aimed at trying to understand the perception of the principal's role in helping to support the special education teachers who work under them. One cannot answer this question without directly asking principals who work at school sites that service special education students. I could not possibly know what the perception of the principal's understanding or role in compliance without directly asking them for their thoughts and opinions. The interview process was designed with questions that asked the principals regarding their perceptions and thought process.

Description of Participants

This study focused on participants who currently hold jobs as school site administrators that help special education teachers that service special needs students.

Participants of this study were found in three school districts located in one county in the Central Valley of California. This was a criterion sampling since the participants met the criteria

of working in one of the Central Valley school districts (Creswell, 2013). I originally chose to interview teachers, but then felt that the research questions would be better answered using principal insight as to the decisions that get made in a school district at their school site. The school districts being considered were public schools in an urban setting in Cypress County: Winchester Unified School District, Mayfield Unified School District and Collier Unified School District. Each school chosen was an elementary site; either one that services a Kindergarten through 6th grade or Kindergarten through 8th grade population. The characteristics of the population being considered was a criterion sampling because the schools were chosen since this study targeted elementary schools in the Central Valley of California. The schools that were chosen had classes that serviced special education students. They ranged from students who have mild/moderate disabilities to students considered to have moderate/severe disabilities.

Seven elementary school principals were asked to participate in two interviews that looked to answer how they perceived their role in helping to support the special education teachers who work at their respective school sites. They were asked to participate in the study in order to gain more depth into the phenomenon under inquiry; how do site administrators help support their special education staff. The principals chosen all needed to have at least three or more years of administrative experience. Along with their administration experience, they needed to have a minimum of three years of teaching experience prior to their current principal role. They were each asked to sign an agreement form to participate in the study.

Data Collection

Participants were led through a semi-structured interview process where the interviewees were asked a series of questions which allowed for other questions to be asked if the interviewer deemed it necessary for clarity (Creswell, 2013). There was a total of two interviews, the first

one lasted approximately 60-75 minutes, while the second one lasted approximately 30-40 minutes. The first interview focused on the details and descriptions of the principal's daily jobs and how they help support the special education teachers at their school site. The second interview looked at the administrator's leadership qualities and how it bridged the gap between special education and general education. This semi-structured interview process was picked based on the phenomenon that it holds for each individual and their experience. Using a phenomenological approach, one can get to the "essence" of the lived experience that the participants are involved in with the type of leadership they use in order to help support their special education teachers and students (Creswell, 2013). Special education teachers not only have to educate the students placed in their classrooms, but they must also work with instructional assistance placed in their classrooms. The site principal must also help support the instructional assistants who work in the special education teacher's classrooms. These questions will be addressed by using a one-on-one interview format.

I started the interview with a few demographical questions regarding the background of each participant. Next, there were two broad, general questions that phenomenological research always asks the participants: First, "what have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?" Second, "what contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 115). The rest of the interview was made up of a series of open-ended questions used so that the interviewer was able to explore other questions as they came up. It also provided a way that the participant could relate areas that I was not aware of. I needed to see "what" the interviewee has experienced as well as "how" they have experienced it (Creswell, 2013).

The interviews were conducted in the principal's office at their respective school sites or at another location of their choosing. The first interview lasted approximately 60-75 minutes, while the second interview lasted 30-40 minutes, both interviews were audio-taped since permission was granted from each participant. Field notes were taken while each interview was conducted. Any follow up questions that arose were clarified through a follow up email. Each participant was asked if they would like to provide an alternate email to their school email. Those who chose to, provided an alternate email address separate from their school district email that was originally used to solicit their participation. Each participant was offered a copy of the transcript to verify its contents. Since interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim, all participants agreed to the contents of the interview.

Analysis of the Data

I listened to all oral interviews and transcribed them within 24-48 hours of the interview. The raw data was stored and filed on a password protected computer. Coding is one way to analyze qualitative data (Saldana, 2016). Coding is looking for themes and categories and classifying them by labeling them into patterns that emerge from the interview process. I used the process of coding by going through the field notes and then transcribed the interviews by evaluating them for themes to understand the perceptions that site principals had regarding their role in supporting their special education teachers (Creswell 2013). All field notes and transcriptions were analyzed and color coded. Memoing was used to write in the margins looking for reoccurring words between the interviewees. By using this system of color coding of interviews and field notes; there is a hope that themes will begin to emerge (Creswell, 2013). Coding and categorizing data were done on an ongoing basis as each interview was completed (Saldana, 2016). The data was arranged in topics and files. Color coding with different colored

pencils and highlighters kept the themes separate as each interview was analyzed (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Sixteen colors were used in the coding process: Aqua was used for background information and demographics; gray was used to indicate help from the special education teachers; red was used to flag school culture; olive green was used to denote money and funding; orange was used to follow the trail of communication and open door policies administrators indicated; yellow was used to track instances of leadership and helping staff; purple indicated the lack of parental support; sky blue followed a trail of behavior issues and instances of help coming slowly; Kelley green showed instances of PBIS being implemented at the sites; pink showed a pattern of no/low training or lack of support on the district's part; brown was used to show the lack of curriculum identified by administrators; magenta flagged mental health concerns of students; navy blue showed the principal's understanding of special education issues; tan was used to show district support; forest green showed the way districts help supported their administrators and schools; and burgundy was used to flag the closing of the achievement gap between special education and general education. Once the patterns and themes emerged then they were converted into categories to analyze the similarities and differences between participants (Patton, 2002). The interview documents were analyzed side by side where they were organized into certain thematic patterns which were then categorized. The hope was that the categories that emerged would be connected to prior research (Creswell, 2013). Follow up questions were to be conducted via email communication.

The axiom in qualitative research is far from value free, it is value-bound by the participants being interviewed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). "Like the characters in director Akira Kurosawa's classic film, *Rashomon*, multiple realities exist because we each perceive and interpret social life from different points of view" (Saldana, 2016, p. 8). Triangulations can be

used to cross-check data by using different sources, methods, and at times, different investigations, this process helped to provide validity to the findings (Creswell, 2013).

Researcher bias was clarified throughout the data collection and analysis process since the reader will need to understand the researcher's position and any prejudices that may have shaped the interpretation of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Trustworthiness

When it comes to trustworthiness in a qualitative study, it can be a bit harder to define, but must include four components: Credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Credibility is to figure out if your findings are true and accurate. A qualitative study will have to look at the participants as credible in the position they hold and the perceptions they have regarding their approach to helping the special education teachers that work under their leadership. Transferability is how applicable this research topic is to similar situations, populations and phenomenon. This study looked at urban principals who deal with special education teachers and how they perceived their role in supporting these teachers in their ability to help educate this population of students. Confirmability is the ability of the researcher to keep their own personal bias out of the study. It is looked at what each respondent said and not what was "thought" they said. Therefore, it is important to record each interview and transcribe it verbatim before going through and coding the information to look for the themes that emerged. The dependability component looks to see whether this can be repeated by other researchers researching the same phenomenon. Can this study look at the lived lives of other urban elementary principals and replicate this study and get the same or similar answers (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). If there were other studies done on this topic, I believe that the results of this

study can be repeated. Member checking will be used to assure accuracy of information and to keep researcher bias from tainting the research results (Creswell, 2013).

Limitation

The researcher assumed that major themes and subtopics would emerge while investigating the perceptions that principals have regarding their role in supporting the special education teachers at their school site.

The researcher assumed that the participants were honest in their responses. The researcher also assumed that these perceptions could be assigned to other principals who deal with special education teachers at their respective school sites. Time was a limiting constraint since interviews were being conducted with site principals who tend to have limited time in their busy schedules. The site principals were very generous with their time and sticking to the interview schedule once set up. Of all 14 of the interviews set up, only two needed to be rescheduled but even each of those were only postponed by one day. Another limitation was that the study was only conducted in three urban Northern California school districts.

Summary

Three urban school districts in Central California were used for this study to examine the themes regarding a site principal's perception of supporting their special education teacher in their daily job and role of educating students with special needs. Fourteen interviews were conducted in all; eleven in the principal's office at their school site and three interviews were conducted at local coffee shops chosen by the participant. All data was analyzed and compared looking for the emerging themes that helped the administrators in their daily roles of supporting their special education teachers. The results of the study were analyzed and triangulated to

compare the perceptions of the various principals interviewed to find the similarities and differences.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

By land mass, California is the third largest state in the union. It boasts a population of 39,809,693 people living within its borders, which far exceeds any other state in the country. According to the US Census of 2017-18, the state was responsible for educating approximately 6,220,413 students. Of that number, 774,665 (12.5%) are identified as students receiving special education services ranging from birth to 22 years of age. According to the California Department of Education (CDE), California has 1,026 school districts and educates its students within the walls of 10,473 school sites. By 2017-18, pupil spending was approximately \$11,392 per student regardless of the child's general education or special education status.

This study focused on seven participants from three different school districts in one county in the central valley of California. Cypress County services 120 schools in 12 school districts with a total student population of 140,112. This county educates 17,514 (12.5%) special education students. It mirrors the state percentage of 12.5% of the population being identified as special education. The three school districts represented in this study were Mayfair Unified, Collier Unified and Winchester Unified School Districts. Mayfield Unified is the second largest of the school districts, and services 28,354 students in 47 schools. It has 3,912 special education students enrolled which makes up 13.8% of its population. Winchester Unified is the largest of the three school districts, and services 37,537 students in 55 schools. It has 4,054 special education students enrolled which makes up 10.8% of its population. Collier Unified is the smallest of the three school districts, and services 7,994 students in 10 schools. It has 1,095 special education students enrolled which makes up 13.7% of its population. Interestingly, Mayfield Unified and Collier Unified educates 13.8% and 13.7% special education students respectfully which exceeds both the state and the county in identifying special education

students. Winchester Unified recognized 10.8% of their population as being special education which falls under what both the state and the county identified as special education students.

Setting

Principals were contacted by email to see if they would be willing to participate in two open ended interviews. Their school district emails were used to solicit their participation. The administrators were recommended by various teachers from different school districts and a method of snowballing was also used to acquire more participants for the study (Patton, 2002). Each participant was offered anonymity by being given a pseudonym. To further protect the participants, pseudonyms were also given to the county, their respective school sites as well as the school districts where their schools were located. The criterion that was required for each principal was that they were a site administrator for at least three years at an elementary site, that they had been a teacher for a minimum of three years prior to becoming an administrator, and that they had at least 2 special education classes on their school sites preferably at least one RSP class and one SDC class . Each administrator was sent a copy of the agreement to participate in the research which included the title of the study, the purpose of the study, the study procedures, the risks and benefits of the study and the confidentiality for participating in the study (Appendix C). A total of nine principals were asked to participate with seven agreeing. The study was originally looking for six participants, but the seventh participant was a special education teacher prior to becoming a site administrator so I felt it was important to gain her input and insight into the phenomenon under investigation. Originally, I thought that it would take a lot more time to find participants since principals are extremely busy and I was asking for approximately an hour in a half of their time so I could interview them. Five of the principals answered the original email, with two answering after one follow up email which included an attachment outlining the

description of the study. They emailed back and stated that they would be willing to participate. One of the nine principals was unable to participate due to a medical leave of absence. There was only one administrator who did not answer the original email or the follow up email. It is recommended that there should be between five to 25 participants for a phenomenological study, a lower number is acceptable when multiple interviews are the main source of information (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2012). “Qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed data about a much smaller number of people and cases” (Patton, 2002, p. 227). It was determined that the seven participants would be an adequate sample size with each participant being interviewed twice for a total of 14 interviews.

Each principal was interviewed twice, the first interview was made up of ten questions (Appendix A) and lasted from 60-75 minutes and focused on the details and descriptions of the principal’s daily job and how they supported their special education teachers at their school sites. The second interview was made up of four questions (Appendix B) and lasted 30-40 minutes and focused on the administrator’s leadership qualities and how it bridged the gap between special education and general education. Each interview was then transcribed verbatim, color coded and analyzed for repeated patterns of themes (Bernard & Ryan, 2010).

Three of the principals worked for Mayfield Unified, three of them worked for Winchester Unified and one of them worked for Collier Unified. After the initial contact by email, the first interview was scheduled and conducted. At the conclusion of the first interview, the second interview was scheduled within one in a half to two in a half weeks after the first interview took place. Eleven of the interviews were conducted in the principal’s office while three of them were conducted in local coffee shops of the administrator’s choice. Twelve of the

interviews took place on the appointed day as scheduled with two of the interviews pushed back by one day each due to unforeseen conflicts that arose.

Repeated themes that seemed to come up within multiple interviews and participants were in these areas; communication, mental health issues, lack of support/or delay in receiving help, culture between special education and general education teachers, support for special education programs and teachers, curriculum, funding and on the job training. Each administrator had to meet the criterion of being a site principal at either a K-6 school or a K-8 school. They needed to be an administrator for a minimum of three years as well as a teacher for a minimum of three years prior to that. Each principal also had to have at least two special education programs on their respective school sites of at least one RSP and one SDC class. Having multiple special education programs on their campuses would help answer the overarching question of how administrators help support their special education teachers. All the administrators through the interview process stated that they felt the topic was both worthy of being researched as well as worthy of their time to participate. I sincerely believe that statement to be true since I did not know any of the administrators personally and there was no compensation of any kind being offered and yet they still chose to participate.

Administrator Participants

Mrs. Rebecca Nichols works for Mayfield Unified School District. She is principal of Silver Leaf Elementary which is a K-6 school with a student enrollment of 320 students. She has been an administrator for six years, four of the six years were part-time, with six years of teaching experience before becoming an administrator. She holds a master's degree in administration as well as a multiple subject credential, a single subject credential in PE and an administrative credential. She taught kindergarten, first grade, a first/second combo class, 7th

grade and high school PE. She currently has four special education programs on her campus: One RSP and three mild/moderate SDC classes. A pre-school SDC class, a second/third SDC class and a fourth-sixth SDC class make up the three SDC classes on her campus. She has 63 students in these programs for a total special education population of 19.7%. When Mrs. Nichols was asked why she pursued a career in administration, she stated that it was not her original plan. She went back to get her master's degree and was going to look at curriculum and instruction but because of teacher layoffs at the time, she chose to get her master's degree in administration instead. "I thought that it would give me a better consistency of keeping my job in administration then compared to the teacher layoffs at the time".

Dr. Roman Cruz also works for Mayfield Unified School District. He is a principal of Forest Lake Elementary which is a K-6th grade school with a student enrollment of 600 students. He has been an administrator for seven years with 13 years of teaching experience prior to becoming an administrator. He holds a doctorate degree in education with a focus on data driven decision making and its effect on leadership practices in the state of California. He holds a multiple subject credential with BCLAD authorization as well as an administrative credential. He taught both second and third grades and was a math coach for three of his 13 years. He currently has four special education classes on his campus: One RSP and three mild/moderate SDC classes. He has a second/third grade SDC class, a fourth/fifth grade SDC class and a sixth grade SDC class on his campus. He has 66 students in these programs with a total special education population of 11%. When asked why he pursued a career in administration he stated that he "saw the value in working with teachers and helping them improve their instructional practices and helping them to collaborate and improve upon the work that we do school wide". He was also encouraged to pursue leadership positions by those around him who appreciated the

presentations that he gave plus his ability to come up with a standard based report card in Spanish.

Mr. David Foster too is from Mayfield Unified School District. He is the principal of Palm Valley Elementary which is a K-6th grade school with a student enrollment of 525 students. He has been an administrator for 23 years and prior to that he was a teacher for seven years. He holds a master's degree in educational administration. He has a multiple subject credential and an administrative credential. He taught fifth grade, sixth grade and a combo fifth/sixth class. He stated that at one point in his career, he was a teaching principal for a year. He currently has seven special education programs on his campus: One RSP class and six SDC classes. He has a preschool moderate/severe SDC class, a preschool mild/moderate SDC class, a K-third SDC medically fragile SDC class, fourth-sixth grade medically fragile SDC class, a K-second grade mild/moderate, and a third-sixth grade mild/moderate SDC class. He has an enrollment of 79 students in these programs with a total special education population of 15.0%. When Mr. Foster was asked why he chose to pursue a career in administration, he stated that he had served four years in the military before pursuing his college degree and teaching credential and he had an excellent Navy instructor who taught him to appreciate good creative teaching. His instructor was teaching how to escape from a submarine hatch in preparation for war, he stated "that it really taught me as well what a great gift he has to teach that to other people in a positive way". He went on to state that "I really fell in love with teaching because I loved seeing the light bulbs come on in the kids and how much fun you could have with them". He went on to say that administration carried over from his teaching experience because others saw his leadership abilities and encouraged him to seek out a job in administration. He claims that his only regret looking back is that he wished that he had spent more years in the classroom before he went into

administration. He stated that he felt that he could have benefitted from more classroom experience.

Mrs. Vickie Thomas works for Collier Unified School District. She is principal of Pinewood Elementary which is a K-eighth grade school with a student enrollment of 650 students. She has been an administrator for seven years and prior to that she was a teacher for 15 years. She has a master's degree in administrative leadership, she is also currently working on her doctorate degree. She holds a multiple subject credential as well as an administrative credential. For nine years she taught fourth grade, fifth grade, sixth grades then she was a math coach for three years plus a reading intervention teacher for three additional years. She currently has three special education programs on her campus: Two RSP classes and one mild/moderate SDC seventh/eighth grade class. She has a special education enrollment of 57 students for a total population of 8.7%. She stated that the county houses a moderate/severe fourth-eighth grade class on her campus where they use her school's facilities. When Mrs. Thompson was asked why she chose a career in administration, she stated that through her coaching jobs she started interacting with teachers in different classrooms where she took on more of a leadership role. She stated that she had a mentor "who started putting the bug in my ear that you should probably get your admin credential you're good at seeing the big picture of things and how to organize to achieve the big goals of the big picture".

Mr. Vincent Zamba works for Winchester Unified School District. He is principal of Riverdale Elementary which is a K-eighth grade school with a student enrollment of 787 students. He has been an administrator for four years and prior to that he was a teacher for ten years. He holds a master's degree in education with a concentration in technology. He has a multiple subject credential with a BLAD authorization and an administrative credential. He

spent his ten years teaching either fourth, fifth or sixth grades. He currently has three special education classes on his campus: One RSP class and two SDC classes. He has a K-third grade moderate/severe SDC class and a fourth-sixth grade moderate/severe SDC class. He has a total special education enrollment of 65 students for a population of 8.0%. When Mr. Zamba was asked why he chose to pursue a career in administration, he stated that he felt that many parents in this community had a hard time communicating with the school. Since his school is located in a large Latinx community, he stated, "I noticed that parents were always having a challenge to communicate with the principal because they did not speak Spanish, and so I really thought that is something that I wanted to do".

Mrs. Catherine Kelley also works for Winchester Unified School District. She is principal of Eagle Mountain Elementary which is a K-eighth grade school with a student enrollment of 689 students. She has been an administrator for seven years and prior to that she taught for eight years. She holds a master's degree in educational administration. She has a multiple subject credential, two single subject credentials, one in English and the other one in Social Science, and she has an administrative credential. She taught Kindergarten, fifth grade, fifth/sixth grade combo class for five years. She taught high school English and Social Science for three years. She went on to become a math coach for one year and an ELA coach for one year. She currently has five special education classes on her campus: One RSP and four SDC classes. There is a continuum of moderate/sever SDC classes on her campus. She has a K-second grade SDC class, a second/third grade SDC class, a fourth-sixth grade SDC class and a seventh/eighth grade SDC class. She has a total special education enrollment of 112 students for a population of 16.3%. When Mrs. Kelley was asked why she chose to pursue a career in administration she said that as a teacher she could only impact 30-60 students at the elementary

level and only 180-200 students at the secondary level. It was ultimately her students who were the inspiration for her to move into administration. “Kids were telling me, wow you care you are trying things for me, you are pushing me and then at one point during that time the administrator was gone out on leave and I had already gotten my admin credential so I covered for her while she was out”. During that time was when Mrs. Kelley realized that she could impact more students on a grander scale than she had been able to as a teacher.

Mrs. Maya Parker too is from Winchester Unified School District. She is principal of Meadow Ridge Elementary which is a K-eighth grade school with a student enrollment of 860 students. She has been an administrator for nine years and prior to that she was a teacher for 14 years. She has a master’s degree in education, and she has a multiple subject credential as well as an educational specialist credential in learning handicapped for the deaf and blind, plus an administrative credential. She was the only one of the seven administrators to have a special education credential and to have directly taught in special education classes. She taught a fifth/sixth grade general education class for one year. She taught a fourth-sixth grade SDC class, a seventh/eighth grade SDC class and a first/second communication handicapped class. She currently has five special education classes on her campus: Two RSP classes and 3 SDC classes. There is a continuum of mild/moderate SDC classes on her campus. There is a first-third SDC class, a fourth-sixth grade SDC class and a seventh/eighth grade SDC class. There is a total special education enrollment of 98 students for a population of 11.4%. Mrs. Parker was asked why she pursued a career in administration, and she stated that she didn’t actually seek to do that she actually thought that she would retire in the classroom. Her answer was similar to Mrs. Kelley’s, “I think that a lot of people that are in an SDC type setting they get the same kids every three years, cycling kids out and I know that I could make more impact and I wanted to make

more impact so I then decided to leave the classroom”. At first, Mrs. Parker pursued a job in coaching but after three months she was pulled up into an Assistant Principal role and that is what started her career in administration. She was then pulled up into the district office and served three years as a special education administrator until she decided to become the principal of just one school site.

Table 2
Administrator Profile

Name	Years as Admin	Years Teaching	Total Years Admin/Teach	Highest Degree	Positions Held as a Teacher	Credentials Held
Rebecca Nichols	6	6	12	Masters	K-1 Grades 1 st /2 nd Combo 7 th Grade	Multiple Subject Single Subject-PE Administrative
Roman Cruz	7	10	17	Doctorate	2 nd Grade 3 rd Grade Math Coach	Multiple Subject w/BCLAD authorization Administrative
David Foster	23	7	30	Masters	5 th -6 th Grades 5 th /6 th Combo	Multiple Subject Administrative
Vickie Thomas	7	15	22	Masters	4 th -6 th Grades Reading Coach Math Coach	Multiple Subject Administrative
Vincent Zamba	4	10	14	Masters	4 th Grade 5 th Grade 6 th Grade	Multiple Subject w/BCLAD authorization Administrative
Catherine Kelley	7	8	15	Masters	Kinder 5 th Grade 5 th /6 th Combo	Multiple Subject Single Subjects English & Social Science
Maya Parker	9	14	23	Masters	5 th /6 th Combo Communication	Multiple Subject Education specialist

Table 3
Demographics of State, County, and School Districts

State, County, School District	Total Student Population	Total # of Districts	Total # of Special Education Students	Total % of Special Education Students
State of California	6,220,413	1,026	774,665	12.5%
Cypress County	140,023	12	17,514	12.5%
Name of District	Total # of Schools			
Mayfield Unified	28,354	47	3,912	13.8%
Collier Unified	7,994	10	1,095	13.7%
Winchester Unified	37,537	55	4,054	10.8%

Table 4
Site Type, Numbers and Percent of Special Education Students

Administrator	Name of School District	Site Type and # of Students	# of Special Education Classes on Site	# of Special Education Students	# of Special Education Students
Rebecca Nichols	Silver Leaf Elementary Mayfield Unified	K-6 320	4	63	19.7%
Roman Cruz	Forest Lake Elementary Mayfield Unified	K-6 600	4	66	11.0%
David Foster	Palm Valley Elementary Mayfield Unified	K-6 525	7	79	15.0%
Vickie Thomas	Pinewood Elementary Collier Unified	K-8 650	3	57	8.8%
Vincent Zamba	Riverdale Elementary Winchester Unified	K-8 787	3	65	8.3%
Catherine Kelley	Eagle Mountain Elementary Winchester Unified	K-8 689	5	64	9.2%
Maya Parker	Meadow Ridge Elementary Winchester Unified	K-8 860	5	98	11.4%

Themes That Emerged From the Interview Process

There was a total of two interviews that were conducted with each principal participant. The first interview was made up of a series of ten open ended questions that focused on the principal's daily jobs and how they help support the special education teachers at their school site. The second interview was made up of four open ended questions that looked at the administrator's leadership qualities and how it bridged the gap between special education and general education. Each of the seven participants were interviewed twice for a total of 14 interviews. The interviews were all tape recorded with permission from all the principals. The 14 interviews yielded approximately 11 hours of interview data. Each interview was then transcribed verbatim to ensure that each administrator's answers were accurate and in their own words. This also helped ensure that the words were not misinterpreted by the researcher. It took approximately another three hours per interview hour to transcribe each interview verbatim totaling over 33 hours. After all interviews were transcribed, it amounted to 170 pages of data and took several more hours to color code each interview, while writing memos in the margins to come up with the themes that multiple participants identified through the interview process. Repeated themes that seemed to come up within multiple interviews with the participants were in these areas; communication, mental health issues, lack of support/the delay in receiving help, culture between special education and general education teachers, support for special education programs and teachers, curriculum, funding and on the job training. Each theme was broken down and analyzed between each of the seven participants and how it relates to special education on their respective school sites.

Identifiable Themes Among Participants

Communication

According to Tyler (2016), literature supports the fact that effective leaders possess strong tendencies to have good communication skills. She went on to say that “effective communication is essential to change.” Garfinkle (2015) states that people desire open and honest communication with mutual respect and trust. Transparency is another desired trait to build relationships with staff. According to Burns (1978), leaders must clearly communicate their vision to their staff in order to make change happen. He concluded that communication is the cornerstone to good leadership.

“Communication is key” was a continual theme that wove its way throughout all the administrators interviewed. Four of the seven participants interviewed, Mrs. Nichols, Mr. Foster, Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Kelley, used the term “open door policy” to describe the way they ran their school sites. They not only encouraged but expected their staff to come and talk to them about any issues that came up needing their attention. Two of the seven administrators interviewed, Dr. Cruz and Mr. Zamba stated that it was important to talk about all challenges with staff and to work them out together to find solutions to help guide the direction of their schools. Mrs. Parker felt that all staff needs to fully understand the expectations involved. She went on to state that there needs to be collaboration not just dictation and having those follow up conversations with all staff involved is another important component.

Mr. Foster believes that the very first thing to be a successful administrator is communication. He said, “The top guy, the site leader is that one who can communicate what is going on with the rest of the staff, communicating with them, meeting with them, training them, resourcing them to the highest level”. For Mrs. Kelley, she stated that communication is huge;

she is constantly sending out surveys asking what kinds of things her staff needs from her in the area of supports. Mr. Zamba and Dr. Cruz are bilingual and feel that helps the parents at their respective sites with communication since the majority of their school population is Latinx. Mrs. Nichols, Mrs. Kelley and Mr. Zamba encouraged staff to come to them when parents were upset so they could follow through on communicating with them together. Mrs. Thomas acknowledges that as a principal, things get busy,

I have a million things going on in the back of my head that I know I need to take care of, but if a teacher is coming to me and they need to talk, I am going to put all of that away and down and have the conversation with them whatever it is.

Mr. Foster, who has been a site administrator for 23 years stated that, “Good site leaders are seen, heard and approachable”. He went on to state that, “most people are very happy where they work or go to school as long as they know the expectations and they change so rapidly that you have to be a good communicator”.

Mental Health Issues

Mental health continues to be an issue that needs to be address in the public-school arena. According to the Center of Disease Control (CDC), “Mental disorders among children are described as serious changes in the way children typically learn, behave, or handle their emotions, causing distress and problems getting through the day” (According to the Center of Disease Control (CDC) 2019, p.1). All seven of the administrators interviewed for this study brought up the fact that mental health continues to be a rising problem at their school sites. The CDC (2019) goes on to state that depression and anxiety have increased from 5.4% in 2003 to 8.4% in 2012 among school age children. It has been recognized that 100% of the children living below the national poverty level are more susceptible to mental health issues. That number is roughly one in five children or 22% of that population experiencing mental health issues (CDC, 2019). All seven principals admitted that their site was classified as a Title 1

school, which means they receive extra federal funding since at least 40% of their students are of low socio-economic status which is measured by their free/reduced school lunch programs.

According to Prince and Howard (2002), on an emotional or cognitive level these children do not come to school ready to learn since their primary concern is often human survival.

Two principals interviewed, Mr. Zamba and Mrs. Parker who both work for Winchester Unified, stated that mental health issues tend to run in both their special education and general education populations. They went on to explain that they both work-in poverty-stricken areas where there is a huge homelessness rate. When asked what their homeless rate was neither one could give a definitive answer since many parents will not report their children as being homeless for fear the state will come in and take their kids away from them. Mr. Zamba stated that he knew that his homeless rate number was higher than 43 students. When I asked Mrs. Parker if the parents were helpful in terms of getting help for their children, she stated, "I think that especially on this side of town there is a lot of distrust of outside people; so it is not that they don't want help for their kids it is just that they are not trusting...of the process".

Mrs. Kelley stated that when it comes to mental health issues and students, she feels that she has good district support on her site but is very aware of principal's from other sites who struggle to get the help their student's need and she had heard them state that "it is like pulling teeth to try to get help, like this kid is needing a lot of other supports and they don't know how to address it and I know some principals are struggling to get support to come to their sites". She acknowledged that sometimes her biggest problem comes from the parents of students on her site who need help but getting the parents to come in and sign the paperwork can be challenging. There were four other administrators who mentioned having a hard time with parental follow through: Mrs. Nichols who claims that parents don't always "see" what school personnel see.

Dr. Cruz also stated that parents have a hard time acknowledging that their children have mental health issues, so it makes it hard to get them the help they need. Mr. Zamba also stated that it is a big challenge to get parents to go through the mental health process for their children and to follow through. He also said that many parents don't like having their child "labeled". Dr. Cruz too stated that it is difficult for parents to admit their child is experiencing academic or behavioral problems. Mr. Foster acknowledged that he felt that there was a lot of mental health issues at his school site. He went on to state, "kids are not always cared for, so yes mental health in the areas of neglect, child abuse and domestic violence, you see all of that and they bring it to school".

Mrs. Thomas has seen an influx of mental health needs at her site, so she has recently gone to another county to see their multi-tiered system of support for mental health education. She also ran a summer retreat for her staff so they could look at how to address kids and their mental, social and emotional needs. Mrs. Thomas has also noticed that if a child makes a self-harm statement and the school recommends to the parents to take their child to the county mental health clinic to have them evaluated then they (clinic workers) will advise the parents to go back to the school to request special education testing. She went on to state that,

These students are in need of intense mental health therapy in some way, they might need medication so that is for a doctor to determine: But there has been this trend that they go down there and then I have gotten requests from parents to do special education assessments and you know their (child) is 4 on the state assessments...they're not going to qualify (for special education services).

Cypress County runs a program that helps residence whose disability qualifies them for services including school age children. Mrs. Kelley stated that the county run program is willing to help families of the children who qualify for mental health services as long as the family sticks to it and has follow through. The parents must stay in constant communication with the county run program, if the parents stop communicating then the county drops them and discontinues

their services. She went on to acknowledge that the waiting list is just too long, and the county cannot chase parents around trying to offer services when they have several more families on wait lists, wanting desperately to receive services. Mrs. Nichols stated that students on her campus can receive eight to ten counseling session with the site counselor but if they need more then they need to refer to an outside agency. She went on to say that it was easier to get parents to agree to the site counseling but more difficult once that runs out and they need to drive their kids to an outside counseling center. The problem that many of these parent's face is filling out multiple forms and trying to get their insurance companies to pay for those services. If it is not covered by the insurance companies, if they even have insurance, then parents must resort to private funds and as a Title 1 school that is not always possible for many parents to pay for those outside counseling services.

Lack of Supports/Delay in Receiving Help

Another topic that repeatedly came up with all seven of the participants interviewed was the lack of supports or the delay in receiving help for their students or for their special education teaching staff. According to Butrymovicz and Mader (2017), when students do not receive the help and supports they need, it ultimately hurts their future. Their report also proved that if students receive the help that they need along the way than 90 percent of students with disabilities can graduate with a high school diploma. Lack of help has done nothing but create a crisis for special education students and the teachers trying to help them (Burrymovicz & Mader, 2017). Nathan Jones who is a specialist in education policy, has cited that the quality of the special education teacher's relationship with the site principal has a lot to do with whether they stay or leave the profession (Harper, 2018). As each participant pointed out, sometimes the delays in help come from the district level special education department.

Mrs. Nichols stated that her preschool teacher is struggling at her site because she has a huge caseload and no one to help her. Her RSP teacher is also struggling because they have her working at two different school sites, so she does not feel supported since there is too much work to be done for one person. This past year, Mr. Zamba commented that the two teachers who teach the moderate/severe classes at his school site were both out on medical leaves at the beginning of the year. As a result, there was constant turn over with substitute teachers and the paraeducators were very frustrated and feeling unsupported because the special education department was not sending more help. He went on to comment that when teachers and paraeducators were out of these classrooms there was a lot of more challenging behaviors that needed to be dealt with. He stated that these teachers and paraprofessionals just need basic training to be successful and helpful in these classrooms.

Two of the seven participants, Mrs. Kelley and Mrs. Nichols stated that they felt frustrated when they knew something was wrong, but they couldn't get the help they needed from the special education departments in their respective districts. They felt that administrators should be able to bypass the tiering system to get help faster for these students and for the staff. Mrs. Kelley went on to say that she even went so far as to place a student on a "child find," which means that the student would get special education services while all the assessments were being administered to them since the student exhibited non typical behaviors. Mrs. Parker stated that the special education department really needs to support the case manager because when the case manager does not feel supported then it starts to fester at the school site and then the whole school feels unsupported. Mrs. Parker really feels that "help just comes a little too late". Four of the seven participants, Mrs. Parker, Dr. Cruz, Mrs. Kelley and Mr. Zamba all stated that there is a real issue with hiring enough people to help with this population of students. Staffing

shortages is a real problem and there is not enough paraeducators, clinicians, experienced special education teachers, school psychologists and counselors to go around.

All seven of the administrators interviewed mentioned students being inappropriately placed on their campuses. Mr. Foster stated that the district had collapsed a program at another site and transferred the whole class over to his site but did not send the teacher. He went on to state that the district just thought that he could place the students in existing programs at his site, but he said there was no programs at his site that matched their level of needs. He acknowledged that only two of the students could be placed into existing programs and it was a struggle and very challenging with the other six students. It took the district four months to move those students to other programs in the district so their individual needs could be met. Mrs. Nichols stated that a student with autism had severe outburst with hitting, kicking, screaming and cussing. She went on to say that the class really didn't have major outburst or behavior issues to the level that this student was displaying. She stated, "we have been trying to give him a lot of supports but it is really challenging to give him what he needs and we have to think of the whole class and how the whole class feeds off of what they are hearing...especially when they go home and repeat those 'bad' words at home". She went on to acknowledge that this one student's display of negative behaviors caused an influx of parents from the other students in the class to come in and lodge complaints wanting the school to do "something" since they didn't want their children exposed to his unwanted behaviors. Dr. Cruz too saw behaviors as one of the most challenging aspects of dealing with special education students who may not be appropriately placed. He noticed that when you have these types of students who hit, spit and bite that the district office is slow to offer up supports. Mrs. Thomas stated that sometimes the district will send you a student that you know is not properly placed,

And the bureaucracy is always challenging with special education where you have to go through a certain process and check off a lot of things before you can place a kid differently even though you know in the end it is going to happen. And so, it is how to manage the chaos during the time that they are not appropriately placed.

The three administrators who work for Winchester Unified each expressed frustration at not being able to hire the teachers and paraeducators at their respective sites. Mrs. Parker stated that if she is expected to work with these people and to do their evaluations then she should be able to be part of the hiring process. Mrs. Kelley also stated that she felt frustrated at not being able to hire the paraeducators for her staff. Recently she has started to see that change through her own insistence at being on the hiring panel. Mr. Zamba mentioned that he feels that he is at the mercy of the special education department and must “wait” for them to interview and hire the paraeducators needed to help support the student’s needs. He went on to acknowledge that the waiting makes it difficult for everyone involved in helping these students succeed.

Mrs. Thomas stated that in her district technology has not caught up. She went on to say that she has all these chrome books for students to use but there is technology out there to help special education students be more successful, but she cannot get a hold of it. She went on to state that there is a lot of great audio books and curriculum that special education students could access to be more successful in their classes.

Three of the principals, Mrs. Thomas, Mrs. Kelley and Mrs. Parker were in agreement regarding administrators at the district office needing to be more knowledgeable in special education. Mrs. Thomas commented that, “Every administrator at the district level needs to understand that every child in that special education room may need something completely different, and we shouldn’t have to wait weeks, months or years to get whatever the right thing is”. Mrs. Kelley followed it up stating, “I told them (District Office) that they need to get more administrators and program specialists from the special ed involved in it because a lot of them

didn't understand it especially with everything changing". Mrs. Parker has been the only participant that was once a special education administrator was able to add some insight into district personnel who have never been special education teachers themselves by stating,

I think that having that experience is really important because again I think when you are in a compliance type setting and you are asking someone to do something, if you don't know what you are asking them because you have never had the experience, what you are asking them at times is unreasonable and you wouldn't know that unless you had actually walked that.

Another area that these principals mentioned was parental lack of support. Some parents either didn't see what the school staff saw, or they didn't know how to deal with the issues that their child was exhibiting. Three of the seven participants, Mrs. Nichols, Dr. Cruz and Mrs. Thomas all stated that they had students whose parents lacked the skills necessary to adequately discipline their children at home. The students, who had challenging behaviors, came to school looking to get suspended so they could go home where "there were no rules". These students had access to exorbitant amounts of technology and Netflix at home. The parents just let them get on the technology when they got home from school and were allowed to stay on it until they went to bed. These principals had to work closely with these parents to help give them tools so they could better assist their students with their challenging behaviors at home by limiting the amount of technology they had access to. The three administrators from Winchester Unified, Mrs. Parker, Mr. Zamba and Mrs. Kelley all work in more impoverished areas where their parents are less trusting of the system. Many lacked the transportation to get their students to outside counseling services or lacked the money or insurance to get the much-needed help for their children. Mrs. Kelley also acknowledged that some parents just admit that they are at a loss as to how to help their child. She went on to state, "Then I have some parents who come in and are in complete denial, and so they are sometimes not as humble or sometimes we have parents who are like 'I don't have the time'".

Mr. Foster was the administrator with the most years of experience, and he stated that some parents come in with high demands and they want everything for their child. He went on to state, “this could be too enabling for their kid because you want them to be as independent as possible and to grow up learning those independent skills”. He also acknowledged that as a principal he must be careful because in order to offer FAPE to a student you must also offer that in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). This means that students need to be educated in the environment that best meets their learning needs. This can be in a special education class, a general education class or a combination of the two. There is a big push for inclusion but Mrs. Parker, the only principal who once taught special education classes in regards to inclusion stated that, “sometimes having a child in a room, that is not inclusion but people think that if they are physically in there then that’s inclusion...that is not inclusion, what are you talking about”?

Culture Between Special Education and General Education

According to Lentz (2013), respect is the corner stone of setting a welcoming school climate/culture. The National School Climate Center (NSCC), (2007) states that, “A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributory, and satisfying life in a democratic society” (p. 1). The NSCC (2007), went on to state that teachers need to feel engaged and respected for their contributions to the culture and the shared school vision. The Harvard Graduate School of Education states that ultimately the message that the leader of the organization conveys is where the school culture arrives from. “A good culture arises from messages that promote traits like collaboration, honesty, and hard work.” (Shafer, 2018, p. 1)

All seven administrators interviewed for this study acknowledged that they do everything to ensure that the special education teachers and students are included in the campus culture.

They all mentioned that they include them in everything that the general education population is involved in, which included assemblies, ceremonies, recesses, field trips, and school-wide incentive programs. The special education students were also mainstreamed into PE and music classes at all these sites. Mrs. Kelley went on to state that she also includes her special education in the parent's night, Special Olympics, fall festival and Easter egg hunt. Mrs. Nichols stated that this is her first year as a principal at her current school site and that at times it can be a struggle including the special education students because the special education teachers mentioned that in the past their students were not recognized for their reading accomplishment since they could not keep up with the general education students. This year, she has worked with the special education teachers and has allowed them to set the parameters for each student according to their individual needs, so if they accomplish the predetermined growth set by their teacher then they too can earn the school-wide incentives. Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Parker mentioned that there are a couple of general education teachers at their respective sites that have the "just fix them" mentality toward the special education teachers. Dr. Cruz, Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Parker felt like at times their staff does not hold as high of expectations for the special education students when compared to their general education peers and this can cause problems between the general education and special education teachers since they are not in agreement.

Another thing that all seven of these administrators mentioned throughout the interview process was the fact that every teacher had to be on a committee. All the schools in this study participate in the Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) program. Three of the administrators, Mrs. Thomas, Mrs. Kelley and Mrs. Parker all stressed the importance of having a special education teacher on that committee. They each acknowledged that generally special education teachers are exposed to more varying degrees of behaviors in their classroom that at

times will lead to a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP), so they have more experience in how to deal with negative student behaviors. They went on to say they felt that made their special education teacher a good knowledgeable resource on that committee.

Mrs. Parker went on to state that the special education teacher is such a valuable resource to the general education teacher, “because they understand better how to do a quick assessment and how to really look through and say OK this is where the gaps are or this is where the strengths and weaknesses are, they also have more experience with assessments and really looking at and analyzing the assessment”. Dr. Cruz stated that both general education and special education students are two or more years behind in reading at his school. He went on to say that both the general education teachers and the special education teachers are trying to work together so they can develop a systematic approach to help all students. One of the problems they are experiencing is that there is no “universal screener” that the district uses so each teacher uses whatever they happen to have so it is hard to assess students when the teachers are not all using the same assessment tools. Most all the administrators interviewed mentioned that they felt that their special education teachers and general education teachers collaborated well regarding the students they shared. Mrs. Nichols, Dr. Cruz and Mr. Zamba all stated that they heavily relied on their special education staff at their site to help answer questions and to be a valuable resource to them.

Many of the principals stated that they realized that one of their roles is to be the liaison between the special education teachers and the general education teachers. Typically, on many school sites, the special education teachers feel isolated and they work on their own. Mrs. Kelley said that on her site she has had to work really hard at making sure that the special education teachers feel like an important part of her campus. She went on to give an example, she asked

the SDC teachers if they wanted to go to the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) training and their first response was,

Really? And I am like yes, and they are like well uhhh we have never been asked to go. And my thoughts are that anybody should be asked and if you want to go. And I am like we are paying for it and so now it is them feeling like they are a part of this school.

She went on to state that they were surprised that she would ask them because one of her SDC teachers has been on that school site for 15 years and stated she had never been asked or made to feel like she is an important part of the school culture. Mrs. Kelley let them know that all teachers should be invited to AVID since they give good teaching strategies and all teachers need good teaching strategies to use with their students even if they need to be modified. Dr. Cruz stated that “We are at an age where we cannot work in a silo anymore even though some folks would like to continue to work in a silo we need to work together, we need to build upon our strengths and work together to best meet the needs of our kids”. On her school site, Mrs. Parker insists that special education teachers and general education teachers meet after school during professional developments. She went on to state that they need to meet, “so they don’t just get isolated because we want kids to be fully integrated, we need for them to fully understand the expectation on the general education side of it”. Mr. Foster stated that all of his teachers at Palm Valley Elementary have a wonderful relationship with one another. He went on to say, “there is not a whole lot of teachers that want to be out there on an island by themselves, they all want to collaborate together, and we do a real fine job of that here”.

Supports for Special Education Programs and Teachers

In order to be successful, all teachers need support including the special education teacher. “In fact, many special education teachers cite a lack of support from colleagues and supervisors as a principle reason for leaving the profession” (Brown, 2019). According to Harper (2018), she echoes what Brown and many researchers have found, that lack of support

and understanding from the principal and their peers causes special education teachers to exit the field. She also cited a heavy workload and too much paperwork places even more burden on the overworked special education teacher. Without principal supports on their respective sites, special education programs are doomed to thrive.

Each administrator interviewed answered how they help support the special education teachers and programs on their respective campuses. Mr. Forster when commenting about the special education students on his campus,

You know they have special needs, so we have to be sure and look at those classes in the special eye and the teachers need support and to have the full listening ear that they are wanting and to be able to go to the next level if needed and to be able to ask for that.

Many of the administrators attend the IEP meetings at their school sites or have their vice principal attend them. There was only one principal, Mrs. Nichols who does not have a vice principal at her site due to her school size of 320 students. She stated that she has gone to every IEP this year except for two where she sent an admin designee to represent her since she had to be off campus at the meeting date and time. Without a doubt each one of these administrators expressed the importance of attending these meetings. Many of these principals are very big on professional development and making sure that their teachers get that. Dr. Cruz stated that he really likes to gear the professional developments at his site so that he can include the special education staff and make it relevant to their students as well, so they are not “wasting their time”.

Mr. Foster, Mr. Zamba and Mrs. Kelley who all run several moderate/severe programs on their sites stated that they need to make sure that they have enough paraeducators to cover those classes. Mrs. Thomas, Mr. Zamba and Mrs. Parker will give their special education teachers release time so they can go watch veteran teachers in action to help them become better instructors and better understand student discipline procedures. Mrs. Nichols and Mrs. Thomas are good about setting up release time so their special education teachers can get their

assessments and IEP paperwork done. Mrs. Thomas, Dr. Cruz, Mrs. Nichols, Mrs. Parker all mentioned spending money to get substitute teachers to cover their teacher's classes so they could attend IEP meetings during the school day.

Mr. Foster mentioned that over the years, he has realized the importance of having a really strong RSP teacher. He stated that teacher can help the general education teachers when she is knowledgeable about various subjects and assessments. Dr. Cruz and Mrs. Parker also talked about their special education teachers being knowledgeable in the area of assessments so they could help their general education colleagues. Mrs. Parker continued to state the importance of supporting her special education teachers when the general education teachers are not doing their part for the IEP. "So, I had... the support team present at our last staff meeting, the importance of following IEP's, they are legally mandated, these minutes are not suggestions, they are what is required, your input is also required". If the general education teachers still do not comply then she said that she goes and has a follow conversation with them.

There seems to be a slight trend mentioned by five of the seven participants that their respective special education departments seem to be better about offering up more supports this year compared to past years. Mrs. Nichols, Dr. Cruz, Mr. Foster, Mr. Zamba, and Mrs. Kelley all stated that they felt they did get help from their program specialists. Mrs. Nichols felt that this year it was easier to get a hold of her program specialist and would get emails answered back in a timely manner than in years past. Mrs. Parker mentioned that she felt that her school district special education department has definitely made some progress in the right direction in fine tuning when it comes to the Tier III process. Mrs. Thomas said that this year she has a phenomenal school psychologist that is very helpful to both special education and general education teachers. Mrs. Parker stated that it was very important for her new special education

teachers to get support from the district office in how to write compliant IEP's. She also gives individual supports to her special education teachers, but she insists that they need to also advocate for themselves and to let her know what they need. Mrs. Kelley said that she tells new special education teachers to be sure and come to her if they have questions and she will answer without being judgmental. She also learned how to write compliant IEP's so she could help her new special education teachers through this process.

All seven principal participants recognized that special education students could be disciplined like their general education peers unless their behavior was a manifestation of their disability. Mrs. Parker also stated that it was important to teach the staff how to implement a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP). She said, "The BIP is for the adults, not the kid, it is for the adult to know what to do". Mr. Foster stated that all students whether they are special education or general education need to follow the school rules and if they don't then they must face the consequences. He went on to say that with special education students we must look at it "with a lens of hey, did we do what we were supposed to do first". He stated that if a student has a BIP then the school needs to follow it, so discipline for special education students is case by case depending on their IEP's. With his 23 years of administrative experience, he stated that principals still need to look at the ed code and make sure that students are not violating it. The big three are bringing drugs, selling drugs or bringing weapons (which includes brandishing weapons or hurting somebody severely). Dr. Cruz feels strongly about "teaching" students the right way to behave instead of just punishing them for their misbehaviors.

Curriculum

"A curriculum is considered the 'heart' of any learning institution which means that schools or universities cannot exist without a curriculum" (Alvior, 2014, p. 1). Alvior (2014),

went on to state that curriculum does not only give students a learning experience in school but also in society. There was a study done in Detroit, Michigan that found that old curriculum being used with their students set them up for failure. If school districts do not use up to date curriculum then students are not learning the material that they will see on the end of the year high stakes testing (Einhorn, 2018). Special education students are no different than general education students and should be provided with updated curriculum and not expected to use old and outdated curriculum.

Six of the seven administrators interviewed claimed that curriculum in special education continues to be a problem mostly because of the lack of curriculum available to their special education teachers. Mrs. Kelley, Mr. Zamba and Mrs. Parker who all work for Winchester Unified claimed that their district has not really had any curriculum for the past several years. According to both Mrs. Kelley and Mrs. Parker, when the district switched over to common core about four or five years ago instead of going with standard curriculum they went to “units of study”. Mrs. Kelley went on to explain that “district teachers and the curriculum department designed these units of study and they were just shells of what a unit should look like, everything wasn’t in there, there was no teacher’s edition to look at”. Mrs. Parker stated that “what we found is some inconsistency, here is the priority standards that should be addressed, here are some resources, here are some performance tasks and assessments so it is really a skeletal design, it really was not good for new emerging teachers for sure”. Mrs. Kelley echoed the same sentiment regarding new teachers, “so actually for your newer teacher it was probably harder for them to follow the units of study”. Mrs. Parker said that when it came to curriculum for special education, “historically people would piece meal and find something that is left over...or much to my dismay somebody will find an old curriculum and give them (special education) an old

curriculum to use". Dr. Cruz, also acknowledged, "teachers use what is available in the room you know a lot of times there are resources that are in the class where they are and some of them are also teacher purchased".

Both Mrs. Parker and Mr. Foster stated that it was ultimately up to the site administrator to make sure that special education teachers got what they needed in terms of curriculum and supplies. Dr. Cruz and Mr. Foster followed it up saying that teachers need to have autonomy in their creativity and what they want to do and a lot of times they need extra resources. Mr. Foster went on to state, "I have to make sure that I stay on top of that because there is constantly aggressive technology changes and we want to make sure that we keep up with the times and with those kids". Mrs. Kelley, Mrs. Thomas, Mrs. Nichols and Dr. Cruz acknowledged that special education students may need specialized curriculum to help them be successful. Mrs. Nichols stated that the curriculum that the general education teachers and the special education teachers use at her site is different. Dr. Cruz stated that there are a couple of specialized reading programs used at his school site to help student build literacy skills for the special education students. These administrators, Mrs. Nichols and Dr. Cruz both admitted that their teachers use a more specialized curriculum in reading but when it came to math there was no specialized curriculum offered or being used. Mrs. Parker teachers also happen to use the same specialized reading curriculum for their special education students as Dr. Cruz and Mrs. Nichol's teachers.

Mrs. Thomas is the only principal from Collier Unified, she stated that it was a struggle getting curriculum and resources for the special education students on her campus. She went on to say, "That shouldn't be the case, it shouldn't have to be like this big 'I don't know' a battle or waiting game to get resources that might be beneficial to kids". As a principal that was once a reading intervention coach, Mrs. Thomas acknowledges that there are several students who

cannot read by the time they are in the 6th-8th grades. Many of these students have been identified as having dyslexia. The district somewhat uses a program that targets dyslexia. She went on to state, “the district does not have the whole program here and that is always just strange to me”. Since she has been both a math coach and a reading intervention coach, she has looked closely at the intervention materials that come with the regular curriculum. She stated that, “people do not realize that the intervention programs embedded within the regular curriculum typically are not intensive enough for special education students, if they were intensive enough then they wouldn’t be in special education”. She went on to state that special education teachers historically have never been on a curriculum adoption committee, but they should be since they possess a lot of knowledge.

The three principals from Winchester Unified expressed excitement regarding their school district’s adoption of a traditional curriculum for all teachers whether they are general education or special education. Because her site was looking for a good math intervention program, Mrs. Kelley mentioned that her school helped to pilot a new math curriculum that ended up being adopted by the district. These three principals from this district claimed that they felt that teachers would have an easier time lesson planning since they would have a teacher edition along with other teaching materials to refer to and not just a skeletal outline.

Funding

Ideally, special education is supposed to improve schooling for the 12 percent of students that are identified as needing those services. However, Since the inception of special education laws, funding of special education continues to be an issue. In the state of California, there are 133 SELPA’s (Special Education Local Plan Areas) that oversee special education from one school district to several school districts each (Hill et al., 2016). Hill et al. (2016), went on to

state that when it comes to special education funding the federal government funds nine percent, the state 29 percent and the districts 62 percent of the cost of special education services. At the passing of IDEA back in 1975, Congress estimated the cost to be about twice the amount of money to educate a child with a disability than one without a disability (McCann, 2014).

McCann (2014) went on to state that Congress promised to fund school districts 40 percent of the cost, but to date they have never even funded 20 percent to any district. The Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) has confirmed that the federal government only funds school districts in California a mere nine percent, a far cry from the 40 percent promised (Hill et al., 2016) Sadly, the PPIC also went on to state that there are currently 13 categories that a student can be identified as needing special education services. Some of these categories are more costly than others, but none of that is taken into consideration when allocating monies for special education students through state and federal funding (Hill et al., 2016). In order for school districts to make up the cost of funding for their special education students, districts must draw upon their general funds to make up the difference creating a funding shortage for school districts (Hill et al., 2016).

According to all seven participants of this study, special education funding continues to be a “hot button” topic. The four administrators who work for Winchester Unified and Collier Unified admitted that their districts give them no extra funding for their special education population at their individual school sites. The three administrators who work for Mayfield Unified stated that their school district does give them a small stipend for their special education population, but they emphasized that the stipend was “very small”. Mr. Foster who has 79 special education students housed in seven classes on his school site stated that he gets an extra \$1,500. He went on to say that this money does not supplant but helps to support the curriculum

for special education. He has been a site principal for 22 of his 23 years and he said that he has had to get creative over the years when it comes to special education funding. He stated that “the Medi Cal grant is fantastic and that is geared toward kids with special needs”. His school site uses the Medi Cal grants more than any other site in the district. “One of his teachers just wrote a grant for \$25,000 to buy a piece of equipment for her moderate/severe class.” He has also found some other smaller grants that are available that his teachers can write and obtain \$1,000 of extra funding for their special needs’ population. He acknowledged that one of his special education teachers wrote a grant for \$40,000 for a piece of playground equipment that had a rocking motion to it that helped her moderate/severe students.

Dr. Cruz stated that he has four classes that have a combination of 66 students in them and he receives an extra \$2,000. He stated, “the way I usually do that is I just divide it equally among the special education teachers”. He went on to say that each site, in his district, does things differently, but his teachers usually use it to purchase substitute teachers for IEP meetings and SST meetings. Mrs. Nichols said that she gets a little bit of extra money. She has 63 special education students spread throughout four classes and gets an additional \$1,000. She said that her teachers usually spend the money on organizational materials, extra curriculum supports for writing and foot bands to help their special education students stay focused.

Mr. Zamba stated that his district offers no extra funding for the 65 special education students on his campus. School districts get their funding through ADA (Average Daily Attendance), and he acknowledged that his school has an attendance problem. Their average attendance rate is right at 77% which means the district loses ADA monies when students don’t show up to school. At his school they have installed an incentive program to get students to show up. He has gotten businesses to donate technology items like mini iPads along with other

technology devices and bicycles. Students earn tickets for each day they attend school then at the end of the month the school has a drawing. The more tickets the students get to put in the bigger their chance of winning one of the fabulous prizes that are being offered. Mrs. Kelley said that at times it is hard to financially support her special education students because when it comes to her site funding the 112 students identified as special education are not included in her numbers, so the district does not supply the finances for those students. She went on to say that she must pull money from her site funds in order to buy supplemental curriculum to help support the special education teachers. She also uses site funds to purchase substitute teachers to cover teacher's classes so they can attend IEP meetings. Mrs. Parker also acknowledged that the 98 special education students at her site are also not included in her school count. She stated that she too must use site funds to purchase substitute teachers so the student's teachers can attend IEP meetings. The only principal from Collier Unified, Mrs. Thomas, has 57 special education students on her campus and does not receive any extra funding for them, she stated that "I try to support my teachers financially; I knew what it was like being a teacher, especially a beginning teacher, and barely making enough money...and then trying to buy classroom supplies on top of it". She went on to say that if her teachers need something to be very creative in their classrooms, then she said more often than not she will somehow find the funds in her budget to help support them. Mr. Foster with his 23 years of being an administrator summed it up this way:

Sometimes it is not as easy supporting special education because the dollars...I don't know if you know this but the special education department is a drain on the general education fund because we don't get enough to run the programs so that is a drain in and of itself...you know you have to balance it. I always have special education teachers come up to me and say can you get me this can you get me that...and I have to say slow down a little bit here.

On the Job Training

On the job training is not always a good thing and when it comes to special education it can actually be a detriment to school districts as well as special education students. According to Samuels (2018), she acknowledged that principals are not given enough training in their programs regarding special education. David Bateman was once a due process hearing officer and he was required to rule on disputes between parents and school districts. He stated that it became very obvious that many principals who were sent to represent the school districts did not know even the basics of special education law (Samuels, 2018). This proves to be costly to a school district through the litigation process when the parents prevail on a court case.

Almost all the participants referenced getting most of their experience through “on the job training”. The only one of the seven principals to have any extensive special education knowledge and background prior to becoming an administrator was Mrs. Parker who received a special education credential for the Learning Handicapped deaf/blind population. She also ran her own special education SDC classes for 13 years before becoming a principal. When asked if she received any classes specifically for special education while earning her administrative credential she stated, “I don’t recall getting any... because again it was already in my background”.

All seven of the administrators interviewed acknowledged attending conferences and workshops provided by their various school districts. None of the administrators who I interviewed could remember taking a class in their administrative classes specific to special education except for their law class that covered both special education as well as general education laws. Mrs. Nichols stated that she received extensive training with lawyers and special education law about holding and conducting IEP’s. Only one principal, Mr. Foster,

stated that he attended some classes in special education instruction which were required for his degree in elementary education over 30 years ago. Dr Cruz stated, "I feel like a lot of what I learned has been on the job training and it is through sitting through a hundred IEP meetings or sitting through classroom observations or going over psychologist reports that is where I have learned what those should look like". Mr. Zamba empathically stated that when he went through his administrative program, he got no exposure to special education students or their needs. He went on to state, "one of my goals was to really learn from the teachers and from the students and from the parents so I basically made it one of my goals that every day I would spend at least 10-15 minutes in each of my special education classes". The two administrators, Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Kelley, who had once served as reading intervention coaches, acknowledged that they got some exposure to special education student and their needs through some extensive training for their coaching positions. Mrs. Thomas, stated that, "I attended intensive training on learning how to teach children the foundations of reading and what that looks like for your typical general education kid and what that looks like for a kid who may have a learning disability". When I asked Mrs. Kelley about her trainings in special education, she said that she took it upon herself to go through the whole SELPA (Special Educaiton Local Plan Area) series. She stated, "I took two years' worth of trainings, going to classes where they brought people in from the county to train the new teachers because I had a site that had so many autism classes on it and I don't have a special education background". She mentioned that she constantly keeps up on all the updates so she can make sure her teachers have what they need to teach their special education population.

Transformational Leadership

Leadership is very closely tied to communication. After seeing how each administrator acknowledged the importance of communication which they expressed was the key to good leadership, I looked closer at the way they described their leadership style and what was important to them in leading their respective school sites. Every single administrator interviewed, without exception, stated that they all believed in having every teacher on their site be part of a committee. Not one of their teachers could opt out of being on a committee. Burns (1978) ties this into transformational leadership, by looking at the separate interests that each person holds and having those interest united into a higher goal within the organization. I found this very interesting. After serving at several different school sites over the years and a few different school districts, I never had a principal set up committees that teachers had to serve on. When I probed the principals and asked why, they all answered in much the same way; to get teacher buy-in. None of them felt that they could effectively run their school sites on their own without the help of the teachers ensuring student success. Mr. Foster stated that “you need to get buy in from staff because these are other teachers who are leading these committees, because believe me one person can’t do it all”. All the participants interviewed believe in the concept of “teacher buy-in” to help create a positive culture at their respective school sites. Bass (1990) looks at the goal of transformational leadership as raising up its followers into leaders. Mr. Foster also stated that he could not micromanage teachers, he must believe that they will do the job they were hired for without him constantly looking over their shoulder. Mrs. Thomas realized that it is important to take the time to build relationships with all staff so that she can have the conversations with them to help solve problems. It is likely that Crowley (2011) would

agree, since he states that money is not the most powerful motivator; being valued and appreciated is a more powerful motivator. When people feel truly valued then they will rise to the occasion.

Another topic that five of the seven administrators was emphatic about was data. Their consensus was this: Schools generate a lot of data but if no one is looking at it then you can't help teachers drive instruction to help students be successful. Dr. Cruz stated that his teachers are constantly finding and analyzing the data to monitor their students to see if they are making progress on their IEP goals. He went on to say that he must block out time in his schedule so that he can analyze the school data to help the teachers plan for instruction when they look at district benchmarks and state testing. Mr. Foster claims that he looks at some form of school data every day. He stated that many principals don't know how to analyze data, but in order to be a successful principal then you need to know how to analyze the data that your school generates. Mrs. Thomas stated that she is a very data driven principal but then when she looked back when she was a teacher, she always looked at a lot of data. Since she was once a math coach and reading intervention coach, she is equipped to help teachers with ways to help students be successful. Mrs. Nichols stated that she has a leadership team on her campus who she asks for their thoughts and opinions. Her leadership team then collects and analyzes the data that gets generated to help solve site issues. Mrs. Kelley advises her whole staff to participate in the decision-making process at their school site. She stresses the importance of them understanding that she is just one person, while there are 36 teachers on her staff, and this is their school too so their opinions count.

Mr. Foster said that it took him about five years to get good at leadership but when you get thrown in the fire a few times you learn quickly. He acknowledged that things in leadership change rapidly so once you get something down then you need to learn something else. Mrs.

Thomas says that she is very transparent with her staff. She will have the discussions with them to make decisions together unless it is something that she just needs to make the decision on her own. She also acknowledged that she is confident enough to admit to her staff that if she does not know the answer to something, she will tell them she doesn't know and will have to get back to them. Mr. Zamba believes in putting systems in place. This is his second year serving as principal at his current site and he stated that there was a huge staff turnover rate and he couldn't get substitute teachers to work at his school site. Part of the issue was when teachers had family emergencies arise, they did not have a set of emergency substitute plans so substitute teachers were placed in classes with no sub plans. Mr. Zamba then made it mandatory that all teachers have two days' worth of sub plans in the office "in case of emergency", that way substitute teachers had a set of plans to work from. He went on to state, "I surround myself with people who have all the skills that I don't have...I give them credit for what they do, and I empower them to make decisions and if they make a mistake then I basically take full responsibility, I don't blame them". According to Crowley (2011), this is an example of transformational leadership where people feel safe, appreciated, understood and valued.

Dr. Cruz also insists on having systems in place for all students. He has staff attend academic conferences. He also insists that they help run the professional developments at their school, he said that he always notices how it enhances the leadership skills better when it is information coming from their colleagues and not just the principal. He also feels that this helps empower his staff since they feel valued. Dr. Cruz went on to state the importance of working with all staff to improve the instruction at his school by saying, "Everything magical that happens at school is either an interaction between the teacher, the student or the content and so

focusing your energy...to improve instruction is when you are going to see academic improvement school wide”.

Mrs. Kelley stated that it is important that everyone feels included. She went on to say that she doesn't separate out special education and general education, they are all treated equally. Mr. Foster stated, “I do not purposely leave anybody out, I want to make sure that everyone knows they are invited and to feel welcomed”. He went on to acknowledge the importance of knowing all 79 of his special education students by name. He says that he goes into their classes every day to say “hi” and to give them fist bumps. Again, transformational leaders are going to place value in others. By placing value in others, the transformational leader has the ability to motivate and inspire their followers to believe in themselves (Crowly, 2011).

Conclusion

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of seven elementary school principals who were responsible for educating not only the general education students on their respective campuses but the several classes of special education students as well. It was interesting to hear them describe the difficulty that they too faced when trying to help not only the special education students on their sites but the staff that works with them too. Except for Mrs. Parker, the other participants of this study expressed a concern and a desire to have more classes to increase their knowledge in special education.

Something that I found fascinating was that every one of these principals required every teacher on their campuses to be on at least one committee. They each felt that the teachers serving on these committees gained the much needed “buy-in” from the teachers to gain a more positive school climate and culture. According to Tobin (2014), principals spend 70-80% of their time in some form of interpersonal communication, most of it is direct face to face or by

telephone, followed by a heavy load of email correspondence that they need to keep up with. Every administrator interviewed for this study echoed the fact that they felt that communication was “key” to running an effective and efficient school.

After conducting this hermeneutical phenomenological study and learning about the experiences of site administrators and their perceptions of how they help their special education teachers and staff, I now have a better understanding of their role. Site administrators are left at the mercy of the district office special education team. They too feel the frustration of having to weather the storms while the data is being collected regarding special education students and their unique needs. Besides the unhappy teachers that they must face on their campuses, they must also face and deal with the unhappy parents who come in to complain about the negative behaviors of other students who are directly impacting their own child in a negative way. Through the interview process it was recognized that the administrators of this study had a special education population anywhere from 10.8 percent to 13.8 percent. Special education tends to take a lot of a principal’s time; however, they still have the general education population of students who can also have unique needs that they need to make time for as well.

Summary

After spending approximately 11 hours transcribing and countless hours analyzing 170 pages worth of interview data with the seven participants of this study, one can see the challenges that they face in leading the special education programs and special education staff at their respective school sites. They themselves face a host of obstacles with trying to help their special education teachers and special education students. There were several themes that emerged from the interview data which included: communication, mental health issues, lack of support/the delay in receiving help, culture between special education and general education

teachers, support for special education programs and teachers, curriculum, funding and on the job training. After conducting this study, I can now see the issues that administrators face in trying to support their special education teachers and staff. Because Mrs. Parker was once a special education teacher herself, I think she phrased it honestly when she was asked about balancing the demands of being a principal,

It is and again like for me it is really hard for me because I was trying to be so special eddy and I am like wait a minute, I have a whole school that I need to run, but my heart was kind of pulling me in that direction and again ten percent of the population should not take 80% of my time. You know I have to be kind of realistic.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Today's principals have a host more responsibility than in years past. Historically, the principal had to deal with students discipline along with serving as a teacher's boss (Mills, 1974). Principalships have evolved into more complex roles in recent years. Now principals are responsible for leading personnel, they oversee students and public relations, as well as school climate and culture. They oversee finances at their school sites along with instructional strategies to ensure students success (Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2004). With the passing of IDEA (Individual Disability Education Act, 2004), it expanded the principal's role even farther to include and ensure students with disabilities received specialized instruction in the least restrictive environment which means that principals are required to spend more time with special education than in years prior (Lasky & Karge, 2006).

Transformational Leadership

James MacGregor Burns wrote about transformational leadership in politics while Bass, Avolio and Leithwood were the first to apply it to education. Burns (1978) stated that transformational leadership looks at transforming both the leader and the follower who were led through both moral levels of conduct and ethical aspirations. Bass (1998), extended transformational leadership to include trust, admiration, and respect. Leithwood (1994), looked at the leadership skills that school leaders should possess which include: Building school vision and establishing goals, creating a productive school culture, providing intellectual stimulation, offering individualized support, modeling best practices and important organizational values, demonstrating high-performance expectations, and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions. Burns (1978) sees power as equal and should not be used coercively. He

sees power as a relationship with others and not a thing to own. Burns (1978), goes on to quote William James who says: “The deepest principal in human nature is the craving to be appreciated... First, arouse in the other person an eager want: -then satisfy it” (p. 447).

These principals showed a pattern of raising their followers up through levels of morality, where the leader and the follower are both dependent on each other (Burns, 1978). Burns (1978), goes on to state, whatever separate interests each person holds, they come together to form a “higher” goal which serves the interests of all involved. All the principals included in this study expected every teacher to serve on at least one committee. Dr. Cruz insists that his teachers run the school’s professional developments, since teacher don’t always want to be “told” what to do by the site principal. According to Bass and Riggio (2006), this type of leadership will grow leaders out of subordinates which proves to be the very heart of the paradigm of transformational leadership.

Challenges That Principals Face

Many of the principals in this study admitted that help from the district office does not come soon enough. In the words of Mrs. Thomas and Dr. Cruz who acknowledged that when the help comes slowly it is how to manage the chaos during that time can be a real challenge. Dr. Cruz felt that it would be beneficial if there were some trainings for administrators in the area of goal setting and progress monitoring. He went on to state,

I know what good goals look like and I know what good progress monitoring looks like but I think sometimes when we have newer teachers who are learning how to create good goals and learning how to progress monitor...I don’t feel as qualified in providing them with the training on how to go about how to progress monitor.

Mrs. Parker stated that there needs to be more trainings at the site and district levels. She went on to say that there is a lot of brand-new assistant principals who need to be trained in special education. They are expected to run IEP meetings at their school sites so they need to acquaint

themselves with the IEP process so they can speak to the site and district programs and supports available to special education students.

Principal Preparation Programs

According to research, approximately half of administrators surveyed expressed a lack of knowledge when it came to the topic of special education because they did not feel that they were given the formal instruction in their credential programs to help with this population of students and the staff that runs these programs (Angelle & Bilton, 2009; McHatton et al., 2010).

One area that every administrator in this study stressed was the fact that their administrative credential program did not really equip them with the knowledge that they needed in order to do their job effectively as a principal of students with special needs. Even Mrs. Parker, who was a special education teacher prior to becoming an administrator could not recall a single class that she took in her administrative credential program pertaining to special needs students. She stated that she didn't really think about it because it was already in her background. The administrators in this study all expressed a desire to learn more about special education and took trainings through their districts. Two administrators, Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Kelley went beyond that by taking county trainings offered through other counties. Mrs. Kelley went on to state,

Most administrators typically don't or they may only be familiar with part of the IEP but I went through the whole every little component with special ed to make sure that I knew how they were written because I had so many brand new teachers that sometimes we were writing them together and if I didn't know how to write an IEP then I couldn't help them.

Mrs. Kelley also expressed the importance of knowing how to read the test results so that she could help explain them to parents better than just handing them a sheet of paper with a bunch of numbers. When Mrs. Thomas was asked if she felt that principals from other sites knew enough

about special education, her response was, “I would say more often than not, principals lack an understanding of our special education.”

In an article by Lynch (2012) that reviewed state certification requirements for special education training of future administrators, he found only eight states that required such training: Colorado, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio and Vermont. According to Paze and Cole (2012), Patricia Powell examined data from all 50 states and took the top two universities of each state who graduated the most administrators and evaluated their programs for special education classes. What she found was astonishing; she stated that of the 97 programs evaluated only eight of them offered a separate course in special education law. When asked, all the other universities provided the explanation that the special education law was embedded in the school law related class. Powell went on to state that she doubted that this would have given the administrative candidate enough information to sufficiently learn all about the special education laws that one must know for an administrative job (Powell, 2009).

Mrs. Parker phrased it ably when she stated, “People don’t know what they don’t know”. If administrators don’t know the information, then they must find out, so they are better equipped to deal with the unique population of students that make up approximately 12 % of their school’s community.

Mental Health

Of all the students educated within the boundaries of California, 11% of them have been identified as having a serious emotional disturbance (California State Auditor, 2016). In California 3% of children receiving special education services have been identified under the category of emotional disturbance (California Department of Education, 2018). In comparison, the national average of students identified under the category of emotional disturbance is 5%

(Kena et al, 2016). Sadly, in California many children do not receive the mental health treatment that they need (California State Auditor, 2016). According to George et al., (2018), many children identified with emotional and behavioral disorders do not receive the adequate services that they need through the school system. If children are on an IEP, and they need mental health and related services in order to make educational gains then the school district is required to provide those services unless the treatment needs to be provided by a physician (Yell et al., 2018).

According to the California State Auditor (2016), mental health services were transferred to County Mental Health (CMH) in 1986, but when the state hit a severe budget shortfall, then responsibility was transferred back to Local Education Agencies (LEA's) in 2010. Weinberg et al., (2019), jointly conducted a study that looked at the inadequacies of placing the responsibility of mental health services being dispensed through school districts. First, and foremost, it was recognized by all interviewees which included parents, administrators and attorneys that there is always a break in services for the duration of school holidays where no services are being granted. Children with mental and behavioral health issues cannot afford to have a break in services. Many parents expressed a concern regarding a lack of mental health services through the school as well as the concern for parent's needs to pay for services outside of the school.

All the school districts interviewed for this study are all Title I schools which indicates that at least 40% of the households are considered of low socioeconomically status, and many of these parents cannot afford mental health care costs. Both Mrs. Parker and Mr. Zamba indicated that they have a high homelessness rate at their schools and many of their parents are not trusting of the system so will not seek the help that their children may need when it comes to mental health. Mrs. Thomas indicated that in Cypress County, the County Mental Health (CMH) office

will often refer parents back to the school district for special education testing in hopes that they qualify and then the school districts has to provide the money and services needed for mental health. She went on to say that it was sad because the students are stuck in a vicious cycle because they won't qualify for special education services and the county is denying them the mental health services that they truly need. Again, the study conducted by Weinberg et al. (2019), looked at attorney responses who "reported that the transfer of mental health services back to school districts often led to students not receiving the services they needed" (p. 919). Another attorney interviewed wrote: "Since the law was changed the collaboration with school districts has become worse in terms of attaining mental health services as part of a child's IEP" (Weinberg et al., 2019, p. 919). It has been recognized that if we do not address these mental health issues among our school aged children, then the lack of treatment leads to poor educational growth and outcomes (Edmonds-Cady & Hock, 2008; Green et al., 2017).

Funding Continues to be an Issue

With the inception of special education laws that began in the 1970's, there is an ongoing issue about who should fund special education. Research has shown that on average, it cost over twice the amount to educate a special education student compared to a general education student (McCann, 2014). Congress promised that the federal government would fund school districts 40% of the cost to educate a special education student. To date, the federal government has not even funded any school district 20% of the excess cost. As of 2016, California only received nine percent of its funding from the federal government to cover special education costs. The federal government further places a deeper burden on the school district to cover the extra cost of special education students by not allowing them to use the "excuse" of not having enough funding to cover the additional cost.

Special education is expensive. California educated approximately 718,000 students in 2014-15 and it costs \$12 billion in federal, state and local dollars every year (Hill et al., 2016). These same authors point out that special education operates under a unique set of laws that is quite different from general education. Because of the way that special education is funded, it is worth pointing out that the state of California had to use \$3.2 billion in General Fund support to cover special education costs which makes up 29% of funding, \$1.2 billion came from Federal funds which makes up 9% of funding and the other \$7.6 billion came from local contributions which makes up the other 62% of funding (Hill et al., 2016). Interestingly, California's main program for financing special education is called the AB 602 funding formula which distributes 80% of the special education funds for California. However, the funding is based on ADA (average daily attendance) of all students enrolled in the K-12 system without considering how many have qualified for special education services. The reason the state funds this way is to keep districts from over qualifying students for special education services just to receive more money (Hill et al., 2016). After a decade of funding special education this way, there is now an acknowledgment that AB 602 is not keeping up with the pace of the growth and change in special education students who qualify for services. Also, over the past decade, disability distribution has grown for disabilities that are considered more costly than lower cost disabilities. Autism is considered a high cost disability and has risen significantly over the past decade, while a specific learning disability diagnosis is considered less expensive and has been declining in recent years (Hill et al., 2016). Every principal interviewed for this study stated that the cost of special education was an issue that they experienced at their respective school sites. There was only one school district, Mayfield Unified, that provided a small amount of special education funding to help off-set some of the cost of special education. Funding is a serious issue that

causes school districts to struggle with the ever-rising cost of providing special education students with the services that they need to be successful in school.

Hiring Concerns

Special education continues to be an area that is understaffed and holds several vacancies. According to DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2003), special education teachers have complex job responsibilities with an enormous amount of paperwork which tends to be overwhelming. Prather-Jones (2011), conducted a qualitative investigation to find out why special education teachers vacate their jobs. The top three reasons they stated for leaving was lack of administrative support, a lack of appreciation and lack of understanding and support from their general education colleagues. Once obtained, it has been recognized that special education teachers leave the profession at a higher rate than their general education colleagues (Billingsley, 2004; Billingsley & Cross, 1991). Billingsley (2004), goes on to acknowledge that special education teachers leave their positions at a rate of 12% higher than their general education counterparts. When school districts have vacancies in special education, they are then forced to fill those positions with long term substitute teachers who are not qualified, let alone, highly qualified to educate this diverse population (Billingsley, 2004). DiPaola et al. (2004), also acknowledge that the top reason for leaving the field of special education is lack of administrative support, followed by large caseloads and enormous amounts of IEP paperwork.

Lack of Curriculum

Another problem area that has been recognized after conducting this study is the lack of curriculum or no curriculum given to the special education teachers to educate their diverse population. It would be prudent for administrators to recognize this and to help their special education teachers obtain curriculum for their students. At one point in my career, I ran a

moderate/severe program with ten students in it with varying degrees of educational needs. Their chronological age ranged from 12 to 14 years old, however, their mental ages ranged from one in a half to eight years old. I was given no curriculum and had to make it up every single day by looking through old workbooks or getting lessons on the internet. I also had to pay, out of my own pocket, for internet access to lessons for my students. Because none of my students were in the same place, I was basically running ten programs with one student in each of them. Not surprisingly, after two years I was burned out and had to leave that job. The number one person who can make the special education teacher feel valued is the site principal. Without their support, the special education teacher is on a sinking ship and research shows they vacate special education before they drown.

It would be helpful for special education district administrators to also hold special education teaching credentials and to have their own special education teaching experience. I have run across more district administrators who have no special education experience and truly have no knowledge of what our job entails. They make unreasonable demands, that they have no clue as to why they are unreasonable. Mrs. Parker, the only principal of this study who ran her own special education classes for 14 years, recognized that administrators that work in the district office and who have never run their own special education class have no clue what they are asking and their expectations tend to be outrageous.

Communication and Transformational Leadership

Without exception, every single principal participant in this study, looked at communication as the “key” to running a successful school. According to Marks and Printy (2003), principals who recognize that teachers are equal partners that they can gain knowledge and skills from and who can help them make decisions in the educational process tend to be

stronger leaders who are respected by their staff. Every administrator interviewed for this study, talked about the importance of having committees at their school sites and that every teacher must be on at least one committee. When I asked them why, all seven of them stated in much the same way; to gain teacher buy-in. According to Dr. Cruz, teachers don't want their administrator constantly "telling" them what to do. He has teachers at his school run site professional developments so that teachers will respond more positively to a teacher who is successful in the area of the PD that they happen to be conducting. Mrs. Kelley is very big on having staff fill out surveys to communicate what they may need. She tells them that she is only one person and her opinion is not the only one that should count. She insists that with a staff of over 30 teachers that without their input, she acknowledges that she could not run a successful school. She and three other administrators; Mr. Foster, Mrs. Nichols and Mrs. Thomas, all use the term "open door policy" where staff knows they are welcome to come in and talk to them about anything at any time. When principals use the teachers at their school sites to help them with leadership responsibilities then there tends to be less principal burnout compared to the "hero" principal who tries to do everything on their own (Marks & Printy, 2003). According to Avolio and Bass (1993), transformational leaders solicit others to rise to a level where they reach their full potential. "At the heart of transformational leadership is the development of followers, with much of this occurring through effective empowering of followers by leaders" (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 193).

According to Crowley (2011), people want to feel like they are important to those who they work for. When a principal takes time to find out about an employee's personal life then it makes them feel validated. Mrs. Thomas stated that even in the chaos of the day no matter how busy she is, if a teacher comes to her and wants to talk about a personal issue then she always

puts whatever she is doing aside and stops to listen to their concerns. She acknowledged that by making time for them then she has noticed that they respond to their work environment and to her in a more positive way. Transformational leaders realize that one of the driving forces behind satisfying employees is to respect them and to recognize them for what they bring to the workplace (Crowley, 2011).

Barriers to Transformational Leadership

After looking at the leadership style of each principal participant of this study, it became apparent that they themselves ran into barriers that may have hindered them in leading their respective school sites. At times, their special education teachers felt unsupported when it came to handling children with difficult behaviors in their class. The principal participants claimed that it did become difficult to support their special education teachers during the data collection process. Their respective district office special education departments required months of data collection before they would decide to send more help or not. They also ran into barriers when they did not always understand the whole IEP process. Three of the participants, Dr. Cruz, Mr. Zamba and Mrs. Nichols stated that more trainings in special education from the district office would be helpful to them in guiding their staff. They stated they would like trainings in other areas besides compliance. According to Crowley (2011), how people are made to feel at their jobs, has a lot to do with how engaged or disengaged they are. He went on to state, that research shows that people tend to be more engaged if the transformational leader is acknowledging their contributions to the organization.

Six of the participants, Dr. Cruz, Mr. Zamba, Mrs. Kelley, Mrs. Thomas. Mr. Foster and Mrs. Nichols felt that they could have used more classes in their administrative credentialing program since they felt like they got a lot of their training “on the job”. Besides their law class,

that only partially covered special education law, they felt they would have benefitted from classes that helped them address technology in special education. Curriculum also continues to be an issue in special education. These administrators felt that it would have been beneficial to have learned about curriculum that would help their special education students. Bass and Riggio (2006), acknowledged that transformational leaders are more likely to provide mentoring to their employees than nontransformational leaders. Lentz (2013), looks at transformational leadership in special education as being important so that students can achieve their goals toward preferred outcomes.

All seven administrators talked about the rising mental health issues over the years. At times they acknowledged that help to this group comes slowly or not at all. According to Bass and Riggio (2006), “decision making is likely to suffer unless effective leadership is provided that can help foster the quality of the decision” (p. 59). These principals acknowledged that many students with mental health issues also tend to have behavioral issues. When help from the district office special education department appears to come slowly, many of these principals recognize that their special education teachers feel unsupported. In the words of Mrs. Parker, she stated that the lack of support not only effects the special education teachers but festers on the school site and spreads to the general education teachers as well.

Funding is an issue that plagues every school and school district. It is no wonder that this becomes another barrier to transformational leadership. According to Bass (1995), stability and routines strengthen any organization. Funding could be a problem with creating instability in special education. The three principals from Winchester Unified and the principal from Collier Unified stated that the number of special education students were not even used in their total school population counts creating even more of a problem for funding. In those two school

districts there was no special education funding to help offset any of the cost that it creates for their respective schools.

Hiring personnel for special education continues to be a concern and provides yet another barrier to transformational leadership. The three principals from Winchester Unified stated that they were not even on the hiring panel for paraeducators that were hired to work on their school sites. They felt they were at the mercy of the special education office to hire a person that would be a good fit for their students and teachers. According to Bass and Riggio (2006), transformational leaders tend to be part of a collective society more than an individualistic society, so they like to be a part of the process and not excluded from it. Mrs. Parker and Mrs. Kelley have both insisted that they needed to be a part of the process and have seen a change from the personnel office that has started to include them.

Limitations to the Study

This research project, although according to Patterson (2012), when it came to the number of participants was found to be within acceptable limits for a Qualitative study, did have its limitations. The participants, which were not known to the researcher prior to the study, were solicited directly through their school email which was obtained through their district servers. They answered either the original email or the follow up email to indicate whether they would be willing to participate in the study. There were originally only nine participants solicited with seven principals responding that they were willing to participate in the study. Once an adequate number of participants was obtained then no more emails were sent out. This study did not do a mass email so was very limited in the number of participants that were sought out. The researcher must believe that the participants were honest in their responses to the questions asked of them. These principals were asked if they were willing to be interviewed twice. The two

interviews combined would take a total of one- and one-half hours to complete. They all agreed to the terms that were laid out even though none of the participants were compensated for their time.

When asked by the researcher, why they were willing to participate in this study when they were not being compensated and did not know me prior to the study, all seven participants answered in much the same way: They felt that the study under investigation pertaining to special education was worth their time to share their input. This makes me wonder if they were principals that were more aware of special education and the laws that govern them than perhaps other principals. After interviewing this set of unique individuals, I can honestly say, that I have never had the pleasure of working with a principal as knowledgeable as this group seemed to be about special education by the answers that they shared on the interview protocol. This study only focused on those principals who served at an elementary setting, either Kindergarten through 6th grade or Kindergarten through 8th grade. It did not look at any secondary principal serving at either junior high schools or high schools.

Another limitation to the study was the fact that I am a special education teacher who has earned all three special education credentials: mild/moderate, moderate/severe and early childhood. Along with those credentials I also obtained a master's degree in special education. Because of my vast knowledge of special education and all the laws that govern it, I tend to be passionate and extremely rigid in the IEP process and what the state of California expects of those of us who have been granted these credentials. In other words, I take my responsibilities of the job very seriously. Parents have graciously shared their children with me, and I feel an obligation to help address their unique learning issues so they can fulfill their potential once they leave the walls of the school behind to enter society. Many principals who I have worked for in

the past have been very comfortable breaking the laws that govern the IEP process. Therefore, I knew that I would need to be very careful and diligent in listening to what these principals had to say regarding their own knowledge and not allow myself to be jaded by my own experiences.

Recommendations and Possible Areas for Future Research

After conducting this study, an area of possible research that came to light would be to interview employees who work in the special education district office and to find out what their perception of helping the principals who reside within their district's school sites. Most of the principals in this study emphasized the fact that they felt that help tended to come very slowly. The first thing that is requested and is expected of staff is tons of documentation. It is during this time that teachers feel unsupported while they and their staff are expected to weather the behavioral storms within their classrooms. As a special education teacher, I once had four months of documentation on a student and his behavioral outbursts that were a danger to himself and to others and was told by the district office special education department to get "more" documentation. I asked them how much more I needed to get before somebody from the district office would take a look at it. The documentation already told me what I needed to know but it needed to be analyzed by district staff before this student could receive a PAAS (Paraeducator Additional Adult Support) to help control his aggressive behavior. Two days later they finally sent a district employee to look at the evidence plus take a week more to collect her own data. They came to the same conclusion that I did: This student's behavior was very aggressive and required the assistance of a PAAS to help reshape it. I echo the sentiments of other special education teachers and the principals of this study that felt those of us who were left to deal with the student and their aggressive behavior felt unsupported and forgotten about by the district office special education department during the long data collection process. It would be worth

looking into their role and perceptions. After conducting this study, I now have a better understanding of a principal's role but what I would like to understand is the role of the program specialist or the program coordinator at the district level. Through the interview process, perhaps I can learn what obstacles that they face in trying to support their principals at their respective school sites.

Considering all seven of the principal participants of this study felt that their principal preparation program did not really adequately prepare them for the role of dealing with all the issues of special education, it would be worth looking into administrative credentialing programs. Mrs. Parker was the only principal to have a special education credential prior to becoming a site administrator. She felt that through that training she was adequately prepared but she could not remember taking any specific classes that dealt with special education while she was earning her administrative credential. It would be worth investigating a college program that incorporates more special education courses that adequately prepares a principal to help support this population of students as well as staff. It would be beneficial for states to look at the administrative credentialing programs and provide some course work for principals to learn about the special education students that they are going to have to support on their campuses. According to Dr. Cruz, he stated that he would have liked to have received two to three courses on special education. He went on to say, "Obviously, we could spend a whole program on just special education alone, or even if it wasn't just a course but maybe throughout our course work if professors were able to talk about the implication of special education". Besides their law class, he would have like to have seen it in their technology class. Dr. Cruz felt that he would have been more prepared if the professors had incorporated the components of special education throughout their course work without overwhelming them with a lot of additional course load.

Funding is an ongoing topic of discussion amongst school districts everywhere. School board are elected by the people to represent them in this ever-demanding role to help understand and vote on funding issues. School districts must cover all the costs of running their respective school site, from salaries, to benefits, to deferred maintenance, to curriculum and instruction. Added on top of all those fees is the cost of paying for special education programs so that the students who have been identified with a disability and are on an IEP can get their needs met to make educational gains. It would certainly be a topic worth researching to figure out a better funding formula that would truly benefit the 12.5% of students that are identified as special education students in the state of California.

According to all seven participants of this study, mental health issues are on the rise in their respective school sites, so another possible area of research would be to investigate how exactly mental health services are being dispensed at the school sites. It has already been established that funding is and has always been an issue for school districts and school site. It would be interesting to find out why, after 25 years, did the mental health services that were provided through County Mental Health (CMH) get transferred back to the local school districts. It would be worth looking to see if this trend from the CMH back to the Local Education Agency (LEA) is working for the thousands of students who receive services annually on an IEP.

Another area of possible research would be the hundreds of special education laws that are written to help this population. How effective are they truly at educating these students? It is worth revisiting this topic from chapter two: Special education has many laws that need to be adhered to, most importantly IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). With the reauthorization of that law in 2004, it may have intended to protect the rights of individuals with

disabilities but in fact may have very well have limited school leaders' abilities to provide the highest possible quality of education (Harper, 2012; Torres & Barber, 2017).

Most IEP's are a convoluted mess, full of statements and check boxes that ensure that all of the federal regulations and any additional state regulations have been considered. These documents are typically designed to reflect compliance rather than a truly individualized program for the students with a disability. Many teachers say that IEP documents are not meaningful and tend to all look alike. Parents may say that the document is not user-friendly and is difficult to read and comprehend (Torres & Barber, 2017, p. 131).

As a special education teacher who has written hundreds of IEP's, I echo the sentiments of these authors who have asked the question how meaningful are these documents? Over the years, I can attest to the fact that I have been the recipient of several IEP documents that I had to question the validity of goals written for certain students. The student would struggle to achieve these goals within a one-year time frame and would likely need more than a year to accomplish. Unfortunately, in California, Resource Specialists can have up to 28 students placed on their caseloads. Often, school district will violate that law and place many more students than that on a teacher's caseload. I have heard of numbers as high as 40 and 50 special education students placed on a single special education teacher's caseload. No wonder they just start checking boxes and writing meaningless goals. It would certainly be worth researching a better alternative to the current system that would actually help this population. In California, an RSP (Resource Specialist Program) teacher can have a maximum of 28 students while an SDC (Special Day Class) teacher does not have a maximum number. Just to be clear, RSP students are in general education classes over 50% of their day, whereas SDC students are in general education classes less than 50% of their day. I think it would be worth looking into reducing the number of students on a single RSP teacher's case load, while actually invoking a maximum number for SDC teachers.

Table 5
Recommendations for Possible Future Research

<p>Conduct interviews with special education district office staff to see how they perceive their role in helping principals and their special education teachers. How do they suggest streamlining the process so help comes at a faster rate?</p>
<p>Research universities and what classes they require their candidates to take pertaining to special education. Most participants could not remember taking any separate special education classes during their credentialing program. They only remembered the ½ course that dealt with special education law.</p>
<p>Look at the ways that special education gets funded from the state. Some disabilities are more expensive to fund than others. Look at the percentage of funding from the federal government. Congress promised to fund 40% of the cost but to date has not even funded 20% to any school district.</p>
<p>Look at the way mental health is funded for students on IEP's. The county was responsible for providing mental health care services, but after 25 years, the county shifted the responsibility back to school districts to provide mental health care services to these students. It be worth seeing if the transfer of mental health care from CMH to LEA's is working for the thousands of students receiving services through an IEP.</p>
<p>It would be beneficial to look at the heavy caseload numbers that plague special education teachers. Currently, the caseload maximum in California is 28 for RSP teachers and there is no maximum when it comes to SDC teachers. There needs to be recommendation that there is a reduction in caseload numbers for RSP teachers and that there is actually a maximum number set for SDC teachers.</p>

Answers to Research Questions

In looking at the overarching research question: In what ways do principals provide support for their special education teachers? I believe that Chapter 4 gives a lot of good detail in how each of these seven participants provide supports for the special education teachers. Several themes emerged from this study that helped to solidly answer that question about how these administrators help support their special education teachers on their respective school sites and school districts. The repeated themes that seemed to come up within multiple interviews with the participants were in these areas; communication, mental health issues, lack of support/the delay in receiving help, culture between special education and general education teachers, support for special education programs and teachers, curriculum, funding and on the job training. Each administrator admitted the importance of communicating with their staff. They also acknowledged that mental health is an on-going issue that they must address with parents, County Mental Health and the district office special education staff. These administrators recognize that at times they must be the liaison between these two entities as special education teachers may not hold as rigorous standards as the general education teachers. When help comes slowly then they recognize that their teachers may need supports at the site level. These principals stated that at times it is just listening to their concerns or spreading assistants around to help fill in the gaps. Not surprisingly, the top two administrators in this study who could get help faster from their district office special education team was Mr. Foster and Mrs. Parker who when you combine their years of teaching experience plus their administrative years of service have served 30 and 23 years respectively. Mr. Foster acknowledged that through his years of leadership he has gotten to know the special education district staff and have them on speed dial. Mrs. Parker was once a special education administrator for her district, so she too acknowledged

that between her time at the district office and her years of being a special education teacher has taught her how to advocate better for the special education teachers on her school site.

In looking at the sub question #1: In what ways do principals put value on the special education team? I think it is clear by their responses that all these principals place value on the special education team by directly using them as a resource for the general education teachers in the area of assessments and instruction. Many of these principals also use them on their BPIS teams since special education teachers usually have a wealth of experience and knowledge about how to deal with students and their negative behaviors.

In looking at sub question # 2: In what ways do principals comply with special education laws and practices? These principals again were knowledgeable to know that IEP's were mandatory meetings that they or their vice principal needed to attend. They each also recognized the fact that special education students had to obey all school rules just like their general education peers and if they broke a school rule that was punishable by suspension then they too could be suspended as a consequence of their behavior. With that said, each administrator knew that a special education student could not be suspended if the behavior was a manifestation of their disability. They each acknowledged that their respective school districts ran trainings for principals regarding compliance. As a matter of fact, some of them either said or suggested that they were "compliance to death" when it came to special education law.

Implication of Findings

Social Change Implications

The implications of this study are for an awareness regarding the special education teacher and their job and how it relates to educating the diverse population of special education students. Special education students already have a difficult life, without making it harder for

them to not have access to highly trained and qualified teachers. Throughout this study, it has been recognized that if these students have access to good teaching strategies then many of them will one day be contributing members of society (Capper & Frattata, 2009; Torres & Baber, 2017). Parents too need to feel supported by the schools who they entrust their students to daily. Generally, the happier parents are the less time they spend seeking out attorneys and litigation to what they perceive as a poor IEP for their child (Lentz, 2013).

Principal Implications

There is a hope that for principals that they understand the significance of their role and what it means to a special education teacher. According to Crowley (2011), many people are happiest when their work is being recognized and acknowledged. Principals must maintain an attitude that their special education teacher is valued and appreciate and that will go a long way to retaining them in that difficult position (Bateman & Bateman, 2001). Principals need to be aware of their role at the IEP meeting. Many administrators just make a cursory showing at the IEP meeting without much thought of why they are there. School site administrators, special education teachers and general education teachers should all be there in support of the student whose meeting is being conducted.

District Implications

It would be prudent, for school districts to look at how they support site principals in their already difficult role of trying to run a whole school and all the nuances that come with that job. If they are not supporting their principals, then it makes it hard for the site principals to support their special education staff. As the seven participants of this study acknowledged that they themselves felt unsupported by district administrators when it came to some of their more

complex special education cases. As Mrs. Parker realized, this can fester at the school site and spread amongst the whole staff and produce a negative school culture.

University Implications

It would be helpful for universities to look at their administrative programs and see how they can help support an administrative recruit who is seeking to become a site principal. They would need to include classes that would not only include special education law, but also look at areas of teaching strategies for this population. Another area of concern that came up for the participants of this study was curriculum or lack of it. It would be helpful for administrators to not only learn some teaching strategies but also expose them to different types of curriculum for this population. The IEP process really needs to be covered, in terms of how to write one and what it all entails. Many administrators who work at school sites as well as district offices do not realize the amount of time and effort that goes into writing these documents. Unless they were once a special education teacher, it has been my experience that they have no clue how long we spend preparing, testing and writing the IEP document.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of seven elementary school principals who were responsible for educating not only the general education students on their respective campuses but the several classes of special education students as well. It was interesting to hear them describe the difficulty that they too faced when trying to help not only the special education students on their sites but the staff that works with them too. Except for Mrs. Parker, the other participants of this study expressed a concern and a desire to have more classes to increase their knowledge in special education.

Something that I found fascinating was that every one of these principals required every teacher on their campuses to be on at least one committee. They each felt that the teachers serving on these committees gained the much needed “buy-in” from the teachers to gain a more positive school climate and culture. According to Tobin (2014), principals spend 70-80% of their time in some form of interpersonal communication, most of its direct face to face or by telephone, followed by a heavy load of email correspondence that they need to keep up with. Every administrator interviewed for this study echoed the fact that they felt that communication was “key” to running an effective and efficient school.

After conducting this hermeneutical phenomenological study and learning about the experiences of site administrators and their perceptions of how they help their special education teachers and staff, I now have a better understanding of their role. Site administrators are left at the mercy of the district office special education team. This is the team that does not have “direct” contact with students, so they do not have to deal with the daily frustration that teachers and principals must deal with every single day. According to the seven participants of this study, they felt that it took a long time to get help from district office personnel. The site principal along with the teacher also feels the frustration of having to weather the storms while the data is being collected regarding special education students and their unique needs. Besides the unhappy teachers that they must face on their campuses, they must also face and deal with the unhappy parents who come in to complain about the adverse behaviors of other students who are directly impacting their own child in a negative way. Through the interview process it was recognized that the administrators of this study had a special education population anywhere from 10.8 percent to 13.8 percent. Special education tends to take a lot of a principal’s time;

however, they still have the general education population of students who can also have unique needs that they need to make time for as well.

Special education students are a unique group of individuals that require an understanding and a compassion beyond the general education setting. I leave the reader with the hauntingly beautiful words of one of my participants Mr. Foster:

Those kids are special to me because I just realize how hard of a life they may have had, they may be in wheelchairs, unable to see or talk or hear or walk whatever it is, I think, as a school administrator you have to have some empathy there.

REFERENCES

- Alvior, M. G. (2014). *The meaning and importance of curriculum development*.
SimplyEducate.Me. <https://simplyeducate.me/2014/12/13/the-meaning-and-importance-of-curriculum>
- Angelle, P., & Bilton, L. M. (2009). Confronting the unknown: Principal preparation training in issues related to special education. *AASA journal of Scholarship & Practice*, 5(4), 5-9.
- Antosh, A. A., & Imparato, A. (2014). *The meaning of Brown for children with Disabilities*. American Constitution Society for Law and Policy. <https://acslaw.org>
- Avramidis, E., & Norwich, B. (2002). Teachers attitudes towards integration/inclusion: A review of the literature. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 27, 57-76.
- Balt, S. D. (2000). Preparing principals for leadership in special education. [doctoral dissertation]. University of California.
- Bambrick-Santoyo, P. (2012). *Leverage leadership*. Josey-Bass.
- Bass, B. M. (1990). From transactional to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision. *Organizational Dynamics*, 18(3), 19-31.
- Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). *Transformational leadership*.
Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Bateman, D., & Bateman, F. (2001). *A principal's guide to special education*. Council for Exceptional Children.
- Bates. S. D. (2000). *Preparing principals for leadership in special education*.
[Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of California, Riverside.

- Benedict, A. E., Brownell, M. T., Yujeong, P., Bettini, E. A., & Lauterbach, A. A. (2014). Taking charge of your professional learning: Tips for cultivating special educator expertise. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 46*(6), 147-157.
<https://doi:10.1177/0040059914534618>
- Bernard, H. R., & Ryan, W. R. (2010). *Analyzing qualitative data systematic Approaches*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Billingsley, B. (2004). Special Education Teacher Retention and Attrition: A Critical Analysis of the Research Literature. *Journal Of Special Education, 38*(1), 39-55.
- Billingsley, B. S. (2007). A case study of special education teacher attrition in an urban district. *Journal Of Special Education Leadership, 20*(1), 11-20.
- Billingsley, B. S., & Cross, L. H. (1991). Teachers' decisions to transfer from special to general education. *Journal of Special Education, 24*(4), 496.
- Billingsley, B., Israel, M., & Smith, S. (2011). Supporting new special education teachers. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 43*(5), 20-29.
- Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley, 458 U. S. 176 (1982). <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/458/176/>
- Boscardin, M. L., McCarthy, E., & Delgado, R. (2009). An integrated research-based approach to creating standards for special education leadership. *Journal of Special Education Leadership, 22*(2), 68-84.
- Boscardin, M. L., Mainzer, R., & Kealy, M. V. (2011). Commentary: A response to "preparing special education administrators for inclusion in diverse, standards-based contexts," by Deborah L. Voltz and Lourecia Collins (2010). *Teacher Education & Special Education, 34*(1), 71-78. <https://doi:10.1177/0888406410393362>

- Bowser, A., Hux, A., McBride, J., Nichols, C., & Nichols, J. (2014). The roles of site-based mentors in educational leadership programs. *College Student Journal*, 48(3), 468-472.
- Brown vs. Board of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).
<https://www.oyez.org/cases/1940-1955/347us483>
- Brown, J. (2019). What really causes special education teachers to burn out? *Education Week*, 38(25), 18-19. <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2019/03/13>
- Brownell, M. T., Hirsch, E., & Seo, S. (2004). Meeting the demand for highly qualified special education teachers during severe shortages: What should policymakers consider? *The Journal Of Special Education*, 38(1), 56-61.
- Brownell, M. T., Lauterbach, A. A., Dingle, M. P. , Boardman, A. G., Urbach, J. E., Leko, M., & Park, Y. (2013). Individual and contextual factors influencing special education teacher learning in Literacy Learning Cohorts. *Learning Disabilities Quarterly*. Advance online publication. <https://doi:10.1177/0731948713487179>
- Burns, W. M. (1978). *Leadership*. Harper & Row, Publishers.
- Butrymowicz, S., & Mader, J. (2017). *Low academic expectations and poor support for special education students are 'hurting their future'*. The Hechinger Report. <https://hechingerreport.org/low-academic-expectations-poor-support-special-education>
- Caldwell, B. J. (2007). Special education: Educational leadership and school renewal. *Australian Journal of Education (ACER Press)*, 51(3), 225-227.

- Cameron, D. L. (2016). Too much or not enough? An examination of special education provision and school district leaders' perceptions of current needs and common approaches. *British Journal of Special Education*, 43(1), 22-38. <https://doi:10.1111/1467-8578.12121>
- California Department of Education. (2018). Children and youth with disabilities. IEC>NCES. <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html#bcc>;
- California State Auditor. (2016). *Student mental health services: Some student's services were affected by a new state law, and the State needs to analyze student outcomes and trace service costs* (Report No 2015-112). <https://www.bsa.ca.gov/reports/2015-112/index.html>.
- Capper, C.A., & Frattura, E.M. (2009). *Meeting the Needs of Students of All Abilities: How Leaders Go Beyond Inclusion* (2nd ed.) Corwin Press.
- Center for Disease Control. (2019). Data and statistics of children's mental health. <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/data.html>
- Changing Minds (2017). http://changingminds.org/disciplines/leadership/styles/transformational_leadership.htm
- Cheatham, G. A., Hart, J. E., Malian, I., & McDonald, J. (2012). Six things to never say or hear during an IEP meeting. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 44(3), 50-57.
- Crockett, J.B. (2007). The changing landscape of special education administration. *Exceptionality*, 15 (3), 139-142. <https://doi:10.1080/09362830701503487>
- Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.) Sage Publication Inc.

- Crockett, J. B., Becker, M. K., & Quinn, D. (2009). Reviewing the knowledge base of special education leadership and administration from 1970-2009. *Journal of Special Education Leadership, 22*(2), 55-67.
- Crowley, M. C. (2011). *Lead from the heart: Transformational leadership for the 21st century*. Balboa Press.
- Cruzeiro, P. A., & Morgan, R. L. (2006). The rural principal's role with consideration for special education. *Education, 126*(3), 569-579.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). *The flat world and education: How America's commitment to equity will determine our future*. Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Sclan, E. M. (1996). Who teaches and why: Dilemmas of building a profession for twenty-first century schools. *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education, 2*, 67-101.
- Denmark, V. (2012). *Transformational leadership- a matter of perspective*, Transforming Schools. <http://www.advanc-ed.org/source/transformational-leadership-matter-perspective>
- DiPaola, M., Tschannen-Moran, M., & Walther-Thomas, C. (2004). School principals and special education: Creating the context for academic success. *Focus on Exceptional Children, 37*(1), 1-10.
- DiPaola, M., Walther-Thomas, C. (2003). Principals and special education: The critical role of school leaders (COPPSE Document No. IB-7). University of Florida. <https://www.copsse.org>

- Edmonds-Cady, C., & Hock, R. (2008). Children in crisis: Special education status and other stressors in the lives of children removed from school by expulsion. *School Social Work Journal, 32*, 72-86.
- Edwards, M. S. (2007). *Special education administrators and child study team members: An exploration of the relationship leading to state compliance*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Fordham University.
- Einhorn, E., (2018). *Detroit school' outdated curriculum sets students up to fail, audit Finds*. <https://www.bridgemi.com/detroit-journalism-cooperative/detroit-schools-outdate>.
- Elkind, D. (1998). Children with special needs: A postmodern perspective. *Journal Of Education, 180*(2), 1-16.
- Frost, L. A., & Kersten, T. (2011). The role of the elementary principal in the instructional leadership of special education. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 6*(2), 1-21.
- Fullman, M. (2014). *The principal three keys to maximizing impact*. Josey-Bass.
- Gadamer, H. G. (1976). *Philosophical hermeneutics* (D. E. Linge, Ed. & Trans.). University of California Press.
- Garfinkle, J. (2015). Building positive relationships at work. *Executive Coaching*. <https://garfinkleexecutivecoaching.com/articles/build-positive-work-relationships/>
- George, M. W., Zaheer, I., Kern, L., & Evans, S. W. (2018). Mental health services use among adolescents experiencing emotional/behavioral problems and school impairment. *Journal of Emotional & Behavioral Disorders, 26* (2), 118-128.

- Green, J. G., Comer, J. S., Donaldson, A. R., Elkins, R. M., Nadeau, M. S., Reid, G. & Pincus, D. B. (2017). School functioning and use of school-based accommodations by treatment-seeking anxious children. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 25(4), 220-232. <https://doi:10.1177/1063426616664328>
- Guba, E.G., & California Univ., Los Angeles, Center for the Study of Evaluation (1978). Toward a methodology of naturalistic inquiry in educational evaluation. *CSE Monograph Series in Evaluation*, 8 Report
- Harper, A. (2018). *Special ed teacher retention requires unique supports*. Education Dive. <https://www.educationdive.com/news/special-ed-teacher-retention-requires-unique-supports>
- Harper, J. (2012). In the smelter: Leading special education in an era of systems redesign--A commentary. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 25(1), 48-52.
- Hess, F. M., & Kelly, A. P. (2007). Learning to lead: What gets taught in principal-preparation programs. *Teachers College Record*, 109(1), 244-274.
- Hill, L., Warren, P., Murphy, P., Ugo, I., & Pathak, A. (2016). *Special education finance in California*. Public Policy Institute of California. https://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_1116LHR.pdf.
- Hogg, B. (2016), *7 must have transformational leadership qualities*. Bill Hogg & Associates. <http://www.billhogg.ca>
- Institute of Education Sciences> *National Center for Education Statistics (IES>NCES*, 2017), Children and youth with disabilities. <https://nces.ed.gov>
- Katsiyannis, A., Zhang, D., & Conroy, M. A. (2003). Availability of special education teachers: Trends and issues. *Remedial And Special Education*, 24(4), 246-253.

- Kellis, D. S., & Ran, B. (2013). Modern leadership principles for public administration: time to move forward. *Journal Of Public Affairs (14723891)*, 13(1), 130-141.
<https://doi:10.1002/pa.1453>
- Kena, G., Hussar, W., McFarland, J., de Brey, C., Musu-Gillette, L., Wang, X., & Dunlop, Velez, E. (2016). *The condition of education 2016* (NCES 2016-144). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
<https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016144.pdf>
- Lasky, B., Karge, B. D. (2006). Meeting the needs of students with disabilities: Experience and confidence of principals. *National Association of Secondary School Principals*, 90(1), 19-36.
- Law and Guidance, (2007) *Special education and rehabilitation services archived: A 25 year history of IDEA*. Law and Guidance.
<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/spced/leg/idea/history.html>
- Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2005). A review of transformational school leadership research 1996-2005. *Leadership & Policy in Schools*, 4(3), 177-199. <https://doi:10.1080/1570076500244769>
- Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Whalstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning*. Wallace Foundation.
- Lentz, K. (2012). *Transformational leadership in special education: Leading the IEP team*. Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. E. (1986). Research, Evaluation, and Policy Analysis: Heuristics for disciplined inquiry. *Policy Studies Review*, 5(3), 546-565.

- Lynch, J. M. (2012). Responsibilities of today's principal: Implications for principal preparation programs and principal certification policies. *Rural Special Education Quarterly* 31 (2), 40-47.
- McCann, C., & New America, F. (2014). Federal Funding for Students with Disabilities: The Evolution of Federal Special Education Finance in the United States. New America Education Policy Brief. *New America Foundation*.
- McHatten, P. A., Boyer, N. R., Shaunessy, E., Terry P., & Farmer, J. L. (2010). Principal perceptions of preparation and practices in gifted and special education content: Are we doing enough? *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 5(1), 1-22.
- McHatton, P. A., Glenn, T. L., Sue, & Gordon, K. D. (2012). Troubling special education leadership: Finding purpose, potential, and possibility in challenging contexts. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 25(1), 38-47.
- Marks, H. M., & Printy, S. M. (2003). Principal leadership and school performance: An integration of transformational and instructional leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39(3), 370-397.
- Martin, S. M., Little, J., Miller, K., & Gourwitz, J. (2014). Preparing urban special education leaders: What works. *Journal Of Special Education Leadership*, 27(1), 26-34.
- Mason-Williams, L. (2015). Unequal opportunities: A profile of the distribution of special education teachers. *Exceptional Children*, 81(2), 247-262.
[https://doi:10.1177/0014402914551737](https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402914551737)
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative Research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publication, Inc.
- Mayer, R. E. (2009). *Multimedia learning* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia, 348 F. Supp. 866 (D.D.C. 1972).
<http://usedulaw.com/438-mills-v-board-of-education-of-the-district-of-columbia.html>
- Mills, B. D. (1974). *A survey of the elementary school principalship in West Virginia*
 [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. West Virginia University.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- National School Climate Center. (2007). *What is school culture?* National School Climate Center. <https://www.schoolclimate.org/about/our-approach/what-is-school-climate>.
- Office for Civil Rights U.S. Department of Education (2008). *Free appropriate public education for students with disabilities: Requirements under Section 504 of the "Rehabilitation Act of 1973." Revised*. US Department Of Education.
<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-110s3406enr/pdf/BILLS-110s3406enr.pdf>
- Opuda, M. J. (1995). Cost As a Factor in Determining an Appropriate Special Education Program or Placement: Paper presented at the Annual International Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children. 1-14.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Sage Publication Inc.
- Pazey, B. L., & Cole, H. A. (2012). The role of special education training in the development of socially just leaders: Building an equity consciousness in educational leadership programs. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 49(2), 243-271.
- Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (No. 71-42 (E.D. Pa)). <http://clearinghouse.net/detail.php?id=11082>

- Powell, P. R. (2009). An exploratory study of the presentation of special education law in administrative preparation programs for aspiring administrators [doctoral dissertation]. University of Alabama.
- Prather-Jones, B. (2011). How school administrators influence the retention of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Clearing House*, 84(1), 1-8.
<https://doi:10.1080/00098655.2010.489387>
- Prince, D., & Howard, E. (2002). Children and their basic needs. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 30, 27-31. [https://doi: 10.1023/A:1016589814683](https://doi:10.1023/A:1016589814683)
- Riley, D. P. (2008). A special education lawsuit: Catalyst for positive systemic change. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 21(2). 94-95.
- Saldana, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed). Sage Publication Ltd.
- Samuels, C. A. (2018). The important role principals play in special education. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweekorg/ed/articles/2018/10/17/the-important-role-principals-play>.
- Sasso, G. M. (2001). The retreat from inquiry and knowledge in special education. *Journal Of Special Education*, 34(4), 178.
- Shafer, L. (2018). What makes a good school culture? Usuable knowledge: Relevant research for today's educators. *Harvard Graduate School of Education*.
<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/09/building-strong-school-culture>
- Simpson, R. L., LaCava, P. G., Simpson-Graner, P. (2004). The no child left behind act: Challenges and implications for educators. *Intervention In School And Clinic*, 40(2), 67-75.

- Sindelar, P. T., Brownell, M. T., & Billingsley, B. (2010). Special education teacher education research: Current status and future directions. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 33*(1), 8-24.
- Skrla, L., McKenzie, K. B., & Scheurich, J. J. (2009). *Using equity audits to create equitable and excellent schools*. Corwin, A SAGE Company.
- Slattery, P. (2012). *Curriculum development in the postmodern era: Teaching and learning in an age of accountability* (3rd ed.). United States of America: Edwards Brothers, Inc.
- Smith, D. D., Robb, S. M., West, J., & Tyler, N. C. (2010). The changing education landscape: How special education leadership preparation can make a difference for teachers and their students with disabilities. *Teacher Education & Special Education, 33*(1), 25-43. <https://doi:10.1177/0888406409358425>
- Sumbera, M. J., Pazey, B. L., & Lashley, C. (2014). How building principals made sense of free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. *Leadership and Policy In Schools, 13*(3), 297-333.
- Sweigart, C. A., & Collins, L. W. (2017). Supporting the needs of beginning special education teachers and their students. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 49*(4), 209-212. <https://doi:10.1177/0040059917695264>
- The Council for Exceptional Children's Position on Special Education Teacher Evaluation. (2013). *Teaching Exceptional Children, 45*(3), 73-76.
- Thompson, A. L. (2011). Case in point: Illuminations for the future of special education leadership. *Journal of Special Education Leadership, 24*(2), 111-113.

- Thornton, B., Peltier, G., & Medina, R. (2007). Reducing the special education teacher shortage. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies*, 80(5), 233-238.
- Tobin, J. (2014). Management and leadership issues for school building leaders. *NCPEA International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 9, 1-14.
- Torres, T., & Barber, C. (2017). *Case studies in special education: A social justice perspective*. Charles C. Thomas Publisher, Ltd.
- Topping, K., & Maloney, S. (2005). *The Routledge Falmer reader in inclusive education*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis.
- Tudryn, P., Boscardin, M. L., & Wells, C. (2016). Distributed leadership through the lenses of special education leaders. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 29(1), 3-22.
- Tyler, D. E. (2016). Communication behaviors of principals at high performing title I elementary schools in Virginia: School leaders, communication, and transformative efforts. *Creighton Journal of Interdisciplinary Leadership*, 2(2), 2-16.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov>
- Weinberg, L. A., Luelmo, P., Chiappe, J. C., & Thornton, B. (2019). How a change in state law affected the provision of mental health. *International Journal of Special Education*, 33(4), 910-924.
- Weintraub, F. J. (2012). A half century of special education: What we have achieved and the challenges we face. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 45(1), 50-53.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/004005991204500107>
- Willenberg, E. P. (1966). Critical issues in special education: Leadership at the federal level. *Exceptional Children*, 33(4), 277-278.

- Wong, V. W., Ruble, L. A., Yu, Y., & McGrew, J. H. (2017). Too stressed to teach. Teaching quality, student engagement, and IEP outcomes. *Exceptional Children*, 83(4), 412-427. <https://doi:10.1177/0014402917690729>
- Yell, M., Smith, C., Katsiyannis, A., & Losinski, M. (2018). Mental health services, free appropriate public education, and students with disabilities: Legal considerations in identifying, evaluating, and providing services. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*. 20(2), 67-77.
- Zaretsky, L. (2004). Advocacy and administration: From conflict to collaboration. *Journal of Educational Administration*. 42 (2), 270-286.
- Zirkel, P. A. (2014). The law in the special education literature: A brief legal critique. *Behavioral Disorders*, 39(2), 102-107.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW 1 QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) What is your educational background? How many years were you a teacher? What grades have you taught? What subjects have you taught?
- 2) What credentials did you or do you hold?
- 3) Tell me why you chose to pursue a career in administration?
- 4) Tell me about the various training you have received for Special Education and supports for students with exceptional needs?
- 5) In what ways do you support your teachers on campus?
- 6) In what ways do you support your Special Education teachers/programs?
- 7) In what ways are the Special Educaiton teachers included in the school campus culture?
- 8) Tell me about a time when it may have been challenging to serve the needs of students receiving Special Education services?
- 9) What support might you need as an administrator to assist Special Education teachers/programs?
- 10) How do you balance the demands of being a principal in regard to helping all students and staff on your school site?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW 2 QUALITATIVE QUESTIONS

- 1) What do you see as your role in bridging the achievement gap between special education students and general education students?
- 2) Can you please give me an example of how you, as a leader, have involved staff in a decision-making process about a complex issue?
- 3) In what ways do you need to look at the varying practices of discipline for students receiving special education services?
- 4) If you were a superintendent, what would you do to help your principals so they in turn could help their special education teachers and staff at their site?

APPENDIX C: AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of the Study

The Importance of School Site Administrative Support for Special Education Teachers

Responsible Investigator

Shari Lujan

University of the Pacific Doctoral Program

3601 Pacific Avenue, Stockton, CA 95211

Phone: 209-765-3559

Email: s_lujan@u.pacific.edu

The following information is provided for you to decide if you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time. Please ask the researcher listed above if you should need clarification on anything.

Purpose of the Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to examine the importance of administrative support for special education teachers and students. The special education teacher is in a unique situation since they need to remain compliant with both federal and state laws. The researcher hopes to gain insight into the qualities that best support the special education staff that fall under their leadership.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in a face to face, tape-recorded interview in your office or a place of your choosing. You are being asked for your permission to take notes and to record the interview, if you chose not to be recorded then only notes will be taken.

Risks/Benefits

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with the opportunity to participate in a qualitative research study that can in turn help you and other administrators in the pursuit of educating students who have been identified through an Individuals Education Program (IEP) process as qualifying and needing special education services to target their individual special needs.

Confidentiality

Your response to taped interviews will be anonymous. No information that can identify you will be included in the final study.

There is no compensation for your participation in this study.

Your consent is being given voluntarily. You may refuse to participate in this study at any time. Your refusal to participate will not have any negative consequences to you or any relationship that you may have with anyone at the University of the Pacific.

You will receive a copy of this signed consent form, also signed by the investigator. Your signature confirms that you are in agreement with the information and have had an opportunity to have your questions answered.

I have read the information and agree to voluntarily participate in the study. I also understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____