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# Maximizing Special Education Teacher Retention: Teacher's Perceptions of Administrative Support in Pre K-12 Public Schools as Implications for Improvement

Dawn R. Showers

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MAXIMIZING SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER RETENTION: TEACHER'S  
PERCEPTIONS OF ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT IN PRE K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
AS IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Education

By

Dawn R. Showers

December 2007

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Dawn R. Showers

2007

***DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY***  
***SCHOOL OF EDUCATION***  
***INTERDISCIPLINARY DOCTORAL PROGRAM FOR***  
***EDUCATIONAL LEADERS***

***Dissertation***

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)

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ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT/SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER RETENTION

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## ABSTRACT

### MAXIMIZING SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER RETENTION: TEACHER'S PERCEPTIONS OF ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT IN PRE K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOLS AS IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

By

Dawn R. Showers

December 2007

Dissertation Supervised by Dr. Robert B. Bartos

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of special education teachers regarding administrative support provided by their building principals as related to teacher retention, gender, and disability category taught. Research over the course of the past decade indicates that teachers are more likely to leave the teaching profession when they fail to receive an adequate amount of administrative support. A survey questionnaire was used to collect 125 responses from special education teachers working in South Central Pennsylvania public schools. The population sample consisted of teachers from four special education teacher certification categories including classroom and itinerant staff. Building principals were interviewed and responded to questions pertaining to the level of administrative support provided to special education within their buildings. Results of this study indicate no statistically significant relationship exists between perceived levels of administrative support and teacher gender or intent to remain

teaching special education. Statistical significance was demonstrated between perceived administrative support factors and disability category taught.

## DEDICATION

“Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

It is with sincere gratitude and admiration that this dissertation is dedicated to Ronald G. Ebbert, principal, colleague, and friend. Ron Ebbert served the Upper Adams School District community for 35 years, touching the lives of students, families, faculty, and staff. Ron’s enthusiasm, leadership, and words of wisdom have inspired me to be a lifelong learner. Long after my tenure with the district, Ron continued his support throughout my educational and professional endeavors—always encouraging me to be the best leader I can be and reminding me to keep children at the forefront of every decision. It is with Ron’s administrative support that I had the courage to explore new ideas and to take on exciting challenges as an educator.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Purpose of the Study

Research over the past decade indicates that teachers are more likely to leave the teaching profession when they fail to receive an adequate amount of administrative support. According to Boe, Barkanic, and Leow (1999), teachers who remain in their teaching positions are almost four times more likely to feel supported by administrators than those teachers who leave the profession. Across the nation, 9.3% of public school teachers leave the profession before they even complete their first year in the classroom, while over one-fifth leave their position within the first three years (Rosenow, 2005). Eggen (2001) investigated teacher attrition rates in South Carolina public schools and found that 33% of beginning teachers exit within the first five years of their careers. Teachers indicated a lack of support from both district and building administrators. Current research on teacher attrition shows that 30 to 50 percent of teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Brunetti, 2001; Stanford, 2001).

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of special education teachers regarding administrative support of building principals as related to the retention of special education teachers. In some cases, building principals may be responsible for both summative and formative evaluations of all instructional staff within the building-- often observing special education teachers during an instructional lesson and providing feedback for instructional practice; however, principals do not necessarily acquire experience in special education instructional strategies or techniques they may observe in the special education setting as part of their administrative preparation or certification. In

some districts and intermediate units in Pennsylvania, special education teacher supervision is formally conducted by central office personnel such as assistant superintendents, pupil personnel directors, and directors of special education services. Building principals may not be directly responsible for the special education teachers' supervision, and yet are often the administrators on site and are readily asked to attend parent meetings regarding a child's individualized education plan, follow up on curriculum decisions, arrange for inclusion opportunities, and maintain day-to-day interactions with building staff. The level of supervision and administrative support in special education varies as some teachers have direct supervision and support by on-site building administrators while others are guided by off-site, central office personnel with variable contact. Acquiring feedback from practicing special education teachers regarding the level of administrative support that influences the intent to exit or to remain in the field can help to identify areas needing reform in administrative leadership practice as well as preparation of future principals. With varying models of administrative supervision, a study of administrative support may lead to key focus areas for practicing administrators and how best to concentrate efforts with their staff.

The need for special education teachers is expected to increase faster than the average for all occupations through 2014 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006). The need for special education teachers is a result of increases in the number of special education students needing services, changes in legislation emphasizing training and employment for individuals with disabilities, and by federal and state educational reforms requiring higher standards for graduation. Additionally, a large number of openings will result from

the need to replace special education teachers who leave special education to teach general education students, exit the profession for other careers, and retirement.

Also, contributing to the need for special education teachers is the growing number of diverse student learners. Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, (2002) found this to be the case in schools that are in the southeast, large, urban, or have high minority enrollment and poverty concentrations. Special education was identified as a shortage area across all states. Ninety-eight percent of school districts nationally reported shortages of qualified special education teachers (Bergert & Burnette, 2001). Henderson, Klein, Gonzalez, and Bradley (2005) reported that between 1992-1993 and 1998-1999 the number of children with disabilities nationally grew from 5.08 million to 6.11 million, an increase of 20.3%. Special education and behavioral disorders are cited as the teaching areas with the highest demand in the United States.

Special education is a discipline that has been hit hard by a shortage of trained teachers. The teacher shortage for children with special needs is likely to rise due to increasing enrollments of students with disabilities and retiring teachers . Feistritzer (2004) found that of the graduates from traditional teacher preparation programs, 30-40% of these graduates do not enter the teaching field and approximately one-third leave within the first five years (Feistritzer, 2004). When socio-economic factors are investigated, special education teachers are 2.5 times more likely to change positions or leave teaching than are general educators, especially when they work in high-poverty schools (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2006), there has been an increased demand for special education teachers over the course of 20 years, rising from

332,000 employed in 1990 to 453,000 employed in 2000, and an estimated need by 2010 of 611,550. The number of special education teachers is more plentiful in urban and inner city locations versus rural areas. There is an anticipated increase for teachers who work with multiple disabilities or severe disabilities including autism. This is due to an increase in the enrollment of students in these disability categories.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation requires a highly qualified teacher in every classroom by the close of the 2005-2006 school year (Buckley, Schneider, & Shang, 2005). Schools already facing teacher shortages in special education now have to not only recruit and retain from a limited supply of certified special education teachers, but also must ensure the teachers they do employ are meeting federal accountability standards of high quality. Special education teachers are faced with increased requirements to maintain their teaching certificates, increased accountability, and an increase in accountability for student progress (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006). NCLB requires all children, including students with disabilities, perform at “proficient” levels on state-wide achievement tests. Currently, schools are struggling to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) because special education students have difficulty meeting state standards (Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007).

The number of students requiring special education services has grown steadily in recent years, a trend that is expected to continue. Children with disabilities will continue to be identified and diagnosed at earlier ages while medical advancement has resulted in more children surviving serious accidents or illnesses, but with impairments that require special accommodations and specially designed instruction. Chronic shortages of fully

certified special education teachers hinder the efforts of schools to deliver appropriate educational services to these students with disabilities.

According to Inman and Marlow (2004), the greatest loss in the teaching force occurs when teachers have less than ten years experience. Teachers younger than twenty-five are much more likely to leave when employed in private schools, as compared to those in public school (Baker & Smith, 1997). This large exodus of the teaching force not only creates hardships on school systems, but the constant turnover of the professional staff also impacts student learning (Voke, 2002). Teacher attrition is costly for both students and educational agencies. Students lose the value of having experienced educators in the classroom. Educational agencies pay the costs associated with recruitment efforts, hiring, and interviewing. The Department of Labor conservatively estimates that attrition costs an employer thirty percent of the leaving employee's salary. Using national data from the National Center for Education Statistics, the Alliance for Excellent Education estimates that each teacher leaving a school costs the district \$12,546 (2005). Jarvis (2002) reported that teaching is seen as hard, poorly paid, and held in low public esteem. The reputation of being a highly stressful occupation has a detrimental effect on recruitment and retention.

Schools continue to face problems in attracting and retaining special education teachers. Estimates from a decade ago indicated that ten percent of the special education workforce was not licensed, and those figures are now rising (Mastropieri, 2001). The United States Department of Education (2003) reported that during the 2000-2001 school year, 47,532 individuals filling special education positions lacked appropriate special education certification.

In the 2002 American Association for Employment in Education (AAEE) reports the strongest factors contributing to a decreased supply of educators include: school violence, working conditions, and salaries. As the demand for educators remains high, it is most likely that persons will be hired who are either uncertified or teaching in areas outside their area of certification. The AAEE indicates:

“A considerable shortage exists for fully certified special education teachers due to identification of an increasing number of students as having special needs, the demand from parents, and the desire of the schools to meet those learning needs” (AAEE, 2002, p.8).

Considerable shortages in special education disability category areas include: emotional/behavior disorders, learning disability, mental retardation, mild/moderate disabilities, and severe/profound disabilities (AAEE, 2002). Critical shortages (AAEE, 2005) include specialized teacher certification areas for the visually impaired and hearing impaired. As both state and federal policy makers increase the demands on certification requirements, the problem worsens and classrooms for special education students continue to operate without properly certified teachers. “The continually changing certifications/licensures for teaching students with special needs exacerbate the shortages and challenge the teacher training institution’s ability to redesign and implement certification/licensure programs to meet those needs. (AAEE, 2002, p. 8).

#### Statement of the Problem

Is there a relationship between special education teachers’ perceived levels of administrative support and teacher retention, gender and disability category taught?

*Independent Variable.* Determined level of administrative support

*Dependent Variable.* Retention in special education field, gender, and disability category

H<sub>1</sub>: There will be a statistically significant relationship between perceived levels of administrative support and teacher intent to remain in the field.

H<sub>01</sub>: There will be no statistically significant relationship between perceived levels of administrative support and teacher intent to remain in the field.

H<sub>2</sub>: There will be a statistically significant difference between perceived levels of administrative support and disability support category taught.

H<sub>02</sub>: There will be no statistically significant difference between perceived levels of administrative support and disability support category taught.

H<sub>3</sub>: There will be a statistically significant difference between perceived levels of administrative support and teacher gender.

H<sub>03</sub>: There will be no statistically significant difference between perceived levels of administrative support and teacher gender.

#### Significance of the Problem

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2006) indicates an additional 200,000 teachers will be needed with the next ten years. The shortage of special education teachers is greater than teacher shortages in any other area, including mathematics and science. Compounding this problem is an inadequate focus of teacher preparation programs, quick alternative routes to certification with limited skills training, and limited university preparation programs in rural areas. When traditional routes to teacher preparation are causing schools to hire many novice teachers, determining how to retain quality teachers will be of extreme importance. Administrators must consider how best to fulfill the

needs of support for special education teachers so as to influence the teachers' commitment to stay.

A national survey of over 1000 special educators conducted by the Council for Exceptional Children in 1998 concluded, "Poor teacher working conditions have contributed to the high rate of special educators leaving the field, teacher burnout, and substandard quality of education for students with special needs" (CEC Launches Initiative on Special Education Teaching Conditions, 1998). Studies exist that examine how teachers view their work with colleagues, how collaboration is vital to school improvement, and how principals are essential for the success of school reform. Few studies examine teacher retention as an outcome of these perceptions.

Researchers have found that leadership often determines whether teachers are satisfied with their work and workplace. The specific focus of this study encompassed the role of the building principal in providing support to special education teachers working in their respective buildings. The role of the principal as related to special education programs is varied. The principal's role may include: coordination and support of special education programs and services, program planning and direction, staff and student support, implementation of special education regulations, allocation of resources, communication with parents and family, curriculum development and student achievement. Special education directors responded to a statewide survey of Virginia's public schools and reported that 52% of building principals held sole responsibility for supervising and evaluating special education teachers (Bays, 2001). Additionally, 40% of principals shared this responsibility with assistant principals, special education directors, or a combination of district-level supervisors (Bays, 2001). Crockett (2002)

found that most school administrators know more about legally correct programming for students with disabilities than the specialized instruction. The role of the building principal may not always involve direct and formal supervision of the special education program delivery of services. Special education teacher shortages in rural states are especially prevalent (Menlove, Garnes, & Salzberg, 2003). School districts and intermediate units in Pennsylvania must investigate possible means to attract and retain certified special education teachers. In order to choose and remain in special education, it appears that it is not merely enough for the teacher to have a love for teaching and working with students and the desire to work with students who have special needs.

This study focused on the perceived levels of administrative support of special education teachers and the relationship between administrative support and a special education teacher's decision to remain in special education. Earlier studies have indicated the lack of administrative support being identified as a factor contributing to teacher decisions to leave. Survey data collection comprised perceptions of administrative support received for special education teachers working in public school districts in South Central Pennsylvania. The level of administrative involvement will vary according to district operated special education classrooms and those operated by the local intermediate unit.

The level of supervision and administrative support in special education varies as some teachers have direct supervision and support by on-site building administrators while others are guided by off-site, central office personnel with variable contact. With varying models of administrative supervision, a study of administrative support may lead to indicators of key focus areas for practicing administrators and how best to concentrate

efforts with their staff to influence teachers' decisions to stay. Teacher attrition is a costly matter for school districts. The exit of teachers from the profession and the movement of teachers to better schools are costly phenomena, both for the students, who lose the value of being taught by an experienced teacher, and to the schools and districts, which must recruit and train their replacements. A conservative national estimate of the cost of replacing public school teachers who have dropped out of the profession is \$2.2 billion a year (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005). If the cost of replacing public school teachers who transfer schools is added, the total reaches \$4.9 billion every year. For individual states, cost estimates range from \$8.5 million in North Dakota to a half a billion dollars for a large state like Texas. Many believe that the price tag is even higher; hiring costs vary by district and sometimes include signing bonuses, subject matter stipends, and other recruiting costs specific to hard-to-staff schools. Others believe that the cost of the loss in teacher quality and student achievement should also be added to the bill (Kelley, 2004). It is important to remain cognizant of the potentially high costs of teacher turnover to districts and schools. The struggle to fill vacancies, the search for new teachers, and the introduction and mentoring of teachers in a new school setting are all administrative activities that bear considerable costs.

Teacher attrition imposes costs not only on the students of novice teachers who replace the outgoing teachers but also on the school as a whole. For example, administrators and perhaps even other teachers must take time to orient and train new teachers, in curriculum, general school operations, and the like. In some instances, principals adjust class sizes or the student composition of classes to provide new teachers with a somewhat easier load. According to a study by the Texas Center for Educational

Research (TCER), teacher turnover in Texas costs the state anywhere from \$329 million to \$2.1 billion per year (Kelley, 2004).

Supporting teachers will reduce teacher turnover and create efficiency in the system but the costs of teacher turnover include more than money. The greatest costs lie in the damage to the quality of education students receive. When teachers leave they take with them experience and expertise that add value to the educational experiences of their students. Novice teachers, no matter how well prepared, still learn a lot in their first few years of teaching. Experience in teaching, as in other professions, adds tremendously to the individual's effectiveness. Students pay an immeasurable price when they lose qualified and experienced teachers. To make matters worse, however, many of the teachers who leave cannot be replaced by properly qualified teachers.

#### Operational Definitions

The following terms are operational for this study:

*Administrative Support.* Refers to a collection of affirming actions by the school administrator that assist teachers in performing their responsibilities and withstanding the stress of their positions (Weiss, 2001).

*Attrition.* Teacher attrition is a component of teacher turnover. Teacher turnover may include teachers exiting the profession, but may also include teachers who change fields (e.g., special education to general education) or schools (Boe, Bobbit and Cook, 1997).

*Intermediate Unit.* Regional education service agencies in Pennsylvania charged with providing programs and services to public, private and non-public schools. Intermediate Units provide curriculum and instructional support, professional development,

technology services and operate educational programs such as special and alternative education on a regional basis (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2006).

*Principal.* Principal K-12 has completed an approved program of graduate study preparing him/her to direct, operate, supervise, and administer the organizational and general educational activities of a school (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2006).

### Terminology Related to Educational Placement

(The Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2007)

*Autistic support.* Services for students with the disability of autism.

*Blind and visually impaired support.* Services for students with the disability of visual impairment, including blindness.

*Deaf and hard of hearing impaired support.* Services for students with the disabilities of deafness or hearing impairment.

*Emotional support.* Services for students with a disability whose primary identified need is emotional support.

*Full-time.* Special education classes provided for the entire school day, with opportunities for participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities to the maximum extent appropriate, which may be located in or outside of a regular school.

*Itinerant.* Regular classroom instruction for most of the school day, with special education services and programs provided by special education personnel inside or outside of the regular class for part of the school day.

*Learning support.* Services for students with a disability whose primary identified need is academic learning.

*Life skills support.* Services for students with a disability focused primarily on the needs of students for independent living.

*Multiple disabilities support.* Services for students with multiple disabilities.

*Part-time.* Special education services and programs outside the regular classroom but in a regular school for most of the school day, with some instruction in the regular classroom for part of the school day.

*Physical support.* Services designed primarily to meet the needs of students with the disabilities of orthopedic or other health impairment.

*Resource.* Regular classroom instruction for most of the school day, with special education services and programs provided by special education personnel in a resource room for part of the school day.

*Speech and language support.* Services for students with the disability of speech and language impairment.

### Special Education Teacher Definitions

(Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2007)

*Special Education Teacher, Blind/Visual Impairments.* Certification area includes the science or art of the provision of educational services to infants and children and young adults with visual impairments which adversely affect their educational performance, and a program that prepares individuals to teach such students.

*Special Education Teacher, Cognitive, behavior, and physical/health disabilities.*

Certificate endorsed in this special education area is qualified to teach students with disabilities how to understand, overcome, compensate for and/or adjust to their disability

through the use of adaptive instructional strategies, instructional accommodations, individualized learning activities and specially designed services.

*Special Education, Deaf and hard of hearing.* Certification area includes the science or art of the provision of educational services for infants, children or adults with hearing impairments which adversely affect one's educational performance, and a program that prepares individuals to teach such students.

*Special Education, Speech and language disabilities.* Certification area includes the science or art of the study of the provision of educational services to persons with speech and language disabilities that adversely impact educational performance.

#### Assumptions

It is assumed that:

- 1). All selected special education teacher participants provided truthful answers to the survey questions.
- 2). All selected building principals provided truthful answers to interview questions.
- 3). All subjects had an equal opportunity to participate in the completion of the survey instrument.

#### Limitations

- 1) Limitations of this study encompass those as a result of utilizing survey research. Specifically, responses are perceptions of respondents and may not represent actuality. The respondents may not represent the general population of teachers who either fail to complete the questionnaire or failed to receive

one. The survey represents only one point of time and survey research can have a low response rate.

- 2) Teachers who chose to respond to the survey may have either specific interests or biases toward special education and building administrators.
- 3) This study was limited to the population of public school special education teachers and principals in three counties of South Central Pennsylvania, and may not generalize to other populations with varying geographical characteristics including more diverse and heavily populated communities.
- 4) An additional limitation of the study may also include researcher bias as a veteran special education service provider.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

“Issues of teacher shortages have pervaded policy discussions for decades” (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004, p.326). The shortage of certified educators is a reality that affects all grades, content area subjects, and service-delivery. The problem of retaining teachers is not new. As indicated in *Life* magazine, November 1, 1962, “Too many will quit permanently because they are fed up. Their ambition and self-respect will take them into business or other professions... They leave behind an increasing proportion of tired time-servers” (quoted in Tye & O’Brien, 2002, p. 24). This problem appears more acute in special education and in programs that serve students who are at risk. Ludlow, Conner, and Schechter (2005), note that these personnel shortages are due to "increasing demand, inadequate supply, and high attrition rates" (p. 15).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990, and reauthorizations in 1997, and 2004, continue to ensure free and appropriate public education for all individuals with disabilities. With the numbers of children with disabilities rising and the available number of educators declining, the teacher shortage is paramount to administrators charged with the task of meeting the needs of special education students. Compounding this problem with meeting the needs of students with the supply of special education teachers is the recent legislation involving No Child Left Behind and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Adding to this problem is the requirement in current legislation, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) 2001 and Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) 2004, that teachers be "highly

qualified." This federal legislation mandates that teachers meet stringent requirements in content areas to retain their respective teaching credentials. Often this requirement increases the length of preservice teacher-training programs, adding additional course work and preparation time before receiving their instructional certification. It also forces current teachers to return to university classrooms for additional course work to meet content area subject competency. Research evidence suggests that the requirement for additional coursework has forced some teachers to leave teaching and has reduced the number of graduates from teacher-training programs, aggravating an already acute personnel shortage (Rosenberg, Sindelear, Connelly, & Kelly., 2004).

In the recent National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) report of data drawn from the Teacher Follow-up Survey, 2000-01 (Luekens, Lyter, Fox, & Chandler, 2004), over one-third (38.2 percent) of teachers who transferred to new schools reported their dissatisfaction with support from administrators was either a very or extremely important reason for leaving. This chapter will examine existing literature involving the role of the building principal in providing administrative support to teachers.

#### General Education and Teacher Retention

Teacher attrition is not solely associated with the special education field. In 2000, the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) issued a study of the qualifications, assignments, and job satisfaction of middle school and high school science teachers in the United States. Using a random sample of 5,000 middle school and high school science teachers, participants were surveyed on their satisfaction in teaching during the 1999-2000 school year. Of the twenty-seven percent responding, fifty-five percent were high school teachers, thirty-eight percent were middle school teachers, and seven percent

taught at both grade levels. This study found that 44% of teachers with more than twenty years of classroom teaching were more likely to consider leaving the profession. The reasons for leaving were ranked with retirement being the most common reason, and then job dissatisfaction. The study further indicated that teachers earlier in their careers chose their reason for leaving the profession as job dissatisfaction. The top two reasons provided for this dissatisfaction for those with less than nine years of experience was poor administrative support and low salary (Mangrubang, 2005). Teacher retention issues are not clearly just associated with special education. Teacher shortages are evident in other disciplines as well.

In a small study of secondary science teacher attrition (Patterson, Roehrig, & Luft, 2003), researchers found similar reasons for teacher turnover. The study focused on beginning high school science teachers in southern Arizona and their reasons for exiting. Over the course of four years, almost half of all high school teachers involved in an induction program either left the profession or changed teaching positions. During exit interviews, qualitative data revealed two major themes: turnover because of challenges with the school environment and turnover due to challenges with the teaching assignment. Of the factors related to administrative support, teachers indicated frustration with the lack of support in being able to take advantage of professional development activities. Hindering their participation was the perception that the administration did not provide release time for new teachers to attend educational conferences. These teachers also perceived the atmosphere of the school lacked trust—feeling administrators supported parents over teachers when dealing with concerns and, in addition, there was a high degree of conflict among the staff members working in the

school (Patterson, Roehrig, & Luft, 2003). In relationship to teaching assignment, respondents also reported being assigned to teaching duties outside of their area of expertise. The reason the school districts gave for denying such requests was that it was too difficult to release teachers due to a shortage of substitutes, and beginning teachers would probably leave anyway.

### Teacher Supply and Demand

The labor market in education can be described in terms of the basic economics of supply and demand. The demand for teachers can be determined by the number of teaching positions offered, and the supply of teachers can be determined by the number of qualified individuals entering the profession. Guarino, Santibanez, and Daley (2006) utilized this conceptual framework to review research in the area of teacher recruitment and retention. “Individuals will become or remain teachers if teaching represents the most attractive activity to pursue among all activities available to them (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006, p. 175). This means that having a desire to work with children is not necessarily going to motivate an individual to become a teacher if there are stumbling blocks in pursuing teaching as a profession. To promote teacher recruitment, policymakers need to increase the rewards of teaching relative to those of competing occupations (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006). Teacher supply and demand can also be further defined in terms of quality and quantity. With increased accountability mandated by both federal and state legislation, educational systems need not only certified teachers, but also those who are meet highly qualified criteria.

Researchers are predicting that school districts will need to hire up to 200,000 teachers annually over the next decade (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999). The need for special

education teachers is expected to increase faster than the average for all occupations through 2014 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006). The need for special education teachers is a result of increases in the number of special education students needing services, changes in legislation emphasizing training and employment for individuals with disabilities, and by federal and state educational reforms requiring higher standards for graduation. Additionally, a large number of openings will result from the need to replace special education teachers who leave special education to teach general education students, exit the profession for other careers, and retirement.

Employment of special education teachers varies by geographic area and specialty. Although most areas of the country report difficulty finding qualified applicants, inner cities and rural areas will experience the most difficulty in securing special education teachers as opposed to suburban and wealthy urban areas. In addition, student populations with severe disabilities and multiple disabilities will increase the need for special education teachers. For example, the number of students receiving services for autism has increased markedly, from a little less than 10,000 in 1992 to approximately 65,000 in 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Both federal and state legislation encourages early intervention and special education for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, increasing the demand for early childhood special education teachers. With an increasingly diverse student population, bilingual special education teachers will also be needed.

#### Limited Supply of Special Education Teachers

According to the Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (2002), during the 1999-2000 school year, there were over 69,000 job openings for special educators.

At least seven special education openings were reported by 97% of school districts, and 12,241 funded positions were either left vacant or filled with substitutes because suitable candidates could not be found. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2006), there is an increased demand for special education teachers over the course of 20 years, rising from 332,000 employed in 1990 to 453,000 employed in 2000, and an estimated need by 2010 of 611,550.

### Lessons from Corporate Industry

The problem of employee retention is not unique to education. A literature review indicates that employee job satisfaction and retention hit all aspects of employment, including the corporate world. As one equates the leadership role of the building principal to that of a corporate manager, valuable lessons can be learned. Managers are believed to speak for the organization and represent it. Through communication, information is shared to provide a fundamental understanding of the tasks that are to be performed as well as the goals to which the organization is striving. Perceptions and attitudes are important for individuals as they maneuver through organizational life (Cable & DeRue, 2002). Providing employee feedback is crucial to manager-employee relationships. Feedback on past performance has been found to strengthen efficacy perceptions (Bandura, 1997). A positive evaluation of managerial communication – including both giving feedback and listening – may help employees to get an accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the organization. Such a clear view can be helpful in evaluating the core competences of the organization in terms of organizational efficacy.

### Increased Certification Requirements

Full licensure for special education may or may not require a master's degree, depending on location. There are also differences among states as to whether licenses are categorical (pertaining to each disability category), cross-categorical (pertaining to a range of disabilities, such as mild disabilities in several categories), or non-categorical (a generic license to teach students with any disabilities in specific age or grade ranges). Most states use a combination, so that licenses may be categorical in hearing impairments, visual impairments, and severe cognitive disabilities, but cross-categorical or non-categorical in other disabilities. These differences influence the relative supply of teachers across the States because the broader the licensing category, the more eligible candidates there will be.

### Changing Special Education Student Population

There is a national trend of steadily increasing enrollment of students with special needs in our public schools. According to the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (2005) 27th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA, the number of students receiving special education services under Part B of IDEA has steadily increased. Special education and related services were being provided to 6,046, 051 students ages 6 through 21 during 2003. An increase in school-age special education services grew from almost 4.8 million to more than 6 million since 1993. Preschoolers (ages three through five) included 680, 142 children served in 2003. An increase in preschool special education services grew by 38.3 percent. Several possible reasons for this increase include: overall population growth in the United States, comprehensive national and state legislation, and better medical

practices that allow children with significant health and medical risks to live longer (Greene & Forster, 2002). With increased standards and accountability for student performance under NCLB, it is anticipated that the number of special education students will continue to grow as parents may seek special education services for their children who have difficulty in achieving and meeting proficiency in high stakes assessments.

### The Principal's Responsibility for Special Education

A principal's understandings of district and state policies can influence new teachers' experiences. In a study of the principal's responsibility for special education (Irons & Broyles, n.d.) randomly selected principals from states clustered in four regions of the United States indicated only sixty-four percent had a minimum of one to six clock hours of training in special education. Research shows that the most effective principals are the ones who spend time in the classroom. Building principals who are visible and interactive with special education teachers know what is going on and can provide teachers the opportunity to receive help with their instruction. Several authors have identified the instructional leadership of the principal as the most influential variable associated with effective schools. In one study, Ingersoll (2001) reported that, along with discipline problems and limited opportunities to participate in school decisions, inadequate principal support was one of the primary reasons public school teachers gave for leaving the job.

Principals need to have knowledge of special education regulations and procedures in order to support special education teachers. The current status of least restrictive education models for students with disabilities and No Child Left Behind legislation has principals more involved in special education than in the past. Principals

have responsibility for ensuring implementation of individual education plans for children with disabilities in the least restrictive environments often including integration into the general education classroom. Only five states have special education requirements for administrator certification (Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000). Additionally, principals must keep apprised of the changes and trends in special education in order to deal effectively with issues involving students with disabilities.

Administrators need to acquire knowledge about programs and needs of special education students, understand school discipline procedures as they related to special education, and to ensure resources are allocated for successful programs. When these aspects are lacking, teachers feel stressed, overworked, and under appreciated. Doyle interviewed nineteen principals regarding inclusion of students in general education programs and found that principals feel unsupported and disempowered. (2001). A building principal with limited background in special education may become frustrated, elude responsibility of supporting the special education programs, or have inappropriate expectations of the special education teachers.

Principals need knowledge of the components of effective instruction, supervision and evaluation of special instruction for students with disabilities, and skills to help special education teams make complex decisions (Bays, 2004). Wilcox and Wigle (2001) found principals unsure of their role or responsibility in special education program administration. As a principal's responsibility for special education students increases, so does their need for knowledge about federal and state special education regulations (Collins & White, 2001). Principals can then provide a much needed level of support to special education teachers.

Brown (2002) investigated the role of administrative support for new teachers in low performance schools of South Carolina while exploring principal responsibilities in teacher induction. Brown reported administrators need to take an active role in providing support by visiting classrooms to observe instruction and making sure that teachers have the necessary materials and supplies. In addition, principals should interview novice teachers to develop a profile of the teachers' strengths, weaknesses, and patterns for growth (Brown, 2002). The patterns that emerge from principal involvement aid in better understanding of the novice teachers' needs. Fullan (2002) describes this process as learning at work and learning in context. Administrators who engage in reflective discourse with experienced teachers create a learning community and empower all members. "The results are more effective novice teachers who are less apt to leave the profession to escape the frustration from feeling hopeless" (Brown, 2002, p.426). Gold (1996) indicates the vital need for beginning teacher support in two major areas: instructional-related support that includes assisting the new teacher with the knowledge, skills, and strategies necessary to be successful in the classroom and school; and psychological support to build the new teacher's sense of self through confidence building, developing feelings of effectiveness, encouraging positive self-esteem, enhancing self-reliance, and learning to handle stress that is a large part of the transition period.

#### Demands Placed Upon Special Educators

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Legislation requires a highly qualified teacher in every classroom by the close of the 2005-2006 school year. Schools already facing teacher shortages in special education now have to not only recruit and retain from a

limited supply of certified special education teachers, but also must ensure the teachers they do employ meet federal accountability standards of high quality. Veteran special education teachers are now faced with increased requirements to maintain their teaching certificates.

In Pennsylvania, the implementation of No Child Left Behind requires special education teachers to demonstrate appropriate content skill knowledge either through state teacher exams or additional course work, regardless of their experience or teacher preparation programs. With this increased demand placed upon them, special education teachers may choose to leave special education altogether or once gaining additional certification, leave the field for a regular education position. NCLB requires special education teachers to be highly qualified in their respective disciplines in which they instruct students. This includes requirements for special education teachers to meet competency in core content areas.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) narrows the definition of core subject competency to special education teachers who provide direct instruction in one or more core academic subjects including: English, Reading/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Foreign Languages, Civics & Governments, Economics, Arts, History, and Geography. The subject matter competency is also defined by the age and grade level of content areas taught at early childhood, elementary, middle, and secondary school levels. Teachers who received certification prior to 1988 and who did not take the General Content Knowledge Praxis exam, developed after 1988, must utilize a HOUSSE process to show competency in various subject areas if they are the sole provider for instruction in a content area to a child with a disability. Therefore, teachers who may currently have

more than 18 years of teaching experience have the task of demonstrating their ability to provide quality instruction to their students. Accountability is increased with the NCLB requirement that schools must inform parents of children with disabilities of teachers who do not meet this requirement by the close of the 2006-2007 school year with written documentation of the teacher's inability to meet the highly qualified requirements. (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2007). Teachers not willing to take additional course work for added certifications or who are unable to pass appropriate Praxis exams, may choose to leave the profession altogether. According to Selwyn (2007), “The increased emphasis that NCLB has placed on testing when it comes to children’s educational experience is pushing out and alienating potential teachers whose strengths and interests do not show up on tests, and who do not believe that this is the best way to serve the public school students with whom they would be working. These potential applicants who choose not to apply are among those who are left behind, as are the K-12 students they will never teach” (p. 128).

### *Work Load*

Maslach & Leiter (1997), indicated that teachers burn out—not because they fail to achieve success in their workplace or dislike the work of teaching but because they cannot keep up the intense pace and overwork, which is sometimes compounded by school principals’ tendency to heap additional duties on new, energetic teachers.

### Factors Influencing Teacher Retention

#### *Age, Gender, and Years of Experience*

Retention of teachers differs with the age and experience of the individuals. Grissmer and Kirby (1997) concluded that attrition is high for young or new teachers and

lower for older or more experienced teachers. Increased retirements and increased numbers of young teachers will probably increase teacher attrition rates and the demand for new teachers. Young teachers and teachers having over 20 years of experience, are the two groups with highest attrition rates within the teaching profession (Grissmer & Kirby, 1997). Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2004) analyzed data on more than 300,000 Texas teachers during 1993–1996 and found that those who left Texas public schools were generally either very young teachers in their first two years of teaching or very experienced teachers close to retirement. Kirby, Berends, and Haftel (1999) reported that approximately sixteen percent of teachers who entered teaching in Texas between 1987 and 1996 left the public school system within their first year and twenty-six percent left within two years. Ingersoll (2001), using the 1991–1992 Schools and Staffing Survey and Teacher Follow-up Survey, found that male teachers were less likely to quit teaching than female teachers.

### *Teacher Stress*

Teacher burnout is well documented in the literature. A recent British study to identify the role of individual contributory factors in teacher stress revealed that the strongest predictor of work-related stress, with a strong negative relationship, was occupational commitment, indicating that as occupational commitment increases, perceived stress decreases (Jepson & Forrest, 2006). Using multiple regression analysis, results also showed that significantly higher levels of perceived stress were reported from primary school teachers than secondary school teachers. Jamal (1990) concluded that when individuals are confronted with high job stressors, they will experience a decrease in occupational commitment, low job satisfaction, and a higher desire to leave the

profession. The implications are significant, as the impact of perceived stress upon staff retention and recruitment to the profession is seen to be substantial (Jarvis, 2002).

Factors that may affect stress perceptions in teachers include the gender of the teacher and their experience of teaching. Additional factors include the type of school in which teachers work, years of experience, and full-time or part-time status. Research indicates that women on average tend to have significantly higher levels of perceived stress (Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999), and they may also use different coping strategies than men (Gianakos, 2002). Male and May (1998) indicated that stress levels may vary by the educational level taught by the teacher and amount of time teaching per week. Teachers could adapt their coping skills and manage stress more effectively as they grow with experience. During a study of 92 special educators and related service providers (Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996), researchers found that stress intervention workshops and peer collaboration programs were beneficial in participants feeling more satisfied and committed to their jobs.

### *Race and Ethnicity*

Ingersoll (2001), using the 1991–1992 Schools and Staffing Survey and Teacher Follow-up Survey to investigate factors related to teacher attrition, found that minority teachers were less likely to quit teaching than white teachers. Kirby, Berends, and Haftel (1999), in their study of Texas cohorts who entered teaching between 1987 and 1996, found that Hispanic teachers had the lowest early attrition rates. Median teaching durations were six years for white female teachers, seven years for white male teachers, ten years for Hispanic females and males, nine years for black females, and six years for black males. Adams (1996), in a study of elementary school teachers in a large Texas

school district in the late 1980s, found that African-American teachers had lower attrition rates than teachers of other races. Whites were 385 percent more likely than African-Americans to leave the district and 57 percent more likely than Hispanics to leave the district. The district in question had a predominantly non-white enrollment.

### *Environmental Factors*

Supportive working conditions are recognized by practitioners and researchers as critical to keeping good teachers in the classroom. Consistently, working conditions rank as one of the top reasons why teachers decide to remain or leave the public schools. The shortage of special education teachers is greater than teacher shortages in any other area, including mathematics and science. Compounding this problem is an inadequate focus of teacher preparation programs, quick alternative routes to certification with limited skills training, and limited university preparation programs in rural areas. Administrators must consider how best to fulfill the needs of support for special education teachers so as to influence the teachers' commitment to stay. "Clever incentives may attract new teachers, but only improving the culture and working conditions of schools will keep them" (Johnson, et. al., 2001).

Johnson and Birkeland (2003) studied career paths of fifty new teachers in Massachusetts finding that key factors in a teacher's decision to transfer involved dissatisfaction from administrative efforts and limited opportunities for professional development. Interview results collected with first- and second-year teachers in Massachusetts public schools revealed that teachers who were unsettled in their decision to stay in their positions were moderately satisfied with their schools (Johnson and Birkeland, 2003). Twenty-two percent of teachers who left felt that they had not received

adequate support or resources to perform their job successfully. Teachers who switched schools expressed similar feelings but attributed them to their particular school setting rather than to the teaching profession. Additional findings demonstrated that those who transferred went to schools that offered more supportive environments. Those who were settled in their decision to stay indicated positive perceptions with principals who encouraged them to set reasonable goals for themselves, had a manageable workload, and a supportive and orderly work environment (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

Johnson and Birkeland indicate:

“Unlike those in the study who left the public school classroom altogether, the voluntary movers had not given up on teaching, instead they looked for schools that made good teaching possible” (p. 21).

Researchers have identified key factors associated with retention of teachers. According to Menlove, Garnes, and Salzberg (2003), the largest area of potentially preventable attrition is transferring to a general education teaching position. During a 1999-2000 study of Utah special education teachers, Elizabeth Adams surveyed 51 special education teachers who left special education, finding that many left due to dissatisfaction with non-instructional aspects of the field (Menlove, Garnes, & Salzberg 2003).

Certo and Fox (2002) investigated factors contributing to teacher attrition and retention in seven Virginia school districts. Focus groups were established to answer three research questions involving teacher attrition and retention. These addressed: 1) reasons teachers give for staying, 2) perceptions of why their colleagues left, and 3) reasons for voluntarily moving or leaving the teaching profession. Results indicate that

insufficient salary, lack of administrative support, and lack of planning time contribute to teacher attrition. Secondary results indicate high stakes testing and lack of opportunity for job sharing also contribute to teacher attrition. Results indicate that there is a high interrelation between the teacher attrition and retention variables. For example, teachers may leave because of poor administration, or they stay because of quality administration. Further findings indicate teachers remain in their school divisions for three reasons: 1) commitment to the profession, 2) quality administration, and 3) an appreciation for relationships with colleagues. When teachers indicated reasons as to why their colleagues leave, there was a hierarchy of responses with salary indicated as the number one reason and lack of administrative support being second.

Certo and Fox (2002) reported teachers chose to remain because of the central office support they received. Certo cites teacher comments as: “any support or teaching materials, or training---whatever is needed to meet those needs, we have been very lucky in knowing that those needs would be met” (p. 61). District level support was a common theme, although more teachers indicated that they stayed because of the administrative support in their individual schools. Special education teachers were grateful if their principals possessed an understanding of special needs children and special education law. One teacher of special needs students remarked, “My administration is supportive. I know that if something comes up and I have followed the correct procedures that they are going to back me up. Talking to colleagues in the area I’m not sure a lot of administrations give their faculty that much support.” Other comments included, “We are also very pleased to have our immediate administrator and principal very well-versed

in special ed. law and who take great interest in each of the children. And, it seems like that's not the case everywhere" (Certo & Fox, 2002, p.61).

Turnover rates are particularly high in urban and rural school districts that serve the most low-income students. While all districts worry about losing teachers to other professions, urban and rural districts also are concerned with losing teachers to other districts. Imazeki (2005) examined the causes of both exit attrition and transfer attrition in Wisconsin. This includes the impact of wage effects and district and teacher characteristics. Empirical data collected from Wisconsin indicate that increasing salary levels reduce teacher exits but it has no statistically significant impact upon transfers. When looking at teacher characteristics, the data indicate that teachers of high demand in science, math, and special education areas are more likely to transfer. Since opportunities to transfer are present and assist in teachers finding the "right fit" exits are less likely. In these areas the problem is summarized as not one of attrition so much as one of recruitment. Additional conclusions from the data indicate that having an advanced degree has no significant impact on transfer attrition for male or female teachers.

In a study of 225 special education teachers in Alaska (Starlings, McLean, and Moran, 2002), found that active special education teachers and those leaving the field reported administrative support, paperwork, collegial support, and working with paraprofessionals having the greatest effect on their decision for departure. An aging workforce of special education teachers also was noted as contributing to teacher shortages.

Based upon analysis of federal survey data for more than 50,000 teachers nationwide, Ingersoll (2001) indicated that 42 percent of all those leaving the profession

reported they did so because of job dissatisfaction. When asked why they were dissatisfied, reasons included: lack of support from school administration, low salaries, lack of teacher influence over decision-making, lack of discipline all factored into the decision.

Studies have shown that increasing salary alone will not increase teacher retention. Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2004), determined that a teacher's decision to teach in a school may be influenced less by increases in salaries than many may believe. Research revealed that in Texas salary differentials are nearly irrelevant for women teachers with 10 or more years of experience. As a result, this research concluded that improving working conditions of teachers may prove both more effective and more realistic in retaining teachers. These working conditions include: safety, discipline, and principal leadership. Ingersoll (2001) found that schools providing greater autonomy, influence, and administrative support and schools with fewer disciplinary problems had lower levels of teacher attrition. Weiss (1999) found that perceived school leadership and culture along with teacher autonomy and discretion were the main factors predicting high teacher morale. Perceived school leadership and culture were also strong predictors of teachers' intention to remain in teaching.

Teacher satisfaction is a critical issue in low-incidence disability categories. Luckner and Hanks (2003) investigated the perceptions of teachers of students who are Deaf or hard of hearing. Using a questionnaire, a sample of 610 teachers responded regarding their perceived relationships with colleagues, paper work, state assessments, and parent involvement. This study analyzed teachers across categories of itinerant, elementary, secondary, and resource room settings. One limitation of the study was that

teachers who work with students during intermittent settings, such as itinerant teachers, are more susceptible to stress and burnout (Luckner & Hanks, 2003). Results of this study suggests that teachers of the Deaf or hard of hearing are generally satisfied with their jobs; however, there is still dissatisfaction in paper work, time for non-teaching responsibilities, and lack of family involvement. Nearly 25 years ago, J. L. Johnson (as cited in Luckner & Hanks, 2003) reported that teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing were dissatisfied with the amount of paperwork they were required to complete. Today special education teachers continue to identify paperwork as a primary problem. Certo and Fox (2002) found teachers indicating that the endless meetings and paperwork were driving colleagues out of the classroom.

The professional concerns of beginning teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing were examined in a study conducted by Guteng (2005). Five first-year teachers of deaf and hard of hearing students served as participants. Two of the participants were itinerant teachers; three taught in self-contained classrooms. Participants were selected from programs serving deaf and hard of hearing students in rural and urban areas of the Midwestern and southwestern United States. Results indicate that the majority of the participants expressed concern about their respective school and district policies. Policy concerns included: 1). variations in policies across schools and districts, 2). restrictions on payment for special education services for deaf and hard of hearing students, 3). Huge paperwork requirements that got in the way of teaching, Participants also expressed concerns about students' behavior problems. These problems ranged from death threats, name-calling, cursing, hitting, kicking, biting, spitting, inappropriate touching, and refusing to use auditory trainers. Additionally, participants expressed concerns with

parent involvement. Participants teaching in self-contained classrooms recommended mentor support to provide orientation to new teachers, assist them in understanding school policy requirements and how to write IEPs, and provide them with constructive feedback on classroom management.

Sutherland, Denny, and Gunter (2005) investigated the differences in professional development needs of fully licensed and emergency-licensed teachers of emotional support students. Survey results indicated that fully licensed teachers were significantly more comfortable in classroom management and planning for their students than those with emergency certifications.

### *Salary and Compensation*

Not surprisingly, wages can be an important factor in both recruiting and retaining qualified teachers. People are more likely to enter teaching when starting teacher salaries are high relative to salaries in other occupations. In addition, teachers are more likely to leave teaching when outside wage options are higher. Hanushek and Rivkin (2007) found that average wages of teachers differ somewhat between urban and suburban districts, but working conditions differ substantially. Urban teachers reported far less administrative and parental support, worse materials, and greater student problems. “Difficult working conditions may drive much of the difference in turnover of teachers and the transfer of teachers across schools” (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007, p. 69).

### Principal and Teacher Relationships

The literature suggests that conditions created by school leaders can strongly shape new teachers’ experiences. School leaders with substantive knowledge of subject matter can help new teachers acquire and apply content-specific pedagogical knowledge

during classroom observations, post observation conferences, and other direct contact (Burch & Spillane, 2003). School administrators also can support teachers by matching them with mentors with teaching expertise in the same content and grade level areas. These conditions, created and encouraged by school administrators can strongly shape a new teacher's first year experience. Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, (2001), indicated that trust develops between school leaders and teachers when teachers are consistently supported in areas related to curriculum, hiring, and professional development. When administrators foster trusting relationships with staff, collaboration is likely to be enhanced. New teachers who perceive they have supportive principals also perceive they are receiving support from their colleagues (Quinn, D'Amato-Andrews, 2004). The principal is responsible for the induction of new teachers and the principal's relationship with teachers is highly important. Walsh focused on the importance of principal-teacher relationships, rather than merely leadership styles or behaviors (2005), as principals have the ability to improve teacher perceptions overall by attending to fundamental components inherent in quality relationships. It is essential to keep in mind that principals are the instructional leaders of school campuses. Daily interpersonal interactions of a principal are necessary to create an environment of trust and support for teachers. In schools, this means that the principal can focus more on removing obstacles, providing materials and emotional support, and taking care of management details (Sergiovanni, 1992). Principals can influence the working patterns of teachers when arranging physical space and free time to promote norms of collegiality and experimentation. The role of the principal is to create an environment that accomplishes its goals and sustains its members. In studies involving the effect of school principals on

school climate, a positive school climate is directly related to principal communication skills. Brewer (2001) emphasized that a school leader focuses on instruction, the learning, shared decision-making, staff development, and a climate of integrity, inquiry, and improvement. The results of an international study on school climate (Halawah, 2005) emphasized the importance of principal and teacher communication as having a correlation with a positive learning environment. Ingram (1997) found that leaders who are highly transformational have a greater impact on teachers' motivation to perform beyond expectations.

Job satisfaction is often equated with work conditions, which appear to play a key role in keeping teachers in the field. Yee (1990) interviewed 59 experienced teachers in grades K–12 finding that teachers highly involved in their work attributed their decision to remain in teaching more to supportive work conditions than to salary. Teachers who left reported unsupportive workplace conditions as their main reason for leaving.

Bogler (2005) in a study of 98 schools in Israel involving Arab and Jewish teachers found principal leadership style had a significant impact on teacher satisfaction and created a positive effect on teachers. As the instructional leader of the campus, principals have a responsibility for ensuring implementation of individual education plans for children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (DiPaola & Tschannen-Morgan, 2003). With this comes the responsibility to fulfill the role of the local education agency to facilitate multidisciplinary team meetings and student individualized education plan meetings. Work environments are important to special education teachers' job satisfaction. A survey of 385 special and 313 general education teachers found that groups had similar perceptions of principal support. Work-related variables were better

predictors of extent of perceived support than were demographic variables. Specific types of support were significant predictors of job satisfaction, school commitment, and personal health. Adult learning theory suggests that teachers must collaborate in order to learn. Westling and Whitten (1996) identified specific role factors associated with teachers' plans to stay: clearly defined responsibilities; adequate time to complete paperwork, plan instruction, and prepare materials; and teacher agreement with program goals. In an analysis of over 7,000 teachers from 1994-1995, 17.9 percent cited student discipline problems, 17.6 percent cited poor student motivation to learn, and 15.3 percent cited inadequate support from administration as the main reasons for dissatisfaction (Whitener, 1997). Private school teachers who exited indicated lack of recognition and support from administration as their reasons for dissatisfaction.

In earlier studies of factors influencing teacher retention, teachers' leaving was less often due to a lack of insufficient salaries than to a lack of professionalism, collegiality, and administrative support (Inman & Marlow, 2004). Cooley and Yovanoff (1996) conducted a survey of 158 special education teachers to determine their plans for remaining in or leaving their current teaching positions. Only 57% indicated it was likely they would still be teaching in five years. Data were analyzed to determine variables that differed significantly between teachers likely to stay in their positions and those likely to leave. The results of these analyses, along with teachers' written comments, suggest that administrative support played an important role in teachers' five-year plans. More frequently cited reasons for attrition were family, personal circumstances, and job dissatisfaction (Voke, 2002).

In a 2004 Georgia study, a ten item survey instrument was utilized to gather data regarding twenty-one characteristics of teacher career stability by analyzing responses related to demographics, background, reasons for remaining in the teaching profession and job satisfaction. Inman and Marlow (2004) indicated that teachers face a variety of classroom conditions including increased enrollment of English as Second Language Learners, more inclusion, and state-mandated programs. This compounds an already complex challenge for beginning teachers who often “mistake the uneasiness they feel as an indication that they have made a mistake in their choice of profession” (p.606). By identifying three phases of teacher experience: Phase 1 0-3 years, Phase 2 4-9 years, and Phase 3 10+, Inman discusses administrative efforts as an area of concentration in retaining phase 1 teachers. Beginning teachers need positive experiences in support of new ideas, regular, structured staff development opportunities, teaming with experienced teachers, and promotion of accomplishment to the educational community (Inman & Marlow, 2004).

#### Special Education Teacher Assignment and Experience

Work environments are important to special education teachers' job satisfaction. A survey of 385 special and 313 general education teachers found that groups had similar perceptions of principal support. Work-related variables were better predictors of extent of perceived support than were demographic variables. Specific types of support were significant predictors of job satisfaction, school commitment, and personal health. Adult learning theory suggests that teachers must collaborate in order to learn. Westling and Whitten (1996) identified specific role factors associated with teachers' plans to stay: clearly defined responsibilities; adequate time to complete paperwork, plan instruction,

and prepare materials; and teacher agreement with program goals. Teachers who enter the profession may have unclear or unrealistic expectations of teaching. New teachers need to be provided with a supportive environment that nurtures and encourages professional growth and development. If a teacher is unhappy in their assignment at the onset, they may choose to leave for a different position or leave the profession altogether.

Bobeck's (2002) research found five primary factors for teachers to remain in the profession. Bobeck indicated that relationships such as mentoring, administrative support, and parent support influence a teacher's decision to stay. Other factors include the teacher's career competence and skills and the ability to have personal ownership of their career through the ability to solve problems, set goals, and to help students. A sense of accomplishment and sense of humor are also contributing factors.

In Philadelphia schools, Useem (2003) found that varied turnover rates occurred in a study of sixty new middle school teachers in seven high-poverty district schools. Twelve new teachers surveyed indicated they were unhappy with their school's climate and administrative practices, transferring or leaving the teaching profession. In a report of fifty new teachers in Massachusetts (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003), teachers who left the field described their administrative support having "principals who were arbitrary, abusive, or neglectful (p. 594). In a study investigating practices of successful principals, Blasé and Blasé (2004) utilized the results of open-ended questionnaires completed by 800 teachers studying at three major universities. Those principals perceived to be effective utilized praise, visibility, and teacher autonomy to promote positive attitudes with their staff. Blasé and Blasé found that teachers felt unsupported when principals interrupted, criticized, and were controlling. Weiss (2001) analyzed responses of

teachers in their first year and concluded that new teachers' perceptions of their work environment were related to morale, commitment, and plans to remain in their position.

Teachers with more experience, generally learn how to work the system to acquire what they need. Experienced teachers learn where to find educational answers to solve problems, support from colleagues, and have acquired skills to cope with day-to-day stressors in the field. A questionnaire was utilized to collect data regarding experienced special education teacher perceptions of administrative support (Otto & Arnold, 2005). Study results from 228 participants working in Texas public schools and charter schools indicated sixty-nine percent of the experienced special education teachers viewed satisfaction with the level of administrative support they received.

Shortages are more prevalent in some disability categories than others. From the Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (2002), 2,970 vacancies were for teachers of the emotional disturbed and 385 positions were for teachers of the hearing or visually impaired. Weiss (2001) found in a New Jersey study of 320 special education teachers that teachers of different disability categories value different forms of support. Participants completing a questionnaire also indicated that less experienced teachers feel more support than older teachers.

Principals play a key role in the inclusion process. Principals often set the stage for inclusion opportunities through developing the building schedule, providing opportunities for team collaboration, and coordinating services between the general education and special education staff. Special education teachers may be employed to work in a variety of instructional environments ranging from itinerant level of services to full time classrooms. In a study by Embich (2001), findings concluded that teachers who

worked primarily in general education classrooms were more at risk of burnout than teachers in more traditional special education classroom settings. Embich indicated that the responsibilities of those who team teach with general education teachers have expanded. These team teachers are often involved in working where they are not wanted and in areas for which they have had little preparation.

### Perceptions of Beginning Teachers

Yost (2006) captured perceptions of teacher's daily work and experiences through principal interviews, interviews with second-year teachers, and observations of classroom teacher performance. Data was collected from seventeen participants, and indicated that successful field and student teaching experiences connected to coursework help to build a teacher's confidence. This encourages higher levels of competence in the first year of teaching. A second proposition indicates that critical reflection as a problem-solving tool empowers teachers to cope with the challenges they encounter in their first years. Mentoring components have a powerful impact on beginning teachers when they have the opportunity to network with other teachers. A positive and supportive school environment may not in itself be enough to support a struggling teacher. Novice teachers are expected to engage in activities of shared meaning and a sense of community having an alignment of their new teacher philosophy with the school culture and vision (Hertzog, 2002).

### Administrative Support and Conceptual Models of Leadership

There are many aspects to leadership and how administrative support facilitates the workings of an organization. Burns (1978) described transforming leadership in contrast to transactional leadership.

Burns said (1978),

Such leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Their purposes, which might have started out as separate but related, as in the case of transactional leadership, become fused. Power bases are linked not as counterweights but as mutual support for common purpose. The relationship can be moralistic, of course. But transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has transforming effect on both (p. 20).

Bass and Steidlmeier (1998) cited four interrelated components that they view as essential for leaders to move followers into the transformational style. Bass and Steidlmeier indicated that genuine trust must be built between leaders and followers called “idealized influence”. They described inspirational motivation as the leader’s ability to share goals and to do what needs to be done. Intellectual stimulation provides a vision for followers to generate creative solutions to problems. “Individual consideration” is described in which leaders treat each follower as an individual and provide coaching, mentoring and growth opportunities. This approach fulfills the follower’s need for self-actualization, self-fulfillment, and self-worth—leading to achievement and growth.

John Gardner (1989) studied a large number of North American organizations and leaders and concluded that there were some qualities or attributes that did appear to mean that a leader in one situation could lead in another. These included: physical vitality and stamina, intelligence and action-oriented judgment, eagerness to accept responsibility, task competence, understanding of followers and their needs, skill in dealing with people, need for achievement, capacity to motivate people, courage and resolution, trustworthiness, decisiveness, self-confidence, assertiveness, and adaptability/flexibility.

Leithwood (2005) described two models of leadership that "currently vie for most of the attention among practicing educators—instructional and transformational models" (p. 7). In the instructional leadership model, principals direct their attention to teaching and learning rather than administrative and managerial tasks. This model included three main categories of practice: Defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school learning climate.

Leithwood further describes that when managing the instructional program, principals' roles lend themselves to "supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring student progress" (p. 8). The principal's actions associated with maintaining a positive learning environment include: "protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for teachers, and providing incentives for learning" (p. 8-9).

Administrative support is a difficult construct to define as it is multi-faceted. There are several conceptual models cited in the literature that attempt to encompass the factors influencing teacher decisions to stay or leave a teaching position. Billingsley's (1993) literature review indicated three major factors influencing teacher retention: external, employment, and personal factors. External factors include retirement incentives, alternatives outside of teaching, availability of other teacher professions, and employment climate. Employment factors were also identified which include work conditions relating to management of work responsibilities, caseloads, class sizes, collegial and parent support, requirements from administration. The final factor that was identified as influencing teacher retention includes personal factors of teacher demographics and background, motivation, and personality (Billingsley, 1993).

Billingsley indicated the need for further studies regarding special education attrition to be highly conceptualized and focused.

Crockett (2002) proposed a conceptual model of work including the Star Model for Special Education Planning. This model addresses five interrelated principles of special education leadership: ethical practice, individual consideration, equity under law, effective programming, and productive partnerships.

Conceptual guidance is also drawn from the work of House (1981). He provided a theoretical framework that classifies social and work support into four dimensions: emotional, appraisal, instrumental, and informational. The four dimensions have been adapted to principal support of special education teachers and are defined as follows for the purpose of this study. Emotional support indicates that principals maintain open communication with teachers, showing appreciation for teacher performance, a personal interest in teacher efficacy, and encourage shared decision-making. Collegiality is nurtured and supported. Instrumental support includes those behaviors in which principals allocate and secure necessary resources for teachers, including materials, classroom space, time for teaching and planning, and help with managing the instructional environment and increased paper work demands. The third dimension, informational support, indicates that principals provide teachers with appropriate staff development opportunities, mentoring and induction programs, guidance and tools necessary to improve classroom instruction and teaching performance. Principals also clarify building policies and procedures and assist with problem-solving. A final dimension of appraisal support is where principals provide constructive feedback regarding teacher performance either formally or informally, including commendation

and encouragement. Gersten, Keating, Yonvanof, and Harniss (2001) proposed that in order to address the problems of special education teacher shortages, one must address the job design and working conditions. Recommendations include a need for greater support from principals, other teachers, and central office administration. This also includes more relevant professional development and opportunities for meaningful conversations with colleagues and administrators. Breakdown caused by dysfunctional relationships between administrators and teachers project a negative school climate (Gersten, Keating, Yonvanof & Harniss, 2001).

Brinson & Steiner (2007) summarized four leader behaviors and attributes that positively influence educational organizations' change efforts:

- (a) Build instructional knowledge and skills.
- (b) Create opportunities for teachers to collaboratively share skills and experience
- (c) Interpret results and provide actionable feedback on teachers' performance,  
and
- (d) Involve teachers in school decision-making.

Emotional support is perceived as very important to special education teachers (Billingsley, 2003). In addition, Littrell (1994) found that emotional support is perceived as most important to special educators and includes showing appreciation, taking an interest in teachers' work, and maintaining open communication. Encouragement throughout the day-to-day endeavors of a classroom teacher is of utmost importance. Special education teachers endure stress as well as regular education teachers when carrying out their mission to meet the needs of special students. Stressors may include increased demands of accountability for student performance, acquisition of instructional

resources, increased demands in data collection and progress monitoring of student performance, and parent and family interactions. Billingsley (1993) found that perceived stress is a powerful predictor of teacher attrition.

Schlichte, et. al. (2005) interviewed five novice teachers about their first-year teaching experiences finding that “surviving the first year in special education requires leadership and direction that comes from a trusted and valued mentor” (p. 36). Although teacher mentors are a requirement of most first-year induction programs, few administrators select mentors based on criteria that are proven to meet the emotional needs of first-year teachers. Themes from this research indicate the importance of mentoring beginning teachers, administrators fostering a collegial environment, administrator awareness of the stressors involved in first-year teaching, establishing relationships with students, and encouraging networking and collaboration (Schlichte, 2005).

Charlotte Advocates for Education (2004) studied the traits and strategies of principals within Charlotte- Mecklenburg Schools, particularly those in high needs schools, where principals had been most successful in retaining teachers while continually improving student achievement. Using pre-determined criteria, twenty principals were identified. To begin identifying principal traits and successful strategies used by them, surveys were designed and sent to these principals. Overall themes from this study include:

- 1). Principals who have been more successful in retaining teachers have characteristics of successful entrepreneurs. They are visionary leaders who conceptualize goals for their schools. In addition, they are risk-takers who use data to make informed

decisions. These principals are described as problem solvers, self-motivated, and passionate about their profession.

2). Successful principals believe strong, instructional, operational, and strategic leadership in their school are equally important.

3). Successful principals understand the value of people and value teachers as individuals—helping them to succeed and grow professionally.

4). Principal preparation and continuing professional development must include practical information as well as theory.

#### *Allocation of Resources*

Administrative support can also include providing the necessary resources to enable teachers to perform their jobs. An article regarding technology resources indicated administrative support can be provided through an array of organizational structures and processes such as mini grants to promote technology use, active technology committees, school improvement teams that connect technology to curriculum and achievement reform, and fund raising through the PTA and other annual events held at the school” (Wizer & McPherson, 2005, p. 16). School-based administration can make a significant impact by helping those teachers who are technology leaders in schools. One key area of support is to honor and value faculty who take the lead in using technology. This can be encouraged by the school administrator regularly discussing technology usage in faculty meetings, providing monetary incentives for teachers who use technology in their teaching, encouraging faculty to enroll in graduate courses in educational and instructional technology, and expecting technology

integration to be a component of classroom observations and long-term teaching plans (Wizer & McPherson, 2005).

Building administrators must develop an environment that encourages teacher autonomy and contributes to the greater school community. “Principals fill many crucial roles in the operation of schools, but none more important than the retention and development of new staff members. Mentoring, action research, and study groups provide a three-prong approach to the induction and retention process” (Watkins, 2005, p. 86).

### Conclusion

Overall the literature indicates that a lack of administrative support can be a determining factor causing teachers to leave. The existing research repeatedly confirms the central role that principals play in developing schools where teachers feel supported and work productively with colleagues; however, there is little research explaining specifically what a principal does to positively or negatively influence teachers’ commitment to the school and the profession. Studies examine teacher attrition factors globally with reasons for leaving the profession, including salaries, inadequate preparation, burnout, and paperwork; however, few focus specifically on the role of the principal's support for special education teachers including emotional support and principal and teacher relationships. The research also does not address the role of principals in supporting special education teachers when principals may not be directly responsible for the supervision of special education teachers housed in their buildings.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

A quantitative approach was applied for a portion of the data collection in this study. Descriptive research included collecting data via survey of special education teachers regarding factors of perceived administrative support across varying disability category programs. The goal was to study perceptions of special education teachers in the support they receive and the influence on their decision to stay in their teaching assignments.

Qualitative measures were employed to determine the principals' perceptions of the administrative support they provide. A phenomenological study was fitting to capture the views and opinions of building principals in how they perceive their role in supporting special education teachers within their buildings. Qualitative research design helps to build a complex, holistic picture that analyzes words, and reports detailed views of the participants in a natural setting (Cresswell, 1998). The goal was to study several principals from various school districts in South Central Pennsylvania to examine the administrator attributes and behaviors that teachers perceive contribute to their decisions to stay.

#### Target Population

The population sample in the first target group comprised special education teachers who are employed in the public school preK-12 special education setting in South Central Pennsylvania. The total population in the target counties is approximately 870 certified special education teachers and 230 building principals. A list of all

currently employed special education teachers and building principals was obtained from the district administrative offices of the twenty-five public school districts located within South Central Pennsylvania as well as those employed by the Intermediate Unit. The Intermediate Unit is one of twenty-nine intermediate units in Pennsylvania, serving preK-12 public school entities and early intervention programs.

#### Method of Sampling

The method of sampling used in this study was a stratified random sampling. A list of intermediate unit and district special education teachers was compiled for those actively teaching in South Central Pennsylvania. Teachers were sorted into four stratifications based upon their special education certification area: cognitive, behavior, and physical/health; blind/visually impaired; Deaf/hard of hearing; and speech/language. After the stratifications occurred, teachers were selected using a table of random numbers for each of the four special education certification categories. A proportionate sample of twenty-five percent from each stratification was selected for survey administration.

For the qualitative portion of the study, a random sample of five male and five female principals in South Central Pennsylvania will be selected to be interviewed by the primary investigator. The principals selected for interview were randomly selected using a table of random numbers from a directory of approximately 230 principals working in the public schools located in South Central Pennsylvania. Care was taken to reduce selection bias by using a quality population sample with adequate size and selected through appropriate randomization techniques. A consent form detailing the purpose of the interview was given to the selected participants prior to the interview. Participants were also given a form to request the research study results.

## Measurement Device

The survey instrument selected to evaluate special education teachers' perceptions of administrative support was the Special Education Teachers' Perception of Administrative Support Questionnaire, developed by William Weiss (2001). The survey instrument was developed based on research from the field. The instrument has established validity. Reliability coefficients are from .3145 to .9046 with an overall alpha score of .9649 (Weiss, 2001). The three-page survey instrument included twenty statements of administrative support behaviors in which participants used a Likert scale to rate each behavior based on anchors of: agree, tend to agree, no opinion, tend to disagree, and disagree. Additionally, participants indicated the three most valued principal behaviors of the twenty statements and their intentions to remain in special education. Demographic information regarding the participant's educational experience, certification status, gender, and disability category taught was also collected.

## Data Collection Methods

After participants were selected for this study, the surveys were mailed to participants with a consent form. The consent form explained the purpose of the study and included contact information for participants who had questions. Participants were also mailed a form to request the research study results.

All surveys were mailed to participants during the month of October 2007. Participants were mailed a self-addressed, stamped envelope for return survey responses. Surveys were assigned a coded participant number to ensure participant confidentiality. Survey responses and the corresponding coded links to each participant were kept in a

locked file cabinet in the investigator's home. Participant responses and coded links were destroyed upon the completion of the study.

Participants selected for the interviews were contacted by phone to schedule a time frame and mutually agreed upon location for the face-to-face interviews. The interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes each, and were audio-taped and transcribed for data collection. During transcription, all identifiers of the interview participants, and those participants spoke about during the interview, were deleted from the transcripts. Signed participant consent indicated the participant's voluntary participation, and that de-identified transcriptions including quotations would be utilized in the final dissertation.

#### Statistical Methods

Descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations were calculated and totaled for each survey statement. In addition, descriptive statistics were calculated for demographic information provided. Independent two-tailed t-tests were performed on the data to determine if there was a significant difference between administrative support areas and teacher gender. A Pearson's product-moment correlation ( $r$ ) was calculated to determine the relationship between administrative support behaviors and teacher intention to remain in special education. A  $p \leq .05$  level of significance was used for this study. An analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine statistical significance between disability category groups including: Life Skills Support, Deaf/Hard of Hearing, Blind/Visually Impaired Support, Physical Support, Speech/Language Support, Multiple Disabilities Support, Learning Support, and Autistic Support.

The interview questions were analyzed using phenomenological data analysis. Units were transformed into clusters of meaning and then tied together to make textural descriptions of the respondents' experiences based upon administrative support described. According to Cresswell (1998), "Phenomenological data analysis proceeds through the methodology of reduction, the analysis of specific statements and themes, and a search for all possible meanings" (p. 52).

#### Time Schedule

July 2007 -- The research proposal was approved.

September 2007 –Institutional Review Board approval from Duquesne University was obtained.

October 2007 – The survey was administered by mail and qualitative interviews were conducted.

November 2007 – The data analysis was performed.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This chapter represents an analysis of the data relevant to the research question investigated in this study. This study examined the relationship between perceived administrative support and special education teachers' intent to remain in the profession, gender, and disability category taught. This study was conducted in order to answer the following question: Is there a relationship between special education teachers' perceived levels of administrative support, teacher retention, gender and disability category taught? This chapter is divided into four sections (1) Demographics; (2) Administrative Support and Future Years Teaching Special Education; (3) Administrative Support and Disability Category Taught; (4) Administrative Support and Teacher Gender.

#### Demographics

Special education teachers in South Central Pennsylvania were selected to participate in this study. The population sample was selected by stratified random sample based upon four special education teacher certification designations in Pennsylvania. These certification designations include: Special Education Teacher, Deaf and hard of hearing; Special Education Teacher, Blind/Visual Impairments; Special Education Teacher, Speech and Language Disabilities; and Special Education Teacher, Cognitive, behavior, and physical/health disabilities. Approximately 870 special education teachers are actively employed in South Central Pennsylvania. Twenty-five percent of the population, from each stratification, was selected to participate in the study. Survey respondents represented both school district and intermediate unit employees. The

respondents who are employed by local school districts comprise 27.2% of the sample population. The respondents who are employed by the intermediate unit comprise 72.8% of the sample population. On October 9, 2007, surveys were mailed to participants. Participants were asked to return the surveys by October 20, 2007. Of the 220 possible respondents, there were 125 valid responses yielding a response rate of about 56.8%. Table 1 represents the number of potential respondents and actual responses for each special education certification designation.

Table 1

*Survey Response Rate: PA Special Education Certification Areas*

Individuals Sampled by Certification Area	Potential number of responses	Number Returned	Percent returned
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	8	8	100.0
Blind/Visual Impairments	9	7	77.8
Speech/Language Disabilities	27	13	48.1
Cognitive, Behavior, and physical health	176	97	55.1
Total	220	125	56.8

Table 2 indicates the disability category taught by the respondents and level of special education service delivery. The respondents were divided into ten disability categories: Autistic support, emotional support, learning support, multiple disabilities support, speech and language support, life skills support, physical support, specialized

preschool, Deaf and hard of hearing support, blind and visually impaired support. All disability categories were represented in the sample except physical support. Survey participants represented three types of special education service delivery: Part-time/Full time classrooms, Resource classrooms, and Itinerant classrooms, represented in Table 3.

Table 2

*Disability Category Taught*

	Percent by Disability Category
Autistic Support	4.0%
Emotional Support	14.4%
Learning Support	40.0%
Multiple Disabilities Support	4.0%
Speech/Language Support	9.6%
Life Skills Support	8.0%
Preschool	7.2%
Deaf/Hard of Hearing Support	6.4%
Blind/Visually Impaired Support	6.4%

Table 3

*Type of Special Education Service Delivery Represented*

Part-time/Full-Time Service Delivery %	Resource Service Delivery %	Itinerant Service Delivery %
57.3	17.7	25

The survey investigated the perceived levels of administrative support that the sample group of special education teachers report that they receive from the building principal. Participants were asked to rate each of the twenty support category statements based upon their perception of support provided by the building principal. The mean rating for each of the twenty support areas are listed in Table 4. Table 5 lists the frequency of the five possible responses. A likert-scale was used to analyze responses based upon the teacher's perception on each administrative support statement indicating: Agree, Tend to Agree, No Opinion, Tend to Disagree, and Disagree.

Table 4

*Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Levels of Administrative Support*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Materials	123	3.36	1.397
Equipment	123	3.42	1.367
Financial Support	123	2.72	1.269
Involves in Decisions	123	3.47	1.326
Provides Collaboration	122	3.59	1.335
Respect and Trust	123	3.83	1.266
Interacts Frequently	123	3.36	1.427
Attends to Feelings	123	3.20	1.349
Recognizes/Appreciates	123	3.67	1.303
Current Information	122	3.48	1.281
Helpful Feedback	123	2.69	1.331

Table 4 (Continued)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Informs of Policies	123	3.84	1.155
Supports Actions/Ideas	123	3.78	1.135
Explains Programs	123	3.54	1.320
Helps Solve Problems	123	3.54	1.243
Interactions with Parents	123	3.63	1.182
Understands Program	122	3.37	1.356
Provides Leadership	123	3.64	1.294
Assistance with Behavior	123	3.79	1.314
Encourages New Ideas	123	3.37	1.308

Table 5

*Likert-Scale Frequency of Responses*

	Agree	Tend to Agree	No Opinion	Tend to Disagree	Disagree	N
Materials	19	21	10	47	28	125
Equipment	17	20	11	47	30	125
Financial Support	33	14	44	24	10	125
Involves in Decisions	13	21	17	41	33	125
Provides Collaboration	14	15	15	43	37	124
Respect and Trust	7	19	11	37	51	125
Interacts Frequently	18	27	3	46	31	125

Table 5 (Continued)

Attends to Feelings	19	21	22	39	24	125
Recognizes/Appreciates	10	19	13	41	42	125
Current Information	12	19	22	41	30	124
Helpful Feedback	31	28	30	21	15	125
Informs of Policies	7	15	12	50	41	125
Supports Actions/Ideas	5	15	21	45	39	125
Explains Programs	11	21	19	36	38	125
Helps Solve Problems	9	20	21	42	33	125
Interactions with Parents	8	12	33	36	36	125
Understands Program	16	24	7	51	26	124
Provides Leadership	11	17	16	42	39	125
Assistance with Behavior	12	11	17	36	49	125
Encourages New Ideas	16	10	42	25	32	125

### Research Hypotheses

#### *Administrative Support and Future Years to Remain Teaching Special Education*

Table 6 shows the relationship between perceived levels of administrative support and teacher intention to remain in the field. Survey responses for the twenty administrative support categories and number of future years to remain teaching special education were correlated using a Pearson r correlation analysis. Table 6 indicates no statistically significant relationship between perceived levels of administrative support and teacher intent to remain in the field at the  $p \leq .05$  level of significance. The Null

Hypothesis is accepted.  $H_{01}$  There will be no statistically significant relationship between perceived levels of administrative support and teacher intent to remain in the field.

Table 6

*Correlations of Administrative Support and Future Years to Remain Teaching*

My building principal...	N	Sig. (2-tailed)	Pearson Correlation
1. provides me with materials I need to do my job properly.	119	0.543	.056
2. provides me with equipment I need to do my job properly.	119	0.643	.043
3. provides me with the financial support I need to do my job.	119	0.769	.027
4. involves me in decisions related to me and my job.	119	0.747	.030
5. Provides opportunities for professional collaboration.	118	0.541	.057
6. has my respect and trust.	119	0.398	.078
7. interacts with me frequently.	119	0.145	.134
8. attends to my feelings and needs.	119	0.090	.156
9. recognizes and appreciates the work I do.	119	0.854	-.017
10. provides current information about teaching and learning.	118	0.485	.065
11. provides helpful feedback about my teaching.	119	0.452	.070
12. informs me about agency and/or school policies.	119	0.968	-.004

Table 6 (Continued)

My building principal...	N	Sig. (2-tailed)	Pearson Correlation
13. supports my actions and ideas.	119	0.123	.142
14. explains reasons behind programs and practices.	119	0.963	.004
15. helps me solve problems.	119	0.235	.110
16. supports me with my interactions with parents.	119	0.336	.089
17. understands my program and what I do.	119	0.404	.077
18. provides leadership about what we are trying to achieve.	119	0.353	0.086
19. provides appropriate assistance when a student's behavior requires it.	119	0.353	0.086
20. encourages me to try new ideas.	119	0.358	0.085

*Administrative Support and Disability Category Taught*

An analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine the difference between administrative support areas and disability category taught. Based upon results of Table 3.1, a significant statistical difference is only shown between disability category taught and administrative support in three areas: Providing Materials (.051)-practically significant, Providing Information about Teaching and Learning (.035), and Understands My Program (.037). Based upon this analysis, the Null Hypothesis is accepted.  $H_{02}$ .

There will be no statistically significant difference between perceived levels of administrative support and disability support category taught.

Table 7

*One Way ANOVA: Administrative Support and Disability Category*

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Materials	Between Groups	29.296	8	3.662	2.011	0.051
	Within Groups	211.216	116	1.821		
	Total	240.512	124			
Equipment	Between Groups	24.270	8	3.034	1.690	0.108
	Within Groups	208.258	116	1.795		
	Total	232.528	124			
Financial	Between Groups	23.269	8	2.909	1.913	0.064
	Within Groups	176.363	116	1.520		
	Total	199.632	124			
Decisions	Between Groups	8.895	8	1.112	0.619	0.760
	Within Groups	208.305	116	1.796		
	Total	217.200	124			
Collaboration	Between Groups	22.317	8	2.790	1.641	0.121
	Within Groups	195.522	115	1.700		
	Total	217.839	123			
Respect	Between Groups	10.818	8	1.352	0.838	0.571
	Within Groups	187.294	116	1.615		
	Total	198.112	124			
Interaction	Between Groups	18.550	8	2.319	1.148	0.337
	Within Groups	234.250	116	2.019		
	Total	252.800	124			
Feelings	Between Groups	5.148	8	0.644	0.338	0.949
	Within Groups	220.580	116	1.902		
	Total	225.728	124			
Recognizes	Between Groups	12.445	8	1.556	0.919	0.504
	Within Groups	196.387	116	1.693		
	Total	208.832	124			
Information	Between Groups	26.345	8	3.293	2.170	0.035
	Within Groups	174.526	115	1.518		
	Total	200.871	123			

Table 7 (Continued)

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Feedback	Between Groups	19.670	8	2.459	1.418	0.196
	Within Groups	201.162	116	1.734		
	Total	220.832	124			
Policies	Between Groups	12.206	8	1.526	1.107	0.364
	Within Groups	159.922	116	1.379		
	Total	172.128	124			
Ideas	Between Groups	12.206	8	1.526	1.204	0.303
	Within Groups	146.962	116	1.267		
	Total	159.168	124			
Explains	Between Groups	13.785	8	1.723	0.994	0.445
	Within Groups	201.127	116	1.734		
	Total	214.912	124			
Solving	Between Groups	12.691	8	1.586	1.033	0.415
	Within Groups	178.109	116	1.535		
	Total	190.800	124			
Parents	Between Groups	11.226	8	1.403	1.007	0.434
	Within Groups	161.574	116	1.393		
	Total	172.800	124			
Understands	Between Groups	29.216	8	3.652	2.143	0.037
	Within Groups	195.969	115	1.704		
	Total	225.185	123			
Leadership	Between Groups	16.340	8	2.043	1.246	0.279
	Within Groups	190.172	116	1.639		
	Total	206.512	124			
Behavior	Between Groups	15.069	8	1.884	1.106	0.364
	Within Groups	197.523	116	1.703		
	Total	212.592	124			
Encouragement	Between Groups	21.206	8	2.651	1.634	0.122
	Within Groups	188.122	116	1.622		
	Total	209.328	124			

Given the nature of the results based upon disability category, the three areas of administrative support which did indicate significance in three disability categories are analyzed. The administrative support statement, “My building principal provides me with materials I need to do my job” is practically significant at .051;  $p \leq .05$ . Table 8 indicates

the Mean is lowest for the Autistic Support disability category. The Mean is highest for the Learning Support disability category.

Table 8

*Descriptive Statistics “Provides me with Materials”*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Materials	Autistic Support	5	2.60	1.817	0.812
	Emotional Support	18	3.06	1.392	0.328
	Learning Support	50	3.92	1.104	0.156
	Multiple Disabilities Support	5	3.00	1.871	0.837
	Speech and Language Support	12	3.08	1.621	0.468
	Life Skills Support	10	3.20	1.549	0.490
	Preschool	9	2.67	1.225	0.408
	Deaf and Hard of Hearing Support	8	3.00	1.195	0.423
	Blind and Visually Impaired Support	8	2.88	1.642	0.581
	Total	125	3.35	1.393	0.125

The administrative support statement, “My building principal provides current information about teaching and learning” is significant at .035;  $p \leq .05$ . Table 9 indicates

the lowest Mean is for the Autistic Support disability category (2.00). The highest Mean is for the Multiple Disabilities Support disability category (4.20).

Table 9

*Descriptive Statistics: Provides Current Information About Teaching and Learning*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Information	Autistic Support	5	2.00	1.225	.548
	Emotional Support	18	3.56	1.247	.294
	Learning Support	49	3.80	1.172	.167
	Multiple Disabilities Support	5	4.20	.837	.374
	Speech and Language Support	12	3.42	1.165	.336
	Life Skills Support	10	3.30	1.418	.448
	Preschool	9	2.78	1.563	.521
	Deaf and Hard of Hearing Support	8	3.38	.916	.324
	Blind and Visually Impaired Support	8	2.88	1.458	.515
	Total	124	3.47	1.278	.115

The administrative support statement, “My building principal understands my program and what I do.” is significant at .037;  $p \leq .05$ . Table 10 indicates the lowest Mean for the Autistic Support disability category (1.60). The highest Mean is for the Life Skills Support disability category (3.90).

Table 10

*Descriptive Statistics: Understands My Program and What I Do*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Understands	Autistic Support	5	1.60	1.342	0.600
	Emotional Support	17	3.53	1.375	0.333
	Learning Support	50	3.54	1.249	0.177
	Multiple Disabilities Support	5	3.40	1.342	0.600
	Speech and Language Support	12	3.58	1.240	0.358
	Life Skills Support	10	3.90	1.370	0.433
	Preschool	9	2.44	1.424	0.475
	Deaf and Hard of Hearing Support	8	3.50	1.069	0.378
	Blind and Visually Impaired Support	8	3.13	1.553	0.549
	Total	124	3.38	1.353	0.122

*Administrative Support and Teacher Gender*

Table 11 and Table 12 indicate administrative support and teacher gender. Table 11 compares the Means of gender in each of the twenty administrative support areas.

Table 11

*Group Statistics for Administrative Support and Teacher Gender*

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Materials	Female	107	3.32	1.431	.138
	Male	18	3.56	1.149	.271
Equipment	Female	107	3.38	1.405	.136
	Male	18	3.67	1.138	.268
Financial	Female	107	2.72	1.287	.124
	Male	18	2.67	1.188	.280
Decisions	Female	107	3.50	1.299	.126
	Male	18	3.39	1.501	.354
Collaboration	Female	107	3.59	1.344	.131
	Male	18	3.61	1.290	.304
Respect	Female	107	3.87	1.244	.120
	Male	18	3.72	1.406	.331
Interaction	Female	107	3.38	1.458	.141
	Male	18	3.22	1.263	.298
Feelings	Female	107	3.22	1.383	.134
	Male	18	3.22	1.166	.275
Recognizes	Female	107	3.70	1.290	.125
	Male	18	3.61	1.378	.325
Information	Female	107	3.54	1.276	.123
	Male	18	3.00	1.225	.297
Feedback	Female	107	2.74	1.362	.132
	Male	18	2.39	1.145	.270
Policies	Female	107	3.89	1.144	.111
	Male	18	3.44	1.338	.315
Ideas	Female	107	3.79	1.155	.112
	Male	18	3.72	1.018	.240
Explains	Female	107	3.64	1.291	.125
	Male	18	3.06	1.392	.328
Solving	Female	107	3.60	1.250	.121
	Male	18	3.33	1.188	.280
Parents	Female	107	3.68	1.186	.115
	Male	18	3.39	1.145	.270

Table 11 (Continued)

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Understands	Female	107	3.40	1.364	.132
	Male	18	3.28	1.320	.311
Leadership	Female	107	3.67	1.316	.127
	Male	18	3.50	1.150	.271
Behavior	Female	107	3.79	1.330	.129
	Male	18	3.78	1.215	.286
Encouragement	Female	107	3.38	1.343	.130
	Male	18	3.33	1.029	.243

Table 12 looks at the comparison of administrative support. The t values for administrative support (equal variances not assumed) are: Materials (-.782), Equipment (-.943), Financial (.173), Decisions (.284), Collaboration (-.051), Respect (.417), Interaction (.489), Feelings (.007), Recognizes (.258), Information (1.685), Feedback (1.164), Policies (1.327), Ideas (.273), Explains (1.652), Solving (.868), Parents (1.001), Understands (.350), Leadership (.577), Behavior (.053), and Encouragement (.181).

Table 12 shows results of Levene's Test for Equality of Variances.

Table 12

*Levene's Equality of Variances: Administrative Support and Teacher Gender*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	
		F	Sig.
Materials	Equal variances assumed	4.379	0.038
	Equal variances not assumed		
Equipment	Equal variances assumed	4.232	0.042
	Equal variances not assumed		
Financial	Equal variances assumed	0.448	0.505
	Equal variances not assumed		
Decisions	Equal variances assumed	1.225	0.270
	Equal variances not assumed		
Collaboration	Equal variances assumed	0.498	0.482
	Equal variances not assumed		

Table 12 (Continued)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	
		F	Sig.
Respect	Equal variances assumed	0.568	0.453
	Equal variances not assumed		
Interaction	Equal variances assumed	1.543	0.216
	Equal variances not assumed		
Feelings	Equal variances assumed	1.716	0.193
	Equal variances not assumed		
Recognizes	Equal variances assumed	0.037	0.848
	Equal variances not assumed		
Information	Equal variances assumed	0.000	0.990
	Equal variances not assumed		
Feedback	Equal variances assumed	3.296	0.072
	Equal variances not assumed		
Policies	Equal variances assumed	1.963	0.164
	Equal variances not assumed		
Ideas	Equal variances assumed	0.469	0.495
	Equal variances not assumed		
Explains	Equal variances assumed	0.165	0.685
	Equal variances not assumed		
Solving	Equal variances assumed	0.020	0.887
	Equal variances not assumed		
Parents	Equal variances assumed	0.150	0.700
	Equal variances not assumed		
Understands	Equal variances assumed	0.380	0.539
	Equal variances not assumed		
Leadership	Equal variances assumed	0.769	0.382
	Equal variances not assumed		
Behavior	Equal variances assumed	0.398	0.529
	Equal variances not assumed		
Encouragement	Equal variances assumed	3.808	0.053
	Equal variances not assumed		

Table 13 indicates that the p value for each of the administrative support areas and gender are not significantly different. The Null Hypothesis  $H_{03}$ : There will be no statistically significant difference between perceived levels of administrative support and teacher gender at the  $p \leq .05$  level of significance is accepted. Since the gender of the population sample is known to be not equal in the population sample, equal variances not assumed were used for interpreting results in Table 13.

Table 13

*t-test for Equality of Means: Administrative Support and Gender*

		t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.
Materials	Equal variances assumed	-0.669	123	0.505	-0.238	0.356
	Equal variances not assumed	-0.782	26.743	0.441	-0.238	0.304
Equipment	Equal variances assumed	-0.811	123	0.419	-0.283	0.349
	Equal variances not assumed	-0.943	26.566	0.354	-0.283	0.301
Financial	Equal variances assumed	0.163	123	0.871	0.053	0.325
	Equal variances not assumed	0.173	24.222	0.864	0.053	0.306
Decisions	Equal variances assumed	0.315	123	0.754	0.106	0.338
	Equal variances not assumed	0.284	21.499	0.779	0.106	0.375
Collaboration	Equal variances assumed	-0.049	122	0.961	-0.017	0.341
	Equal variances not assumed	-0.051	23.713	0.960	-0.017	0.331
Respect	Equal variances assumed	0.455	123	0.650	0.147	0.323
	Equal variances not assumed	0.417	21.715	0.681	0.147	0.353
Interaction	Equal variances assumed	0.441	123	0.660	0.161	0.365
	Equal variances not assumed	0.489	25.273	0.629	0.161	0.329
Feelings	Equal variances assumed	0.006	123	0.995	0.002	0.345
	Equal variances not assumed	0.007	25.762	0.995	0.002	0.306
Recognizes	Equal variances assumed	0.271	123	0.787	0.090	0.332
	Equal variances not assumed	0.258	22.306	0.799	0.090	0.348
Information	Equal variances assumed	1.636	122	0.104	0.542	0.331
	Equal variances not assumed	1.685	21.895	0.106	0.542	0.322
Feedback	Equal variances assumed	1.028	123	0.306	0.349	0.340
	Equal variances not assumed	1.164	25.828	0.255	0.349	0.300
Policies	Equal variances assumed	1.484	123	0.140	0.443	0.299
	Equal variances not assumed	1.327	21.383	0.199	0.443	0.334

Table 13 (Continued)

		t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.
Ideas	Equal variances assumed	0.249	123	0.804	0.072	0.290
	Equal variances not assumed	0.273	24.979	0.787	0.072	0.265
Explains	Equal variances assumed	1.743	123	0.084	0.580	0.333
	Equal variances not assumed	1.652	22.204	0.113	0.580	0.351
Solving	Equal variances assumed	0.837	123	0.404	0.265	0.316
	Equal variances not assumed	0.868	23.791	0.394	0.265	0.305
Parents	Equal variances assumed	0.975	123	0.331	0.293	0.301
	Equal variances not assumed	1.001	23.575	0.327	0.293	0.293
Understands	Equal variances assumed	0.342	122	0.733	0.118	0.346
	Equal variances not assumed	0.350	23.601	0.729	0.118	0.338
Leadership	Equal variances assumed	0.524	123	0.601	0.173	0.330
	Equal variances not assumed	0.577	25.112	0.569	0.173	0.300
Behavior	Equal variances assumed	0.050	123	0.961	0.017	0.335
	Equal variances not assumed	0.053	24.380	0.958	0.017	0.314
Encourage- ment	Equal variances assumed	0.150	123	0.881	0.050	0.332
	Equal variances not assumed	0.181	27.780	0.858	0.050	0.275

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the impact of perceived administrative support on the retention of special education teachers. The chapter includes the determination of acceptance or rejection of hypotheses, draws conclusions from those acceptances and rejections, and discusses implications for further research as a result of this study. Perceived organizational support has been found to be a critical factor in employee sense of well-being, job satisfaction, and affective commitment (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). How special education teachers view the role of the building principal in providing the support they perceive as necessary to be successful in their professions may have implications for educational leaders.

#### Statement of the Problem

The problem investigated in this study is how administrative support impacts a teacher's decision to remain in the special education profession. Specifically, is there a relationship between special education teachers' perceived levels of administrative support and teacher retention, gender and disability category taught?

#### Conclusions

##### *Administrative Support and Intent to Remain Teaching Special Education*

Based upon the statistical analysis of results of the relationship between administrative support and teacher intent to remain teaching special education, no statistically significant relationship was found. Special education teachers were asked to indicate the number of years they anticipated to remain teaching special education.

Teachers who indicated a fewer number of years to remain in teaching special education may not have intended their response to mean they would leave the profession altogether. Some may have had plans for professional advancement to administration or upcoming retirements, indicating fewer years to remain teaching. The number of years intending to stay as a special education teacher needs to be interpreted with caution.

#### *Administrative Support and Teacher Gender*

Of the total sample population, 107 participants were female, while only 18 respondents were male. T-tests indicated no statistically significance of study results based upon teacher gender. One might assume that the population sample investigated in this study reflects a disproportionate number of females because teaching continues to remain a primarily female occupation. Of the 401 thousand special education teachers employed in the United States, 83.5% are female (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006). The study results are contrary to those found in a study of Israeli teacher attrition (Addi-Raccah, 2005) in that the Israeli study revealed that gender made a difference and played a significant role in the dynamics of attrition and occupational destinations for teachers. This difference may be explained by cultural characteristics and gender roles for the Israeli study. For the purpose of this study, the twenty administrative support categories appear to be gender neutral, focusing upon areas of administrative support that could each be reflected upon by survey participants regardless of their gender. It is not evident in this study that gender contributes to a teacher's perception of the administrative support they receive from a building principal.

### *Administrative Support and Disability Category Taught*

When investigating statistical significance between the disability category and administrative support perception, a statistically significant difference was found in administrative support areas of providing materials, providing information and teaching and learning, and understanding the special educator's program. Results of this study indicate that learning support teachers have the highest mean score (3.92) in "My building principal provides me with the materials I need to do my job properly". This can be interpreted as learning support teachers tend to agree that the building principal provides the materials needed to do their jobs properly more so than other disability categories investigated. This is of no surprise when the learning support programs in the population sample are directly operated and funded by the local school districts. Special education teachers involved in learning support programs of the local school districts would generally have access to district resources when learning support students may have more opportunities for inclusion in the general education programs. Learning support students are more likely to be following the general education curriculum with IEPs aligned to Pennsylvania State Standards—the same as the general education population educated in regular education classrooms, especially when inclusion models are representative of learning support students being placed in regular education classrooms with supplemental aids and services. Learning support teachers are held accountable to the same state mandated adequate yearly progress results and scores on high stakes testing measures that are reflected in building and district assessment result report cards. It makes sense that learning support teachers would need to have access to the same materials and resources provided to regular education teachers in order to make

the necessary accommodations for students to be successful in the general education program. It can be assumed that principals would want and need to have more control of the resources and materials provided to district operated special education classrooms when the achievement of the learning support students in their buildings is directly reflected in their building level achievement results.

Results indicate that speech and language support students also have a more positive perception of the principal's role in providing materials with a mean of 3.08. Speech and language impaired students are a high incidence disability category meaning that students may require articulation and language remediation, but are not typically removed from the general education classroom to an alternate special education placement. Services generally only encompass a small fraction of the child's instructional time. Speech and language therapists provide services on an itinerant basis, which indicates that students receiving services in the building are most likely resident students of the district. With the higher incidence of speech and language support students, generally speech and language support therapists are assigned to service a plethora of students throughout the building. This can create more opportunity for regular education involvement of the therapist throughout all grade levels representative of the building and thus more perceived involvement with the building principal and regular education programs.

Contrary to learning support teachers, the disability category with the lowest mean score in reference to providing materials to special education teachers is that of the autistic support teacher. In South Central Pennsylvania, the autistic support teachers are assigned to multi-level classrooms operated by the intermediate unit. Due to the nature

of this low incidence population, autistic support teachers provide services to multi-age and multi-grade level students who may or may not be residents of the district in which the classroom is located. This can create a disconnect between the building administration and autistic support classroom as the students in these low incidence classrooms may not be viewed as “our students” but rather the responsibility of each respective district of residence from which these students come. The high stakes testing results of these students are generally not reported in building level data due to the few numbers when scores are disaggregated so as to protect confidentiality of the students in the low incidence classrooms. Therefore, one can assume a limited focus on the materials and resources necessary to provide an autistic support classroom exists when the achievement of these students is not reflected in building level data reports. These low incidence populations may not be a priority for the building principal when determining which classrooms receive materials and resources as compared to district-operated special education classrooms with resident district students. Of the autistic support teachers surveyed, each has a separate budget which is managed by personnel other than the building principals, leaving autistic support teachers to rely on materials and resources provided by the intermediate unit. Although the autistic support teacher’s resource allocation is different, these teachers continue to be responsible for meeting least restrictive environment regulations requiring inclusion in the general education population and most often adherence to teaching Pennsylvania Academic State Standards to their children. When teachers do not feel they have adequate resources to meet these responsibilities, they are less likely to perceive support as positive.

Data from preschool teachers regarding a principal's role in providing materials also indicates a low mean score (2.67). This can be explained in that specialized preschool programs operated in South Central Pennsylvania are funded differently from those of the school-age population. Specialized preschool programs are funded by federal and state monies allocated for this specific age and population. Specialized preschool programs operate on a different calendar than the typical school-age calendar, some are housed in buildings outside the grade level of the building designation, and are for the most part, self-contained. Preschool children only attend school for a half day, and do not participate in school-age general education classes and programs. It can be assumed that disconnect between building principal involvement and the preschool classroom teachers exists due to the lack of commonality in the discipline itself.

When viewing administrative support in providing materials necessary to do one's job, building principals who were interviewed view their role in supporting special education teachers similar to those of supporting regular education teachers. One building principal commented: "I think my role is not different with special education teachers as it is with any other teacher in that you need to provide, certainly, materials-- all those kinds of things that allow them to do what they need to do." Another principal indicated the necessity of providing resources to meet student educational needs, especially when special education teachers are generally assigned to more than one grade level. "In one grade level group there could be six or seven reading levels, so we make sure that our special education teachers have availability to the Title I resources that are open to everyone in the building. I think the most important thing is that they have access to materials and that they have access to the guidance counselor and any kind of

behavioral support things that are in place for anybody else.” When principals indicate specific resources in which special education teachers should have access to support and remediate instruction for their students, and special education teachers in various support categories do not have access to them; there is an obvious discrepancy between what materials and resources should be provided and what is actually provided to teachers. A special education teacher who perceives adequate materials are not provided, regardless of whom is responsible to provide them, is less likely to feel supported and more likely to look for opportunities in which they feel their needs can be met.

A significant relationship was found between perceived administrative support in “My building principal understands my program and what I do” and responses of teachers based upon disability category taught. The mean response was lowest (1.60) for teachers assigned to autistic support classroom settings. Autistic students can have a broad spectrum of academic and behavioral challenges. When a building administrator has a limited understanding of the many faceted characteristics of an autistic child, they may not be as directly involved with the program, may not have a tolerance for the behavioral challenges exhibited by the students, and may not understand the unique instructional methodology that is employed in the autistic support classroom. When an autistic child requires specific sensory stimulation such as in the addition of specialized apparatus in the classroom, building principals may not understand the rationale for having such equipment available. Additionally, an autistic child may need specialized considerations for scheduling, social and peer interactions, and behavioral accommodations. When a building principal does not have an understanding of the characteristics of special education students with various disabilities, special education

teachers can feel frustrated and perceive the building principal's support in a negative manner. A special education teacher with eleven years of experiences indicates, "My current administrator has no idea what I do in a day—from parent contacts to progress monitoring and all that is in between. They continue to give us additional duties when our plate is full. If they understood special education, it would be beneficial to all."

Since autism is commonly known to encompass a broad spectrum of student disabilities, those with limited understanding may tend to shy away from interaction with these students and not fully appreciate the unique interventions and strategies employed in the classroom. An autistic support teacher with six years of experience indicates: "I do not feel as though most principals, not all, truly understand what goes on within the walls of a special education classroom." It is understandable that special education teachers responsible for autistic support classrooms would feel disconnect with those who do not have a comprehensive understanding of the nature of their jobs due to the complexity of the students with whom they work.

The data provide evidence that special education teachers who teach in the life skills support classrooms perceive that building principals understand their programs and what they do with a mean of 3.90. Life skills support students are generally classified as students with moderate mental retardation and their programs generally involve a functional alternative curriculum. It is not surprising that perception of others understanding this program indicates the highest mean score. Life skills support students engage in classroom instruction that involves acquisition of daily living skills as well as functional, basic academic skills. The name in itself is an indication of a widely accepted definition that children assigned to life skills support programs are more likely to be

focusing on acquired skills that would be easily understood. There is also little mystery to the diagnosis of mental retardation as the diagnosis is based upon intelligence quotient scores and indicators of adaptive behavior skills that are fairly common knowledge to most educators. Although life skills support students can also have unique behavioral and academic challenges, the methodology and instructional practice utilized for these students is more commonly understood in the profession. A life skills support teacher of nine years indicates, "My current principal goes above and beyond to make my class a part of his building and models the positive behavior of acceptance." In some instances, administrative support can vary based upon other aspects of a teacher's perceptions. In some cases, a teacher who has a more self-contained classroom environment may not want what they feel as unnecessary intrusion into their classroom. These teachers tend to "fly under the radar" feeling that their self-contained classrooms are their responsibility and no one else's. These teachers may view a principal's lack of involvement in their programs as welcomed and an indication that special education teachers know their jobs best without outside interference. One life skills teacher with thirty years of experience indicated, "Most principals that I have had contact with tend to leave us alone"; and she tended to agree with the perception that the building principal understands her program and what she does. Depending on the special education teacher's perception of their role and responsibilities, outside the classroom involvement by administrators could be viewed as intrusion, rather than support.

A significant relationship was found between perceived administrative support in "My building principal provides current information about teaching and learning". Again, the disability category with the lowest mean score (2.00) is the autistic support

disability category. The level of expertise required to effectively work with students diagnosed with autism has changed dramatically over the past decade and as the incidence of students diagnosed with autism has grown. The current analogy in the autistic community is that autism is a puzzle to which we do not have all the pieces. Autistic support classrooms often have specialized training and consultants available to them. This aspect tends to indicate that current information on teaching and learning would come from those with specialized skills and that traditional and common learning approaches and information would not be applicable in an autistic support classroom. Building principals would not typically have this level of expertise in teaching and learning practice that would directly impact meeting the needs of autistic support students. Although a building principal most likely would be able to provide current information on teaching and learning for the general education population, the building principal would most likely not be a source of information for the specialized curriculum, adaptations, and strategies necessary to instruct students with autism. Autism is a field with much speculation in diagnosis and treatment options, varying from a medical perspective as well as educational treatment plans.

#### Limitations

The first limitation of this study is that 72.8% of the study participants were employees of one intermediate unit. Although participants' classrooms are housed in public school buildings, these special education teachers and their programs are supervised by intermediate unit supervisors of special education, not building principals. The manner in which these special education teachers view the role of the building principal is varied. Participants may not have viewed the administrative support areas of

the survey instrument as a direct responsibility of the building principal, but rather the responsibility of their intermediate unit supervisor; thus lessening the significance the building principal may have in providing support.

A second limitation of the study is that the study was conducted using a survey instrument. Survey data collection is only as accurate as the participant's comprehension of the survey instrument and may not be representative of the population. Survey data is also self-reporting data in which the participants indicate the responses they want to share and is not necessarily guaranteed accuracy of what actually takes place or their true perceptions.

Special education teachers have varied assignments in that some working in inclusive environments with regular education staff may feel more closely connected with the building level administration and may perceive their role more closely related to building decision-making, collaboration, and resources. Those in self-contained environments, with limited interactions throughout the general education population, may view themselves as isolated and therefore not as closely connected to building level interactions including those of the administration. A final limitation of this study is that teachers may have based their responses on the administrator to whom they report, not necessarily the building principal where their classroom and services are provided. Itinerant special education teachers may have chosen to reflect upon a building principal that they feel supports their needs the most, and their responses may not be a true reflection of the building level support they receive overall.

## Implications for Further Research

Additional research is suggested to promote a better understanding of the relationship between administrative support and teachers' intentions to remain in the special education field. The administrative structure and organizational responsibilities are varied in public school organizations. Supervision of special education teachers may not be directly conducted by a building level administrator. Other administrators in public school systems oversee the professional development, instructional methodology, and fiscal resources of special education teachers including central office administrators, itinerant supervisors of special education, pupil service directors, superintendents and assistant superintendents. The researcher suggests that further study of administrative support needs include study of the relationships special education teachers have with these other administrators and how this relationship impacts their satisfaction in the profession. How teachers are supervised and directed appears to be an important aspect of how teachers view the administrative support provided to them. Principals may not view special education teachers employed by other organizations as within their realm of responsibility. Consequently, special education teachers may not view the building principal as having a key role in supporting their classrooms and students. For the most part, principal's roles are viewed as secondary to that of the special education supervisor. A veteran district teacher of 19 years indicates, "At my school, the principal no longer has an active role in the affairs of the special education department. My special education supervisor is in charge of everything that pertains to our special needs students." During qualitative interviews, most principals spoke about their interactions with the school's learning support teachers, those directly employed by the school district

in which the classrooms and services were provided. One principal, when asked about the support provided to special education teachers, referenced answers immediately to those teachers employed by the district stating, “We have inclusion now, so a lot of our teachers are, well all of my special education teachers for learning support students, are out into the regular education classrooms. As far as the teachers go, my role in supporting the teachers is to try to give them as much if not more financially depending on the budget and the needs for their classrooms, for their students, for their teaching.”

An additional area for further study includes the administrator’s preparation, knowledge, and background in special education service delivery. A building administrator who is highly skilled in special education may view their role to support special education teachers differently than those with limited backgrounds in the field. When reviewing the qualitative data from principal interviews, those who were not previously special education teachers had limited formalized training in special education, and yet were often the designated administrator to attend IEP conferences and to handle student discipline matters for exceptional students. Most principals indicated their experience is drawn from prior teaching in regular education environments in which students with disabilities were included for instruction or from their involvement in instructional support and student assistance programs. Some others stated attending district and intermediate unit workshops increased their knowledge of special education practices; since, they have had limited exposure to specific special education knowledge in their administrative certification course work. One principal commented, “The only training I’ve had would have been in-services that I attended at my previous school district. I can’t say that I’ve had an intensive background in special education.”

Administrative support is a multi-faceted concept and one that lends itself to teacher satisfaction in their work assignments. When teachers are comfortable and confident in their assignments, they are less likely to feel dissatisfied and have a desire to leave. Acknowledgement of teacher perceptions of the support provided by building level administrators can contribute to a better understanding of teacher satisfaction and retention in the special education field. Knowing what special education teachers feel to be important support aspects can help administrators identify where to concentrate their efforts during both formal and informal interactions. Results from this study indicate that further attention should be given to ensure equity in material and resource allocation to special education teachers—regardless of their employing entity. When special education teachers are accountable to increase student achievement at all levels and disability categories, administrators need to acknowledge their role of ensuring teachers have access to the materials necessary to meet intended educational outcomes for all students.

Study results also draw attention to the perception that building principals may require additional professional development in areas of specific low incidence disability categories—understanding instructional methodologies, strategies, and characteristics of special needs learners so as to provide optimum learning opportunities for all students. Supported by the qualitative evidence of this study, building principals tend to gain their expertise in special education through on the job experience, rather than specific and planned preparation through their route to principal certification. With special education growing as a litigious field, governed by federal and state legislation, and increased accountability for all students to achieve proficiency; it is highly important that building level administrators are fully cognizant of their actions in providing support to special

education teachers. Principal preparation programs have traditionally included overviews of school law as related to IDEA and general characteristics of exceptional learners. According to Bays, (2004, p. 257) , “If school principals cannot be expected to hold expertise in every content or pedagogical areas, they can be expected to use their knowledge and skills to provide facilitative conditions for teaching and for fostering positive learning outcomes for a wide ranges of learners.” Principals need knowledge of effective instruction, skills in supervising and evaluating specialized instruction for students with disabilities, skills in helping to implement IEP team decisions, and the ability to support teachers in translating instruction intervention research into practice (Bays, 2004). Administrators who understand the complex nature of the work and provide appropriate supports to teachers will be more successful in keeping teachers with specialized expertise in the field (Billingsley, 1993).

It is important to note that special education services provided in South Central Pennsylvania are done so in cooperation with the local intermediate unit. The intermediate unit represented in the study sample provides classrooms for low incidence disability categories in cooperation with the twenty-five constituent school districts located within the intermediate unit. Intermediate unit and school district agreements, called “fair share” in local terms, indicate that special education classrooms operated in a school district should have opportunity and access to the same materials and resources as those given to the regular education teachers in the building in which the classrooms are housed. This is not always the practice as perceived by intermediate unit survey participants.

In an era of accountability for student achievement, teachers must feel their support needs are being met in order to be successful with the students in their charge. The notion that teachers who are satisfied in their teaching assignments would therefore be more likely to stay in their current assignments has many dimensions. When the costs of special education teacher turnover are on the rise, it makes sense to address areas of teacher satisfaction within the profession in order to make necessary improvements to address special education teacher needs. When special education teachers surveyed were asked to rank their most valued administrative support areas from the list of twenty support topics, the following administrative support areas were noted: My building principal involves me in decisions related to me and my job; My building principal recognizes and appreciates the work I do; My building principal provides appropriate assistance when a student's behavior requires it; and My building principal supports me with my interactions with parents. Although teachers indicated these areas as the most valued, the areas of providing materials, understanding program, and providing information about teaching and learning were not among the most valued support areas indicated.

The teacher's perception of administrative support lends itself to job satisfaction and success with students. The grass is always greener on the other side, an old cliché, can be equated with teachers who find their administrative support needs not being met, as those who would consider looking elsewhere. When employees feel successful and satisfied, they have little reason to explore other professional opportunities.

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**Appendix A**  
**Survey Instrument**

## Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of Administrative Support

**Directions:** Below are statements relating to administrative support needs of special education teachers. Indicate your level of agreement for each statement with an “X” in the category that best describes your response.

“The Building Principal...”	Agree	Tend to Agree	No Opinion	Tend to Disagree	Disagree
1. provides me with materials I need to do my job properly.					
2. provides me with equipment I need to do my job properly.					
3. provides me with the financial support I need to do my job.					
4. involves me in decisions related to me and my job.					
5. Provides opportunities for professional collaboration.					
6. has my respect and trust.					
7. interacts with me frequently.					
8. attends to my feelings and needs.					
9. recognizes and appreciates the work I do.					
10. provides current information about teaching and learning.					
11. provides helpful feedback about my teaching.					
12. informs me about agency and/or school policies.					
13. supports my actions and ideas.					
14. explains reasons behind programs and practices.					
15. helps me solve problems.					
16. supports me with my interactions with parents.					
17. understands my program and what I do.					
18. provides leadership about what we are trying to achieve.					
19. provides appropriate assistance when a student’s behavior requires it.					
20. encourages me to try new ideas.					

**Which three (3) of the twenty areas of support do you value the most from your principal? List three numbers that correspond to the area of support from the list above:**

--	--	--

**Part II:**

**Directions: Fill in or check the items that describe your situation. This information will be used only to describe the responding group and to compare group responses.**

**EXPERIENCE (enter one number)**

Number of years as a special education teacher

Total years teaching experience

**GENDER (check one)**

Female

Male

**PRESENT GRADE LEVEL (check one box in which you spend the majority of your time)**

Preschool

Elementary School

Middle School

High School

**PRESENT TEACHING ENVIRONMENT (check one box)**

Full Time/Part Time Classroom Setting

Itinerant Setting

Resource Classroom Setting

**PRESENT STUDENT DISABILITY CATEGORY TAUGHT (check one box)**

Autistic support

Blind and visually impaired support

Emotional support

Deaf and hard of hearing impaired support

Learning support

Life skills support

Multiple disabilities support

Physical support

Speech and language support

**FUTURE PLANS (enter one number)**

Number of years you plan to remain teaching special education

**Part III:**

**Directions:** Below is a set of statements related to professional satisfaction. Please indicate your level of agreement by placing an “X” in the category that best describes our response.

Questions Relating to Satisfaction	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neutral	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied
How satisfied are you with your choice of profession?					
How Satisfied are you with your current teaching assignment?					

**Part IV:**

**Directions:** If you have any additional comments regarding your experience with principals and the support you have received, state them in the space provided.

**Part V: Additional Employment Data**

**Directions:** Please indicate your employing organization and certificate held for your current teaching assignment.

**EMPLOYER (check one box)**

- School District
- Intermediate Unit

**CERTIFICATION STATUS HELD FOR YOUR CURRENT ASSIGNMENT**

**(check one box)**

- Special Education Teacher, Blind/Visual Impairments
- Special Education Teacher, Cognitive, behavior, and physical/health disabilities
- Special Education, Deaf and hard of hearing
- Special Education, Speech and language disabilities
- Other: Emergency/Provisional Certificate

**Thank you for completing this survey.  
Please fold and return only the survey in  
the envelope provided.**

**Appendix B**  
**Survey Consent Form**



# DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

**TITLE:** Maximizing Special Education Teacher Retention: Teachers' Perceptions of Administrative Support in preK-12 Public Schools as Implications for Improvement

**INVESTIGATOR:** Dawn R. Showers  
340 Middle Road Aspers, PA 17304,  
(717) 677-7336

**ADVISOR: (if applicable:)** Dr. Robert Bartos  
College of Education & Human Services  
717-477-1123 ext. 3015

**SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** This study is being performed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program for Educational Leaders at Duquesne University.

**PURPOSE:** You are being asked to voluntarily participate in a research project that seeks to investigate administrative support and the retention of special education teachers. Participants are asked to complete a survey, which will require no longer than a total of 10-15 minutes, and return the survey to the researcher.

These are the only requests that will be made of you.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** There are no risks greater than those encountered in everyday life. This study will provide a better understanding of the role administrative support plays in the retention of special education teachers in the public school setting. This information may be used to enhance the skills of principals in providing administrative support that is meaningful and beneficial to special education teachers.

**COMPENSATION:**

There will be no compensation for participation in this study. Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you. An envelope is provided for return of your response to the investigator. Contact information is provided for any questions you may have.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Your name will never appear on any survey or research instruments. Surveys will be coded by number for the purpose of tracking returned surveys only. No identity will be made in the data analysis. The coded surveys will be stored in a locked file in the researcher's home. Your response(s) will only appear in statistical data summaries. All materials will be destroyed 1 year after the completion of the research.

**RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:**

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time.

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS:**

A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:**

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary; and if the survey is completed and returned, it will be processed and considered my consent to participate.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Dawn Showers, Principal Investigator at 717-677-7336; Dr. Robert Bartos, Advisor, 717-477-1123 ext. 3015; and Dr. Paul Richer, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board 412-396-6326.

## **Appendix C**

### **Principal Interview Questions**

## **Building Principal Interview Questions**

As a building principal, how do you view your role in supporting special education teachers within your building?

What activities, experiences, and support is necessary to provide to novice teachers?

What experience do you have in working with special needs students?

How do you foster collegial learning communities within your building?

How often do you interact with the special education teachers in your building- formally? Informally?

Do you do anything differently for special education teachers and regular education teachers?

What administrative support do you perceive to be the most important to special education teachers?

What preparation and training have you had involving special education service delivery?

**Appendix D**  
**Interview Consent Form**



# DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

- TITLE:** Maximizing Special Education Teacher Retention: Teachers' Perceptions of Administrative Support in preK-12 Public Schools as Implications for Improvement
- INVESTIGATOR:** Dawn R. Showers  
340 Middle Road Aspers, PA 17304,  
(717) 677-7336
- ADVISOR: (if applicable:)** Dr. Robert Bartos  
College of Education & Human Services  
717-477-1123 ext. 3015
- SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** This study is being performed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program for Educational Leaders at Duquesne University.
- PURPOSE:** You are being asked to voluntarily participate in a research project that seeks to investigate administrative support and the retention of special education teachers. You will be asked to allow me to interview you at a mutually agreed upon date, time, and location. The face-to-face interviews will be audio-taped, transcribed and should last approximately 30 minutes.
- These are the only requests that will be made of you.
- RISKS AND BENEFITS:** There are no risks greater than those encountered in everyday life. This study will provide a better understanding of the role administrative support plays in the retention of special education teachers in the public school setting.

**COMPENSATION:**

There will be no compensation for participation in this study; however, participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you. An envelope is provided for return of your consent form to the investigator.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

To protect participant confidentiality, interview audio tapes will be kept in a locked file in the researcher's home. Audio tapes will be destroyed after transcription. Audio tapes will be transcribed, removing all identifiers of your responses and those you may speak about. I will share de-identified transcript content and this content may be utilized in the final dissertation.

**RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:**

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time.

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS:**

A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:**

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Dawn Showers - Principal Investigator 717-677-7336; Dr. Robert Bartos, Advisor, 717-477-1123 ext. 3015; and Dr. Paul Richer, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board 412-396-6326.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date