2014

Determining Effective Leadership Competencies of School-based Administrators Overseeing Special Education Programs Within Virginia Public Schools

Patrice A. Thompson

Recommended Citation

Determining Effective Leadership Competencies of School-based Administrators Overseeing

Special Education Programs within Virginia Public Schools

by

Patrice A. Thompson

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Leadership Studies

Dr. Edward Polloway, Dissertation Chair

Dr. Sally Selden, Committee Member

Dr. Roger Jones, Committee Member

Lynchburg College

May, 2014

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all the people who have to work hard to "get it." Things may not

come easy, but with hard work and dedication the impossible are made possible.

Acknowledgements

To God, thank you for leading and guiding me in the right direction. Without you, none of this would have been possible. This process has strengthened my faith.

I would like to personally thank my committee members for helping guide me through this enduring, yet rewarding process. Dr. Ed. Polloway, I am forever grateful for your patience and gentle guidance. Dr. Sally Selden, thank you for pushing me beyond my limits of quantitative analyses. Dr. Roger Jones, thank you for believing in me and showing me guidance through my graduate coursework at Lynchburg College.

To my mom, words cannot express how grateful I am of your unwavering love. You have always believed in me and taught me that I could rise above the rest with hard work and effort. I love you to the moon and back!

To my dad, thank you for planting this seed a long time ago and speaking it into existence. It was you that started my quest to find a doctoral program.

To my brother, thank you for paving the way for me to get an education. Your support has always helped me to strive to do my best.

To my aunt Joyce, thank you for teaching me my multiplication facts and how to be a public speaker at a very young age. You are one of my role models and your willingness to edit my work has helped me to reach this point.

To Cory, thank you for putting up with my long hours of studying. Your patience helped keep the stress down and your support kept me going.

To Maria, thank you for your words of encouragement whenever I felt defeated. You will always be my favorite "boss."

To Lynchburg College, thank you for an elite education. From an undergraduate degree, Master's degree, certificate program, and now a doctorate degree, I am pleased with the education you have provided.

To all family, friends, and co-workers, I am thankful for your continued support.

Abstract

The effective leadership of special education programs is an essential component in providing students with disabilities access to a free and appropriate public education. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 speaks to the requisite skills needed for the leadership of special education programs. Several studies have suggested competencies that are needed for effective special education leadership. The Council for Exceptional Children (1997) created a list of competencies that special education administrators should have in the repertoire. Wigle and Wilcox (1999) studied these competencies in relation to special education administrator's proficiency level with each competency. In addition, Pontius (2010) researched the topic of special education leadership and training. To study this area further, a mixed methods study was conducted to determine the competencies needed for the effective leadership of special education programs within public schools. Virginia special education directors and identified effective school-based special education administrators were surveyed. Survey participants were asked to rate the essential nature of 25 special education leadership competencies that were modified from the Council for Exceptional Children's (1997) list of special education leadership competencies. In addition, the school-based special education administrators were asked to rate their personal level of proficiency on each of the competencies. Quantitative analyses indicated that perceptions of competencies needed for the effective leadership of special education programs were similar between the two survey participant groups. In addition, training experiences had an impact on the self-reported proficiency levels of competencies rated by school-based special education administrators.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Special education is an integrated entity within the kindergarten through twelfth grade (k-12) public educational system. The Federal law that regulates special education within the public educational system is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). States that accept federal funding are required to adhere to IDEA. Virginia receives federal funds; therefore, this state is required to follow federal mandates. IDEA requires that students identified as having a disability have access to a free and appropriate public education. More specifically, the law mandates that students who are identified as having a disability that impacts educational performance receive specialized instruction in order to gain access to a free and appropriate public education (IDEA, 2004; Lashley, 2007; Yell, Katsiyannis, & Bradley, 2003).

The specialized instruction that students receive under IDEA is closely monitored and regulated by the state in which the student is being educated. Therefore, each local school division within the state must hire staff to oversee and run these specialized programs. The availability of qualified personnel to lead these programs is essential (IDEA, 2004; Conderman & Pedersen, 2005).

This chapter will outline the reason why more research is needed on effective leadership competencies of school-based administrators who oversee special education programs within Virginia public schools. Likewise, the purpose of this particular study will be presented along with research questions that will be answered as a result of the research. Furthermore, terms that are frequently used in the study will be defined in this section.

Statement of the Problem

Crockett, Becker, and Quinn (2009) researched the literature related to special education administration between 1970 and 2009. Their study explored themes throughout history related

to this topic by using the abstract portions of journal articles. The information from their study indicated that special education administration had not been deeply researched over this period of time. Likewise, the themes of the research had not been consistent. Personnel training, professional development, and special education law were among the most researched topics in special education leadership with 35 percent of articles relating to these topics. In contrast, 24 percent of studies were related to special education leadership roles, responsibilities, preparation, and development (Crockett et al., 2009). Crockett et al., (2009) called for more research related to special education administration, specifically related to special education leadership roles, responsibilities, and job training.

From a practice perspective, IDEA (2004) speaks specifically to the requisite skills of leaders of special education within public k-12 schools. These skills include, "instructional leadership, behavioral supports in the school and classroom, paperwork reduction, promoting improved collaboration between special education and general education teachers, assessment and accountability, ensuring effective learning environments, and fostering positive relationships with parents" (Sec. 662(a)(7)). Administrators of special education are required under this law to provide appropriate educational services for students with disabilities. To ensure that this is done, the law states that professional development be provided in these areas for such leaders (IDEA, 2004; Lashley, 2007).

Special education administrators are responsible for ensuring that special education programs are provided and that special education law is followed in order for students with disabilities to access a free and appropriate public education. The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE, 2006) has outlined what is required to provide a free and appropriate public education to students with disabilities. Special education litigation is among the reasons why special

education leadership within public schools should be studied (Protz, 2005; Wellner, 2012). For example, Protz (2005) conducted a study in a southeastern state on the knowledge of principals and assistant principals related to special education law. Participants gave the highest ratings to the need for more training and the importance of special education law. She also assessed principals' knowledge of special education law by scoring answers to scenarios in which participants answered. She suggested that principals are inconsistent in their knowledge of special education law. Protz (2005) attributed this to the lack of training in special education before assuming school leadership positions.

Special education leadership is essential to the education of students with disabilities. In the state of Virginia, special education leadership within schools is provided by persons with supervision and administration endorsements. In order to obtain this endorsement in Virginia, an individual must have a master's degree from an accredited college or university, completed three years of full-time and successful teaching, satisfied the requirements of the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA), completed an approved graduate program in administration and supervision, and completed 320 internship hours in the field. Yet, special education endorsements or training are not required for these leadership positions (Virginia Board of Education, 2011). Due to the lack of special education training needed for leadership in special education, there is a need to establish a set of universal competencies that are necessary for special education leaders to have in order to be effective at leading special education programs within schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the factors that influence the effective leadership of special education programs within Virginia public schools. The information

derived from this study can then be used to establish a set of most essential leadership competencies related to special education that should be acquired by special education leaders and training experiences that can aid in the development of effective special education leaders. Therefore, comparisons will be made from data gathered from special education directors and school-based special education administrators on competencies that are necessary for the effective leadership of special education programs within schools. In addition, this study will seek to determine if training experiences predict the effective leadership of administrators who oversee special education programs within Virginia public schools.

Research Questions

This study is designed to answer two research questions.

R_1: Do special education directors' perceptions of effective competencies related to the leadership of school-based special education programs differ from the perceptions of school-based special education administrators related to the same set of competencies?

R_2: Do training experiences predict school-based special education administrators' self-reported ratings on effective leadership competencies?

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms have been defined to clarify and provide meaning to the information presented.

Child Study (referred to as case study within the paper) means a team of people, including the parents of a child who is suspected of having a learning impairment, convene to develop classroom interventions before the child is referred for testing.

Collaboration is referred to as "how we go about working together" (Jones, Blevin, Barrack, & Abrams, 2007, p. 3).

Competency refers to a skill set needed to effectively carry out job duties and responsibilities.

Evidence-based practices are practices that have been studied and measureable that show a strong cause-and-effect relationship between an intervention and academic or behavioral goals (Kretlow & Blatz, 2011).

Free and appropriate public education:

Special education and related services that: 1. Are provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge; 2. Meet the standards of the Virginia Board of Education; 3. Include an appropriate preschool, elementary school, middle school or secondary school education in Virginia; and 4. Are provided in conformity with an individualized education program (VDOE, 2010, p. 67).

General curriculum:

The same curriculum used with children without disabilities adopted by a local educational agency, schools within the local educational agency or, where applicable, the Virginia Department of Education for all children from preschool through secondary school. The term relates to content of the curriculum and not to the setting in which it is taught (VDOE, 2010, p. 67).

General Education Setting, also referred to as the regular education environment, is the traditional setting where children receive instruction to meet state standards.

Inclusion is referred to as "a philosophy or set of beliefs based on the idea that students with disabilities have the right to be members of classroom communities with nondisabled peers, whether or not they can meet the traditional expectations of those classrooms" (Jones et al., 2007, p. 4)

Individualized Education Plan (IEP):

A written statement for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a team meeting. The IEP specifies the individual educational needs of the child and what special education and related services are necessary to meet the child's educational needs (VDOE, 2010, p. 68).

Least restrictive environment (LRE):

To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and that special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the general educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in general classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (VDOE, 2010, p. 69).

Research-based practices are practices that have been studied using a single study or preliminary data on the effectiveness of these practices (Kretlow & Blatz, 2011).

Roles are referred to as responsibilities associated with job duties.

School-based special education administrators (SBSEAs) are personnel who are responsible for the leadership of special education programs within schools.

Special education administrators are personnel who lead special education programs at the school and division levels.

Special education directors are personnel who oversee special education programs at the school division level.

Special education setting is the place where students with disabilities receive specialized instruction to meet individual needs.

Special educators are personnel within schools who teach students with disabilities.

   The study that follows will be organized in the following manner. A review of the literature associated with special education leadership competencies, roles, and training will be discussed in chapter 2. Then, the methods related to answering the research questions will follow in chapter 3. Chapter 4 will include research findings, followed by chapter 5 that will discuss the findings and implications for future research and practice. A list of references used in the study will be included followed by an appendix of information referenced throughout the study.

CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In order to determine factors that are associated with the successful leadership of special education programs within public schools, this chapter will frame the current research on special education administrators within schools as well as special education directors who oversee local school divisions' special education programs. These leaders include principals, assistant principals, special education directors, special education administrators and/or any individual within the school division that are responsible for the leadership of special education programs. The literature refers to all of these individuals when describing special education leadership.

The search for literature related to this topic consisted of a search of key words using the Lynchburg College library system. Search engines utilized were ERIC, Education Research Complete, Proquest Dissertations and Theses Full Text, and the web. Key words and phrases used to find relevant research materials were: (a) special education principals, (b) special education administrators, (c) principal/preparation/training, (d) effective SPED leadership, (e) critical role/SPED principals, (f) principal/special education, (g) training/special education directors, (h) competencies/special education directors, and (i) special education directors. In addition, reference lists from articles and supplemental materials from professionals in the field of special education and administration were used to gather relevant information for this study.

Consequently, this chapter will first define the roles of these leaders as they relate to their public school job responsibilities in special education. Second, research on competencies of effective special education principals and directors will be reviewed. Third, research on the preparation and training of the individuals leading and overseeing special education programs will be analyzed. Lastly, factors in special education leadership, within schools, will be

examined that may lead to the effective programming and instruction for students with disabilities to access a free and appropriate public education.

Special Education Leadership Roles

According to DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, and Walther-Thomas (2004), special education programs are to be integrated within the public educational system and should be designed and monitored to ensure that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education. IDEA (2004) requires that leaders in special education are trained to be instructional leaders, provide behavioral supports, promote collaboration, ensure adequate learning environments, and foster positive relationships with parents. The roles of these individuals are complex and essential to the implementation of effective special education programs. School-based special education administrators (SBSEAs) and special education directors have a common goal of ensuring effective special education programming; however, each role takes on different aspects.

Roles of School-based Special Education Administrators

School-based special education administrators (SBSEAs) are charged with the role of promoting the success of all students (Bertrand & Bratberg, 2007). This role is critical. According to DiPaola et al. (2004), school leaders must ensure that students with disabilities receive an appropriate education. This includes overseeing the instruction of students with disabilities where research-based practices are used to improve student performance (DiPaola et al., 2004; Boscardin, 2007).

In addition to the instructional leadership role of SBSEAs, these individuals are also responsible for federal and state law compliance with regards to educational programs of students with disabilities (DiPaola et al., 2004). Yell et al. (2003) added that principals who

oversee special education programs are responsible for being involved in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process in order to ensure that the plans are legally sound documents that take into account all aspects of the educational program of a student with a disability, while upholding special education law and regulations.

Through the IEP process, SBSEAs are responsible for ensuring that the educational program outlined in the plan best meets the needs of the student to access a free and appropriate public education. An SBSEA's role is often combined with the demands of general education and special education. There is a current trend in special education to educate students with disabilities with their peers who are non-disabled. SBSEAs are required to ensure inclusion of students with disabilities is occurring within their schools. Therefore, SBSEAs are often overseeing general education programs as well. They are the instructional leaders for both. Therefore, they often act as facilitators of the educational planning process to focus on specialized instruction that can be provided within the general education setting (Boscardin, 2005).

Frick, Faricloth, and Little (2013) in a phenomenological-like research study where they interviewed 13 elementary principals, suggested that special education leadership is a "balancing act." SBSEAs are charged with the responsibility of ensuring the needs of individual students are met and that the entire student body is afforded with the opportunities of a safe, nurturing, and adequate education. Participants in this study stated that they have to think of the needs of all students as well as the needs of students with disabilities when making decisions. It is their ethical and moral responsibility as a school leader to respond to the needs of all students in their schools.

Wigle and Wilcox (1999) noted that SBSEAs are responsible for ensuring that students with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment. The need for specialized instruction can often be met in the general education setting when an administrator who oversees special education programs can provide guidance through the planning process to ensure programming in both the general education and special education settings are tailored to meet the needs of students (Wigle & Wilcox, 1999). According to Conderman and Pedersen (2005), SBSEAs should lead general educators and special educators through the successful implementation of programs that serve all students in the school.

Stevenson-Jacobson, Jacobson, and Hilton (2006) conducted a study on SBSEAs and competencies that were essential to their leadership. They sent a questionnaire to principals who belonged to the Illinois Principals Association. Eighty-one questionnaires were returned with data that could be used in the study. Participants were grouped according to principals who had special education training and those that did not have training. Results from the first part of the questionnaire concluded that more principals with special education licensure endorsements were responsible for a majority of the special education leadership responsibilities within their buildings than were principals without this endorsement. They spent more than 11 hours of their 40-hour work week on special education leadership. In contrast, principals who were not endorsed in special education reported spending the least amount of time on special education related issues. The items that they most often were involved in were pre-referrals to special education within their schools, meaning that principals were involved in meetings to determine if students needed special education services.

Stevenson-Jacobson et al. (2006) suggested that SBSEAs' roles consisted of their abilities to adhere to rules and regulations, monitor instruction and curriculum, and foster collaborative

and professional staff and community interactions in special education. In addition, their roles included evaluating special education staff.

SBSEAs who oversee special education programs require proper guidance from special education directors. Therefore, special education directors' roles are essential to the implementation of special education programs that are offered within schools.

Roles of Special Education Directors

According to Boscardin (2005), special education directors' roles have taken shape since 1975 with the authorizations and reauthorizations of special education law. Currently special education directors monitor each school's compliance with regards to special education law within the school division. Boscardin (2005) further noted that they support school-based special education administrators (SBSEAs) by fostering collaboration among staff, general education teachers, special education teachers, and administrators to ensure successful implementation of special education programs, while maintaining compliance with federal law and state regulations.

Thomas (2007) stated that special education directors are responsible for creating a culture where special education personnel are supported, thus creating an environment where students with disabilities are able to access a free and appropriate public education. In addition, they are responsible for ensuring that evidence-based practices are being utilized within schools in the division. He described special education directors' roles at times as daunting due to the demands of balancing the needs of the school division and of individual students to meet federal and state laws.

The roles of special education directors include enforcing federal legislation and holding schools accountable for compliance. Therefore, they are responsible for ensuring that The No

Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2001) is understood and provisions are being met. NCLB requires that school divisions enforce accountability measures in order for all children in public education to succeed.

In 2011, the USDOE announced that states could request flexibility for some of the provisions of NCLB (2001). Consequently, Virginia was granted a waiver in which a six year plan was developed to reduce the achievement gaps of subgroups in order for schools to receive accreditation. One subgroup is students with disabilities. By year six of this plan, schools need 73 percent of students with disabilities to pass statewide assessments as one of the criteria to meet accreditation standards (Pyle & Grimes, 2012). The NCLB waiver (2012) has implications for how special education directors will ensure that schools within the division are preparing students with disabilities for standardized testing with the appropriate specialized instruction and accommodations.

As a result of NCLB (2001), NCLB waiver (2012), and IDEA (2004), special education directors are charged with the role of ensuring that federal law and state provisions of the law are being fully implemented within public schools. They are responsible for knowing and understanding the law and the implications on the public schools in which they serve (NCLB, 2001; IDEA, 2004; Lashley, 2007).

Collaborative Roles of Special Education Directors and School-based Administrators

Passman (2008) stated that special education directors and school-based special education administrators (SBSEAs) possess the same skill sets. Boscardin (2005) stated that special education directors and SBSEAs' roles are collaborative in nature. A special education director's role is to facilitate and/or lead special education programs in all schools within the division. SBSEAs rely on these directors to provide guidance on special education law and

regulations as they oversee special education programs within the schools they lead. According to Boscardin (2005), special education directors' roles have evolved to support SBSEAs to provide inclusive educational programs for students with disabilities.

Primarily, SBSEAs are responsible for the education of all students, regardless of ability. However, when one of their roles is to provide leadership in the area of special education, collaboration is essential with special education directors in order for students with disabilities to be properly served with access to a free and appropriate public education (Boscardin, 2005). In order to clearly identify roles of leaders in special education, competencies that are directly related to these roles and how they are carried out are worth analyzing (Council for Exceptional Children [CEC], 2009).

Competencies of Effective Special Education Leaders

School-based special education administrators (SBSEAs) as well as special education directors have influential jobs in special education (Conderman & Pedersen, 2005). Competencies that are directly related to special education leadership are essential to the effectiveness of these programs. Research (e.g., CEC, 2009; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999) has been conducted on competencies that leaders in special education should have in order to effectively manage these programs. In addition to current research related to competencies in special education leadership, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) (2009) published six standards that all administrators in special education should possess. These standards are: "advanced knowledge in leadership and policy, program development and organization, research and inquiry, student and program evaluation, program development and ethical practice, and collaboration" (CEC, 2009, p.15). The discussion below focuses on the

competencies that the literature describes as essential to the effective leadership of special education programs.

Competencies of School-based Special Education Administrators

According to Wigle and Wilcox (1999), school-based special education administrators (SBSEAs) who are knowledgeable about special education, tend to have programs, teachers and students who do well. This section incorporates research related to the competencies needed for effective SBSEAs, while using the CEC (2009) published standards as an outline.

First, SBSEAs should have a general knowledge of *special education law and procedures* (Passman, 2008). These leaders should have a foundation of the knowledge related to special education and know how to obtain specific information related to special education programs and leadership (Goor & Schwenn, 1997). Furthermore, Lashley (2007) stated that SBSEAs needed an understanding of procedures that govern special education related meetings. Likewise, according to Furney, Aiken, Hasazi, and Clark/Keefe (2005), understanding and utilizing policy were evident leadership qualities of SBSEAs that led to comprehensive, inclusive schools.

Second, Furney et al. (2005) found that schools in Vermont who had *effective leadership* were better able to serve all students, including those with disabilities. Through a qualitative, policy evaluation study of 16 regional school districts, Furney et al. (2005) focused on studying the leadership of the teams that were developed within schools to support students with diverse needs. Twenty to 35 interviews and five to eight observations were conducted in each school that led to the study's conclusions. Interviews and observations were conducted with principals, guidance counselors, general educators, special educators, central office administrators, business managers, parents, school board members, and any other stakeholders within schools that

principals identified as possible interviewees. Qualitative data were analyzed using cross-case analysis to compare and contrast themes across all areas.

Furney et al. (2005) concluded that the schools who were identified through interviews, observations, and reviewing documents as having effective educational systems and teams to educate all students were the schools that had effective leadership. Leadership competencies that were identified that contributed to the schools' successes were fostering a shared vision, planning, and decision-making.

Third and fourth, Lashley (2007) stated that SBSEAs should be able to understand students and their disabilities in order to *match programs* that will best meet their individual needs while providing them with a free and appropriate public education. In addition, Furney et al. (2005) acknowledged that SBSEAs should be competent at using *data* to make decisions about instruction.

Fifth, SBSEAs have an *ethical obligation* to special education programs within their schools. According to Lashley (2007), they should continuously ask themselves questions about the decisions that are made and the consequences of those decisions through professional ethics lenses.

Sixth, Stevenson-Jacobson et al. (2006) included special education competency-related questions of principals in their study. They asked the principals to rank the top ten competencies related to special education that they perceived as most important to their leadership. There were 30 competencies included in the survey that principals were asked to rank. After a binomial analysis, the administrators who took part in the survey stated, "managing the education of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, the case study approach, general education and special education procedures, parental rights, state and federal regulations and

laws, and the recruitment, selection, orientation, and supervision of staff" (p. 42) were the competencies that were necessary to effectively fulfilling the requirements of their jobs. These competencies recognized by survey participants were, in part, related to the *collaborative efforts* of these administrators. In addition, Furney et al. (2005) stated that creating *collaborative structures and processes* were necessary to the effective leadership of SBSEAs.

SBSEAs should exhibit competencies related to special education procedures and the law, program development, data research and analysis, program evaluation, ethical practices and collaboration. According to Furney et al. (2005), if these competencies are exhibited within special education leadership, effective special education programs will exist in schools.

Competencies of Special Education Directors

Special education directors as leaders of special education programs, according to researchers, also must possess specific competencies in order to effectively lead these programs. When these programs are led by competent individuals, there is a direct impact on the education for students with disabilities.

Thompson and O'Brian (2007) reported a mixed methods study that was designed to develop a comprehensive training program for special education directors. They revealed that special education directors need to be competent in technology applications for administrative duties and have a knowledge base of best practices related to the field of special education.

Passman (2008), in a quantitative analysis of data gathered from an online survey of special education administrators, stated that special education directors should possess greater competence in the knowledge of procedures and the law than SBSEAs. Special education directors are responsible for conflict resolution and ensuring that the school division is implementing special education regulations.

Maher (1986) conducted a study to determine special education directors' competence level related to conflict resolution with parents of students with disabilities. Their qualitative study that consisted of structured interviews with four special education directors in New Jersey before and after treatment revealed a need for conflict resolution skills. Study participants were interviewed before the program to determine their skill level of resolving conflict among IEP team members. Then they received training on conflict resolution for four consecutive weeks. The training included role playing, skill application, and skill acquisition. Following training, participants were interviewed again. Two skills related to conflict resolution were targeted during the program, identifying disputants and delineating the area of conflict. Observers and interviewers were able to see a marked improvement in participant skill sets following training. When initial interviews and post interviews were compared, special education directors were able to use skills learned to resolve conflict.

Hughes, Combes, and Metha (2012) stated in their quantitative study of 103 special education administrators, in Texas, the need for special education directors to understand the implications for educating students with autism. Specifically, special education directors should have a knowledge base related to the specific disability category of autism in order to match programs to meet the unique needs of these students.

There is limited research available on the specific competencies needed for effective special education directors. However, the research that is available stresses the need for special education directors who have a greater understanding of special education than SBSEAs. There are similarities of competencies needed for effective SBSEAs and special education directors; however, the level of competence is greater for special education directors.

Combined Competencies

Lashley and Boscardin (2003) noted that there are eight standards that address the leadership of special education administrators. They stated that these leaders should have:

a strong foundation in philosophical, historical, and legal aspects of special education. In addition they should be competent in the areas of characteristics, assessment, diagnosis, and evaluation of students with disabilities. Instructional content and practice, planning and managing the teaching and learning environment, managing student behavior and social interactions, communication and collaborative partnerships, and professionalism and ethics are also among the standards that were stated as competencies that special education administrators should possess (p. 10).

In 2009, CEC developed and refined competencies for special education leadership. These standards included that administrators who lead special education programs should have "advanced knowledge in leadership and policy, program development and organization, research and inquiry, student and program evaluation, program development and ethical practice, and collaboration" (CEC, 2009, p.15).

Wellner (2012) stated that educational leaders must create partnerships between themselves and parents. As a result, the collaboration between educational leaders and parents improve the teaching and learning of students with disabilities.

Bozonelos (2008) and Lashley and Boscardin (2003) stressed that administrators in special education must increase the retention of special education teachers. Bozonelos (2008) stated that administrators in special education should be competent in the areas of providing emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support to special educators. When special

education administrators are competent in these areas, special educators are more likely to stay in the field.

Emotional support according to Bozonelos (2008) entailed creating a positive school climate where special educators felt appreciated and encouraged. Instrumental support included the allotment of time, structure, and assistance needed to complete special education related paperwork and tasks. Informational support included professional development and communication of policies and regulations related to special education. Appraisal support also needed to be provided to offer timely feedback and evaluation of performance.

Wigle and Wilcox (1999) investigated 35 competencies that were identified as essential to the leadership of special education programs. They surveyed special education teachers, general education administrators, and special education directors. The survey questions were designed for participants to self-report their level of competence with each skill related to special education according to a list that was developed by CEC in 1997 (see Appendix A). The ratings of each competence included three response options: skilled, adequate, and inadequate. The survey also included a section for reporting demographic information that included level of education, years of experience, chronological age, and gender. Surveys were sent to special education personnel in four states (i.e., Tennessee, Texas, Kansas, & Nebraska), with a response rate of 22 percent. Chi-square tests were used to determine significant relationships between groups of survey participants and their self-reported skill levels.

According to Wigle and Wilcox (1999), both special education directors and SBSEAs had at least a master's degree. Fifty-eight percent of special education directors and 55 percent of SBSEAs had more than 11 years of experience. SBSEAs viewed themselves as less skilled than special education directors in a majority of the 35 competency areas. There was a significant

relationship between groups on 24 of the 35 competencies. Moreover, special education directors reported having higher skill levels on all competencies except for the one competency that had no statistical significance (e.g., "develop and implement a technology plan for teachers of students with exceptionalities" (Wigle & Wilcox, 1999, pp. 9-10)). Special education directors considered themselves as more skilled on competencies related to their leadership role in special education than SBSEAs.

Johnson (1998) stated that evaluation of special education administrators is important to the effective programming in special education, but that it was not common practice. The competencies that Johnson (1998) found that were important for special education administrators to possess were "management of special education compliance, personnel, facilities, and resources" (p. 24). In addition, administrators in special education needed to have strong leadership in supporting program development.

Table 2.1 depicts the similarities in research related to competencies associated with the effective leadership of special education programs. While there are similarities in the research related to competencies special education administrators should possess, there are some differences noted among the recommendations of researchers. Lashley (2007) stated the need for special education administrators to be self-reflective as leaders in order to act in an ethical and professional manner. In addition, Lashley and Boscardin (2003) referenced managing student behavior and social interactions as a competency that special education administrators should have in their repertoire.

School-based special education administrators (SBSEAs) and special education directors have a common goal to effectively lead special education programs. According to researchers, there are competencies that should be acquired by both types of leaders to lead special education

programs at the school and division level. As Table 2.1 shows, there is agreement from the

research on competencies that special education administrators should possess at school and

division levels. Of the competencies that are mentioned in this section, there were eight broad

categories that are common among different researchers. These eight relate to collaboration,

program development and organization, program and individual research and evaluation,

leadership and policy, professional development and ethical practice, shared vision and decision

making, retention of personnel, and data analyses for planned decision making.

Table 2.1: Competencies Referenced as Being Essential to the Leadership of Special Education Programs

Special Education Leadership Competency Categories	Literature References
Collaboration among personnel, families, and community members	CEC, 2009; Furney et al., 2005; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003; Stevenson-Jacobson et al., 2006; Wellner, 2012; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999
Program Development and Organization	CEC, 2009; Johnson, 1998; Lashley, 2007; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999
Leadership and Policy	CEC, 2009; Bozonelos, 2008; Furney et al., 2005; Goor & Schwenn, 1997; Johnson, 1998; Lashley, 2007; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003; Passman, 2008; Protz, 2005; Stevenson-Jacobson et al., 2006; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999
Professionalism and Ethical Practice	CEC, 2009; Bozonelos, 2008; Lashley, 2007; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999
Vision, planning, and decision making that is shared	Furney et al., 2005; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999;
Retention of Special Education Teachers	Bozonelos, 2008; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003; Stevenson-Jacobson et al., 2006; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999
Data Analysis for Planned Decision Making	CEC, 2009; Furney et al., 2005; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999
Individual and Program Research-based practices and Evaluation	CEC, 2009; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003; Stevenson-Jacobson et al., 2006; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999

The Wigle and Wilcox (1999) study outlined the need for more preparation and training

programs specifically designed for special education leadership within public schools. Likewise,

CEC (2009) and Bozonelos (2008) stated in their list of six competencies the need for

professional development. Angelle and Bilton (2009) stated that principals lacked the

background needed from coursework and field experiences to be effective special education

leaders who had specific competencies related to special education leadership. In addition to the

competencies relevant to effective special education leadership that have been discussed, is the

need for initial and continuous professional development and training for effective leaders of

special education programs.

<div align="center">**Preparation and Training of Special Education Leaders**</div>

Competent special education leadership is fostered through effective preparation and

training programs. Leadership programs should offer courses and internship experiences in

special education for pre-service leaders to grasp an understanding of the law, policies, and

regulations that govern special education programs (Davidson & Algozzine, 2002). Therefore,

the focus of preparation and training in special education is essential to the investigation of

factors that drive effective special education leadership at school and division levels.

Training School-based Special Education Administrators

Davidson and Algozzine (2002) reported that school-based special education

administrators (SBSEAs) felt they needed more training in the area of special education.

Beginning administrators who completed the North Carolina Principal Fellows Program (PFP)

were surveyed once they finished the program and were asked to rate their knowledge of special

education law using a 5-point Likert scale. The survey participants acknowledged that their

training in special education through administrative preparatory programs did not focus on

special education leadership. Forty-seven percent of participants rated their program as being

below standards with regards to training in special education law. In addition, 82 percent of

participants indicated a need for additional training in special education administration.

According to Goor and Schwenn (1997), preparation programs for leaders in special

education should focus on preparing principals in special education to be reflective practitioners.

SBSEAs must first learn their essential beliefs, knowledge, skills, and reflective behaviors related to special education. In order for this to occur, training programs for special education administrators should include the learning of these concepts. The primary belief is that all students can learn. SBSEAs that have this belief are better able to function effectively in their roles in special education leadership. Likewise, they can build a school culture that cultivates the belief that all students can and will learn through sound instructional practices (Goor & Schwenn, 1997).

Pontius (2010) conducted a quantitative study on the special education training of SBSEAs who oversee special education programs. He surveyed 104 elementary, middle, and high school principals in Virginia to determine if the need existed for professional development in special education competencies for school leaders. Survey participants revealed the need for more professional development in order to lead special education programs within schools. According to results analyzed using a paired samples t-test, SBSEAs should receive training before beginning their role of overseeing special education programs. The training should include research-based practices for students with disabilities. Likewise, ongoing training should be provided for administrators on federal and state special education mandates. Pontius (2010) also pointed out the need for mentoring SBSEAs who do not have prior teaching experience in special education.

Training for SBSEAs in special education is an essential factor to the effective leadership of special education programs. According to Pontius (2010), SBSEAs desire training in special education. As a result, special education training may lead to the effective leadership of special education programs at schools and within school divisions.

Training Special Education Directors

Special education directors who oversee and manage special education programs at the school division level must stay informed on special education mandates and procedures. In order to do this effectively, these individuals require training and preparation in special education. The need and desire does exist among special education directors to receive more training in special education (Arick & Krug, 1993).

Arick and Krug (1993) conducted a survey of special education directors nationwide. Of the 2900 surveys that were distributed, 1468 (51 percent) were returned and used in the study. Survey participants were asked to identify their need for training in general education and special education practices. Chi-square tests were used to analyze survey data. Results of the survey concluded that 60 percent of special education directors had adequate training and preparation to fulfill their roles in special education leadership. However, about one-third of survey participants had less than adequate preparation and/or training in special education. The chi-square test showed that special education directors within rural and suburban communities had less training and experience in special education.

Survey participants rated their need for general education training. The top three needs related to general education were in writing "grant proposals, planning information systems for program management, and strategies for facilitating collaboration" (Arick & Krug, 1993, p. 362). Furthermore, the top three needs related to special education training were in collaboration between general educators and special educators, curriculum adaptation and instruction, and program evaluation (Arick & Krug, 1993).

Combined Special Education Leadership Training

Special education leadership plays a critical role in the leadership of special education programs in public schools. Special education leaders, both special education directors and school-based special education administrators (SBSEAs), require training and knowledge in order to lead these programs effectively. Special education administration training should integrate content within the areas of special education, general education, and educational leadership. Likewise, training programs should focus on the recruitment of diverse and skilled staff that support special education programs. There should be training components related to managing and evaluating instructional practices related to special education assessment and accountability on disability subgroups. In addition, training should focus on special education law and procedures and facilitating collaboration among general education teachers, special education teachers, and parents. When special education directors and SBSEAs receive adequate training that is tailored to meet the needs of special education leaders, the result is effective leaders and special education programs (Davidson & Algozzine, 2002; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003).

Discussion

School-based special education administrators (SBSEAs) have roles related to general education leadership and special education leadership. They must be able to fulfill these roles in order to meet the needs of students with disabilities as well as students without disabilities. Likewise, special education directors have roles that are defined similarly to those of SBSEAs. Differences exist due to the need for special education directors to oversee the special education programs of all students within a school division. The roles of SBSEAs and those of special education directors are necessary to define due to the complexity of responsibilities (Boscardin,

2005; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999). Likewise, these roles support federal law and state regulations

(IDEA, 2004; NCLB, 2001). In order to take a closer look at the factors that influence the

effective leadership of special education programs within schools, there should be a review of

what is required of the individuals in these positions and how special education directors support

the special education leadership within schools.

Within job roles and responsibilities of SBSEAs, competencies that are related to the

effective leadership of special education programs within schools should be examined (CEC,

2009).   CEC (2009) developed standards that are associated with the effective leadership of

special education programs.

The current literature on competencies associated with the effective leadership of special

education programs has led to the development of the current study's research questions

specifically, the competencies developed by the Council for Exceptional Children (1997). Both

of the research questions that follow will address the study on school-based special education

effective leadership.

R_1: Do special education directors' perceptions of effective competencies related to the leadership of school-based special education programs differ from the perceptions of school-based special education administrators related to the same set of competencies?

Comparisons will be made from special education directors and SBSEAs on their perceptions of

factors that lead to the effective leadership of special education programs within schools. These

comparisons will be used to determine competencies that are most important to the effective

leadership of special education programs.

R_2: Do training experiences predict school-based special education administrators' self-reported ratings on effective leadership competencies?

Comparisons on training experiences of SBSEAs to their self-reported skill levels related to each competency will be made in order to make predictions on whether training impacts the effective leadership of special education programs within schools.

Given these research questions, it is hypothesized that special education directors' and SBSEAs' perceptions on factors that are essential to the effective leadership of special education programs within secondary schools will differ. Special education directors are responsible for the entire school division; therefore, it is hypothesized that their perceptions are more at a macro level and SBSEAs' perceptions are at a micro level. SBSEAs are responsible for and therefore usually think only about the programming at their schools and not at the division level. However, perceptions should be congruent in order to have effective leadership of special education programs. Furthermore, it is hypothesized that individuals with more training in special education will self-report a higher degree of competence related to the field. Specifically, the training experiences of having a degree in special education and attaining a higher degree are hypothesized to positively impact the self-reported proficiency levels of SBSEAs on competencies.

The research questions will be answered by using an online survey and by analyzing quantitative and qualitative data. The information gathered will help inform decisions on special education leadership. The methods section that follows will further describe the instrument used and data gathering procedures.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter will describe the methodology and procedures used to collect and analyze data related to the study of competencies that influence the effective leadership of school-based special education administrators (SBSEAs). This section is divided into four subsections. The first section describes the research design, the second section describes the participants, the third section explains the instrumentation and procedures, and the last section describes the analytical plan. A mixed methods approach was used for this study.

Research Design

The design of the study was a dominant status concurrent design due to the quantitative portion of the survey carrying more weight than the qualitative section (Johnson & Christensen, 2011). While the survey contained both quantitative and qualitative questions, the study's primary focus was on the quantitative questions. An open-ended question was included in the survey that asked participants to list specific competencies that were not included in the survey that were necessary to the effective leadership of special education programs. The other survey questions asked participants to rate competencies that were discussed in current literature as being essential to the leadership of special education programs. The researcher gathered quantitative and qualitative data through an online survey with open and closed ended questions administered using SurveyMonkey.

Participants

Two participant groups were surveyed in the study. Special education directors in Virginia were one group. At the time of the survey the Commonwealth of Virginia had 130 special education directors within public school divisions. Special education directors were emailed the online survey and those who did not respond after the first three invitations were

mailed a survey to complete via the US Postal Service. The second group of participants included school-based special education administrators (SBSEAs) identified by at least one special education director as being proficient in the essential competencies of special educators listed in the survey. Forty-six percent of special education directors who participated in the survey provided the name and contact information of at least one SBSEA. This survey question yielded seventy-five total responses. Seventy-two of the responses were used to seek survey participation from SBSEAs. Chapter 4 further outlines the response rate of SBSEAs who were asked to participate in the survey. Participation in the study was voluntary to special education directors and the identified effective school-based special education administrators.

Instrumentation and Procedures

The survey was developed, piloted, and submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Lynchburg College for review (see appendix B for a copy of the request and approval). As a result of the approval, the online survey was sent to all special education directors and identified school-based special education administrators (SBSEAs) overseeing special education programs within Virginia public schools. Both groups received the same survey with slight modifications.

Survey Instruments

Rascoe's (2007) and Wigle and Wilcox's (1999) survey instruments were used, in part, to create the survey for this study. These survey instruments were previously tested for reliability and validity. In addition, questions were included in the survey that were developed by the researcher.

Rascoe (2007) used a survey to measure high school principals' educational background and knowledge related to special education. Therefore, the survey included demographic

questions that were used in the development of the survey instrument for this study. Specifically, questions one through six and nine were modified from Rascoe's (2007) survey instrument and used in this survey. The demographic questions were included to provide the researcher with information on personal characteristics of survey participants. These personal characteristics were gender, race, educational backgrounds, and training experiences. Information gathered from these questions were used to compare demographics of survey participants and analyze relationships between educational backgrounds and training experiences to other survey responses.

Wigle and Wilcox (1999) studied the special education competencies of general education administrators. Wigle and Wilcox (1999) included 35 competencies that were rated by survey participants. In this study, the 35 competencies were modified and 25 were included in the survey. Eight competencies from Wigle and Wilcox (1999) were combined with competencies that were similar and two competencies were omitted. One competency was omitted because Wigle and Wilcox (1999) did not find any statistical significance related to the competency of developing and implementing technology plans. The competency of developing district budgets and procuring funding to ensure effective allocation of resources was also omitted because, in practice, SBSEAs are not responsible for division level budgets and funding. As a result, 25 competencies were included in the survey to determine essential competencies to special education leadership. Therefore, all survey participants were asked the level of importance on each competency and SBSEAs were asked to rate their level of proficiency on each competency.

Some survey items used in this study were modified as a result of feedback from a pilot study of the survey instrument. Ten individuals participated in the pilot study. Five individuals

piloted the special education director portion of the survey and five individuals piloted the school-based special education administrator portion of the survey. Seven of the ten individuals had an education affiliation, while three individuals had a business affiliation. Each individual completed the survey and provided information related to the readability of survey items. As a result, three survey items were modified. Specifically, demographic information was included at the end of the survey instead of the beginning and two competencies that seemed redundant by pilot survey participants were combined into one competency.

Special Education Directors' Survey

Special education directors were asked to rate the essential nature of each competency presented in the survey to the effective leadership of special education programs within public schools, in the first section. Ratings were based on a 4-point Likert scale, with 1 meaning the competency was not essential and 4 meaning the competency was most essential to the effective leadership of special education programs within schools. In addition, participants were asked to provide competencies that were not included in the list on the survey that they believed were essential to the effective leadership of special education programs. In the second section, special education directors were asked to identify one to three SBSEAs that they believed were proficient in the majority of the competencies included in the survey. In the final section, special education directors were asked to complete demographic information related to personal characteristics, educational background, and training experiences.

School-based Special Education Administrators' Survey

School-based special education administrators (SBSEAs) were asked first to indicate their level of responsibility in leading special education programs within their schools. In the next section, SBSEAs were asked to rate each competency, using a 4-point Likert scale, on the

essential nature of each competency. In addition, they were asked to rate their perceived personal level of proficiency as it related to each competency by using a 5-point Likert scale with 1 meaning they were not proficient and 5 meaning they were highly proficient. SBSEAs were also asked to list any competencies that they believed were essential to the effective leadership of special education programs but were not included in the list on the survey. In the final section of the survey, SBSEAs were asked to complete the same demographic information as special education directors related to personal characteristics, educational background, and training experiences.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables in this study were the effective leadership competencies that SBSEAs should have in their repertoire. Specifically, the self-reported proficiency levels on competencies of SBSEAs were the dependent variable for the analysis of training experiences to the effective leadership of special education programs. CEC (1997) developed a list of 35 competencies that were essential to leadership of special education programs. Wigle and Wilcox (1999) used these competencies in their study to compare the self-ratings of special education directors, principals, and special education teachers on each competency. In 2009, CEC developed six broad categories of essential competencies to the leadership of special education programs. CEC (2009) stated that "advanced knowledge in leadership and policy, program development and organization, research and inquiry, student and program evaluation, program development and ethical practice, and collaboration" (p. 15) were essential to the leadership of special education programs. The competencies listed in this survey instrument included those developed by the CEC (1997) that were included in the Wigle and Wilcox (1999) study. This study sought to determine a list of the most essential competencies needed for the effective

leadership of special education programs within schools by using current competencies

mentioned in literature as being necessary for leading such programs.

Independent Variables

The independent variables within this study were the training experiences SBSEAs

obtained in special education. These training experiences included degree programs, special

education endorsements, certificate programs, professional workshops, conference attendance,

and mentoring. Pointus (2010) suggested that training experiences, specifically special

education professional development and mentoring, aided in the effective leadership of special

education programs. Protz (2005) stated that principals and assistant principals needed training in

order to understand special education law and effectively carry out their leadership roles in

special education. In addition, Goor and Schwenn (1997) stated that individuals who completed

degree programs in special education were more effective in their leadership of special education

programs. Therefore, the researcher sought to determine the impact training experiences had on

SBSEA's self-reported proficiency levels of special education leadership competencies.

<div align="center">

Analytical Plan

</div>

Data from the online surveys were analyzed using The Statistical Package for the Social

Sciences (SPSS). Research questions and an explanation of the analytical plan are stated and

described in this section.

R_1: Do special education directors' perceptions of effective competencies related to the
leadership of school-based special education programs differ from the perceptions of
school-based special education administrators related to the same set of competencies?

R_2: Do training experiences predict school-based special education administrators' self-
reported ratings on effective leadership competencies?

Special education directors' survey results were analyzed first. The names and contact

information for SBSEAs identified by special education directors were entered into a database in

order to send out the SBSEA survey. The frequency and percents of demographic information were captured. Descriptive statistics of competencies special education directors reported were analyzed to determine the mean values of each competency.

Special education directors were asked to identify effective SBSEAs in one of the survey questions. Therefore, the second part included sending a survey to the identified administrators. They were asked to answer the same survey questions as the special education directors; therefore, the analyses of data were the same for both groups.

Third, special education directors' and identified effective SBSEAs' survey responses related to the essential nature of each competency were analyzed by merging the two databases. Then, a difference of means test involving independent samples was conducted between the two groups on all 25 competencies. In addition, the average mean scores of each competency's mean score from special education directors and SBSEAs were captured by using descriptive statistics. Next, reliability testing was used to determine the consistency with which the items on the survey measured a single construct. Reliability testing was completed by using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha to determine the degree to which the items on the survey were interrelated (Johnson & Christensen, 2011).

The fourth step involved ranking the leadership competencies according to the average ratings received from both survey groups. The items from competencies that were reported as being most to least important, according to survey participants, were ranked using descriptive statistics to reinforce the validity of competencies.

Each open-ended question from special education directors and SBSEAs was analyzed in the fifth step. The open-ended question asked each group to identify additional competencies that were essential to the effective leadership of special education programs but were not

included in the survey. Themes were generated from the analysis of open-ended responses from both groups.

Descriptive statistics on the self-reported proficiency levels of SBSEAs on the competencies presented in the survey were gathered in the sixth step. Average mean scores and standard deviations were captured from the rankings of each competency by survey participants.

The identified SBSEA's survey dataset was analyzed in the seventh step to determine if possessing effective leadership competencies were directly related to training experiences. A bivariate correlation analysis was conducted to determine the significance of training experiences and self-reported proficiency levels. Next, relationships between an array of training experiences and SBSEA's self-reported proficiency levels on competencies were analyzed using a multiple regression analysis to examine the impact. Due to the small sample size, all training experiences were not included in the multiple regression analysis. The training experiences that yielded statistically significant results were included in this analysis. Those training experiences included having a licensure endorsement in early childhood special education, a licensure endorsement in speech and language impairments, and attending conferences related to special education. The training experiences of having a degree in the field of special education and the highest degree attained were also included in the analysis even though those variables were not statistically significant. They were included in the analysis because it was hypothesized during the development of the research questions that those experiences impacted the effective leadership of special education programs. In addition, the training experiences of working at the high school level and the years working in education were the variables that were controlled in the multiple regression model in order to show the impact of training experiences on self-reported proficiency levels (George & Mallery, 2014).

The perceived importance of competencies from special education directors and SBSEAs' ratings on each competency to the effective leadership of special education programs were compared in the analysis. In addition, analyses were conducted to predict training experiences that have an impact on the effective leadership of special education programs in schools. Data gathered from these analyses will be presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This chapter will outline the findings from the mixed methods study that was designed to determine the effective leadership competencies of school-based special education administrators (SBSEAs). This section is divided into three sections. The first section will discuss data collection and response rates. The next section will include demographic information of survey participants. The final section will discuss the results of surveys as they relate to the research questions of the study.

Data Collection

Special Education Directors

The survey for special education directors was sent out through an online survey system. It was sent to 130 special education directors in Virginia. In addition, the survey was sent by mail to participants who did not respond through the online survey, had an invalid email address, or had chosen not to participate in surveys through the online survey system, SurveyMonkey.

The survey was sent on five different occasions. It was sent three times to individuals who had not responded to the invitation to complete the survey. It was sent once to participants who had responded partially to the survey. As a final action to get participation, the survey was sent by mail via the U.S. Postal Service to special education directors who had not responded to the email for participation in the study (see Table 4.1).

As a result, 62 special education directors fully completed the survey online or either by mail and 18 responded partially to the survey, meaning they did not complete all the questions but answered at least one question. The response rate for full completion of the survey was 48 percent. The response rate for partial completion of the survey was 14 percent. The total response rate for survey participation by special education directors was 62 percent. Table 4.1

describes survey responses for partial and full completion of the survey by participants and the method of delivery of surveys to special education directors. The survey for special education directors was closed on November 23, 2013.

Table 4.1: Survey Responses and Method for Special Education Directors

Date Survey Sent	Number of Recipients	Responses	Method of Delivery	Response Rate
May 22, 2013	128	38	Online	30%
June 3, 2013	89	19	Online	15%
June 21, 2013	94	7	Online	5%
July 25, 2013	66	16	Mail	12%
Totals	-	80	-	62%

A portion of the special education directors' survey asked participants to identify individuals who they thought were proficient in the competencies that were rated in the survey as being essential to the effective leadership of special education programs within schools. This question yielded 75 results. Of the 75 individuals that were identified, 72 were used in the study. Three were not used because they were the names of special education directors who had already been sent the survey. The special education director survey led to the implementation of the SBSEAs survey.

School-based Special Education Administrators (SBSEAs)

SBSEAs were sent an online version of the survey initially. For individuals who had not responded to the online version, a copy of the survey was sent via the U.S. Postal Service. There were 72 potential survey participants.

The survey was sent eight times. The implementation of sending the survey was in phases. As SBSEAs were identified by special education directors, surveys were sent to these individuals. Table 4.2 depicts the execution of sending the survey along with the timeline.

The response rate for full completion of the SBSEA survey was 49 percent. The response

rate for SBSEAs who completed part of the survey, but did not complete the entire survey was

ten percent. The response rate for partial and total completion of the survey was 59 percent. The

survey for SBSEAs was closed on December 20, 2013.

Table 4.2: SBSEA Survey Implementation

Date Survey Sent	Number of Recipients	Responses	Method of Delivery	Response Rate
July 1, 2013	50	17	Online	24%
July 24, 2013	35	4	Online	6%
July 24, 2013	3	1	Online	1%
September 5, 2013	18	5	Online	7%
September 21, 2013	4	0	Online	0%
September 23, 2013	44	7	Online	10%
October 3, 2013	38	2	Online	3%
October 16, 2013	35	6	Mail	8%
Totals	-	42	-	59%

Demographics

Special Education Directors

Special education directors who completed the survey were directors in public schools

within the state of Virginia at the time of the survey. Seventy-seven percent of directors who

completed the survey were female and 23 percent were male. Of the survey participants, 81

percent were White, 17 percent were Black or African American, and 1 percent was Asian.

Table 4.3 represents this information with frequency and percentages. Data in the tables that

follow are organized by question number on the survey.

Table 4.3: Demographic Information by Survey Question

#5: Are you Male or Female?	Frequency	Percent
Male	15	23
Female	51	77
#6: What is your Race?	**Frequency**	**Percent**
White	53	81.5
Black or African American	11	17
Asian	1	1.5

Fifty-nine percent of survey participants had been working in the field of education for 25 or more years. Table 4.4 depicts survey participants' total amount of years working in the field of education.

Table 4.4: Demographic Information by Survey Question

#8: How many years have you been in education?	Frequency	Percent
11-15	7	11
16-20	13	21
21-25	6	9
>25	37	59

Survey participants reported that 28 percent had been a teacher between 6 and 10 years and 23 percent had been a teacher for one to five years. In addition, 31 percent of survey participants stated that they had been a special education director for six to ten years, whereas 30 percent had been a special education director for one to five years.

Table 4.5: Demographic Information by Survey Question

#9: How many years were you a teacher?	Frequency	Percent
0	4	6.3
1-5	15	23.8
6-10	18	28.6
11-15	11	17.5
16-20	8	12.7
21-25	4	6.3
>25	3	4.8
#10: How many years have you been in your current position?	**Frequency**	**Percent**
1-5	19	30.2
6-10	20	31.7
11-15	11	17.5
16-20	6	9.5
21-25	5	7.9
>25	2	3.2

Forty-six percent of special education directors reported that they had received a Master's degree as their highest degree attained and thirty percent had received a doctoral degree. Ninety percent of survey participants had a degree in the field of special education. Table 4.6 shows the responses to these questions from survey participants.

Table 4.6: Demographic Information by Survey Question

#11: What is the highest degree you have attained?	Frequency	Percent
Masters	29	46.8
Ed. S	14	22.6
Doctorate	19	30.6
#12: Are any of your degrees in the field of special education?	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Yes	56	90.3
No	6	9.7
#13: Please indicate the degrees that are in the field of special education.	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Bachelors	11	19.6
Masters	29	51.8
Ed.S.	7	12.5
Doctorate	9	16.1

Eighty-five percent of survey participants had a special education endorsement on their professional license. Survey participants had received a variety of training experiences in the field of special education. Seventy-three percent had attended conferences, 63 percent had participated in degree programs, 59 percent had been a mentor, and 43 percent had been a mentee (i.e., a person that is mentored on the job by another individual). Some other training experiences that survey participants reported included Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) certificate program, graduate coursework in the area of special education, and on the job training.

Table 4.7: Demographic Information by Survey Question

#14: Do you have any special education endorsements on your professional license?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	53	85.5
No	9	14.5
#15: Endorsements	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Learning Disabilities	39	49.4
Emotional Disabilities	29	36.7
Mental Retardation	29	36.7
Severe Disabilities	8	10.1
Special Education General Curriculum	8	10.1
Special Education Adapted Curriculum	1	1.3
Early Childhood Special Education	5	6.3
Speech and Language	3	3.8
Vision Impairments	1	1.3
Hearing Impairments	1	1.3
Other	13	16.5
#16: What training experiences have you had related to special education?	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Certificate Program	21	26.6
Professional Workshops	60	75.9
Conferences	58	73.4
Degree Programs	50	63.3
Mentoring: as Mentor	47	59.5
Mentoring: as Mentee	34	43.0
Other	5	6.3

School-based Special Education Administrators (SBSEAs)

SBSEAs who were identified by special education directors and also participated in the study were school administrators in the state of Virginia. The first question on the survey asked SBSEAs to indicate if they had primary responsibility for supervising special education programs within their school. Of the 42 individuals who completed the survey, eight did not have primary responsibility of supervising special education programs within their schools. Therefore, they were not asked any additional questions; their survey was complete at that time. Table 4.8 depicts the responses to that question.

Table 4.8: Demographic Information by Survey Question

#1: Do you have primary responsibility for supervising special education programs in your school?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	34	81
No	8	19

The remaining 34 individuals who participated in the survey were then asked to report on the percentage of responsibility they had in supervising special education programs within their schools. Six individuals did not respond to any other survey questions after the first question on the survey. In addition, one survey participant answered the second question on the survey but did not complete any other questions; therefore, there were 27 individuals who completed the entire SBSEA survey. Most individuals who completed the entire survey rated that they had at least 50 percent of responsibility with the supervision of special education programs within their schools. Table 4.9 shows the percentages that individuals who completed the survey rated on their level of responsibility supervising special education programs.

Table 4.9: Demographic Information by Survey Question

#5: Which best represents the level of responsibility you have for leading special education programs in your school?	Frequency	Percent
25% or less	1	3.7
More than 25%, but less than 50%	3	11.1
50%-75%	8	29.6
More than 75%, but less than 100%	7	25.9
100%	8	29.6

For the purposes of gathering demographic information, survey participants were also asked their gender and race. Table 4.10 depicts gender and race demographics of the 27 survey participants who completed the entire survey. Eighty-one percent of the participants were females and 57 percent were White.

Table 4.10: Demographic Information by Survey Question

#6: Are you Male or Female	Frequency	Percent
Male	5	18.5
Female	22	81.5
#7: What is your race?	**Frequency**	**Percent**
White	24	57.1
Black or African American	3	7.1

SBSEAs at the elementary level were the majority of survey participants. Forty percent of SBSEAs who completed the survey were elementary school administrators and 23 percent were pre-kindergarten administrators. Twenty-one percent of the administrators who completed the survey worked at the high school level and 19 percent worked at the middle school level. Table 4.11 summarizes SBSEA representation from each school level. Survey participants were able to select more than one level if they currently worked at different school levels. This question was designed that way to include administrators who were responsible for leading more than one school in a school division.

Table 4.11: Demographic Information by Survey Question

#8: At what school level do you currently work?	Frequency	Percent
PreK	10	23.8
Elementary	17	40.5
Middle	8	19.0
High	9	21.4
Combined: Middle and High	1	2.4

Most SBSEAs that completed the survey had been in education between 11 and 25 or more years. Fifty-five percent of individuals had taught between six and ten years. In addition, fifty-one percent had been in their current administrative position for one to five years. Table 4.12 shows the frequency and percent of SBSEAs and their years of experience.

Table 4.12: Demographic Information by Survey Question

#9: How many years have you been in education?	Frequency	Percent
6-10	2	7.4
11-15	7	25.9
16-20	6	22.2
21-25	5	18.5
>25	7	25.9
#10: How many years were you a teacher?	**Frequency**	**Percent**
1-5	1	3.7
6-10	15	55.6
11-15	6	22.2
16-20	4	14.8
21-25	1	3.7
>25	0	0
Question: How many years have you been in your current position?	**Frequency**	**Percent**
1-5	14	51.9
6-10	5	18.5
11-15	3	11.1
16-20	2	7.4
21-25	2	7.4
>25	1	3.7

Table 4.13 depicts demographic data around SBSEAs degree attainment and how they relate to special education. Of the 27 SBSEAs that fully completed the survey, 81 percent had a master's degree as their highest degree attained. In addition, 48 percent of the 27 survey participants had a degree in special education. Sixty-six percent of the 27 survey participants had a master's degree in the field of special education.

Table 4.13: Demographic Information by Survey Question

#12: What is the highest degree you have attained?	Frequency	Percent
Masters	22	81.5
Ed. S	4	14.8
Doctorate	1	3.8
#13: Are any of your degrees in the field of special education?	**Frequency**	**Percent**

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	13	48.1
No	14	51.9
#14: Please indicate the degrees that are in the field of special education.[1]	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Bachelors	5	33.3
Masters	10	66.7
Ed.S.	0	0
Doctorate	0	0

Table 4.14 gives an analysis of the frequency and percent of SBSEAs and their training experiences related to special education. Approximately half of the participants who completed this portion of the survey reported that they had an endorsement in special education on their professional license. In addition, 33 percent of survey participants had an endorsement in learning disabilities. Fifty-nine percent of survey participants had received special education training by way of conferences and professional workshops. Survey participants also included other training experiences they had completed that were not included in the survey. Those training experiences included an aspiring special education leadership program, courses, but not a completed degree, and the VDOE special education one-year leadership program.

Table 4.14: Special Education Training experiences

#15: Do you have any special education endorsements on your professional license?	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Yes	14	51.9
No	13	48.1
#16: Endorsements	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Learning Disabilities	14	33.3
Emotional Disabilities	7	16.7
Mental Retardation	8	19.0
Severe Disabilities	1	2.4
Special Education General Curriculum	0	0
Special Education Adapted Curriculum	0	0
Early Childhood Special Education	2	4.8
Speech and Language	1	2.4
Vision Impairments	0	0

---

[1] Survey participants could select more than one option if they had more than one degree in the field of special education.

Hearing Impairments	1	2.4
Other: Administration and Supervision, National Boards Birth to 21, Supervision in Special Education, Health and Physical Education	5	11.9
#17: What training experiences have you had related to special education?	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Certificate Program	9	21.4
Professional Workshops	25	59.5
Conferences	25	59.5
Degree Programs	14	33.3
Mentoring: as Mentor	8	19.0
Mentoring: as Mentee	3	7.1
Other	3	7.1

Findings Related to Research Questions

R_1: Do special education directors' perceptions of effective competencies related to the leadership of school-based special education programs differ from the perceptions of school-based special education administrators related to the same set of competencies?

By using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha, the results for the special education director's survey showed a reliability coefficient of 0.93, which indicates that the 25 competencies are highly interrelated and thus warranted inclusion in the analysis. In addition, the reliability coefficient for the SBSEA's survey responses was 0.86, which reinforces the importance of the 25 competencies in the study. Therefore, these items had relatively high internal consistency.

The first research question of this study sought to determine if perceptions of effective leadership competencies outlined in the study differed between the two groups of participants. Table 4.15 outlines the mean scores and statistical values of each competency rated by special education directors and school-based special education administrators (SBSEAs). The competencies were sorted by combined average mean scores, in Table 4.15, from highest to lowest.

Table 4.15: Mean Scores for Each Competency

Competencies	Special Education Directors Means	SBSEAs Means	Combined Average Mean Scores	T-Statistical Values	P-Values
Communicate and demonstrate a high standard of ethical practice	3.94	3.96	3.95	0.43	0.67
Make decisions about students with exceptionalities based on open communication, trust, and mutual respect	3.80	3.89	3.85	1.02	0.31
Interpret case law and federal, state, and local policies	3.81	3.86	3.84	0.47	0.64
Ensure that case management procedures provide appropriate services to students with disabilities	3.80	3.86	3.83	0.58	0.56
Advocate for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities	3.74	3.79	3.77	0.42	0.68
Develop and provide effective communication with parents and families of individuals with disabilities	3.70	3.82	3.76	1.17	0.25
Implement programs to assess the strengths and weaknesses of individuals with disabilities	3.67	3.82	3.75	1.30	0.20
Understand and interpret data/information about individual students	3.66	3.79	3.73	1.06	0.29
Ensure that outcomes for individuals with disabilities are addressed in general/regular education standards and curriculum	3.74	3.71	3.73	0.29	0.77
Support school personnel in implementing a range of strategies that promote positive behavior	3.63	3.79	3.71	1.38	0.17
Respect and support students' self-advocacy rights	3.74	3.68	3.71	0.58	0.56
Communicate an inclusive vision to various constituencies	3.66	3.71	3.69	0.52	0.61

Develop collaborative general and special education programs	3.60	3.75	3.68	1.20	0.23
Implement a variety of procedures to ensure clear communication among administrators and personnel	3.60	3.71	3.66	0.79	0.43
Develop building level supports for inclusive educational settings	3.59	3.64	3.62	0.48	0.63
Develop and implement strategies for professional development for teachers of students with disabilities	3.61	3.61	3.61	0.06	0.95
Serve as an advocate for individuals with exceptionalities and their families	3.63	3.57	3.60	0.41	0.68
Collaborate and engage in shared decision-making to support programs for students with disabilities	3.51	3.68	3.60	1.17	0.24
Develop and implement ongoing evaluations of special education programs	3.56	3.61	3.59	0.38	0.71
Assist in development of special education curriculum and instructional models for all students	3.50	3.61	3.56	0.83	0.41
Develop and implement transition plans	3.37	3.25	3.31	0.70	0.49
Develop and implement a discipline policy for students with exceptionalities	3.30	3.29	3.30	0.09	0.93
Develop strategic plans that provide opportunities for collaboration across programs and agencies	3.26	3.32	3.29	0.41	0.68
Develop parent/family education programs	3.07	3.21	3.14	0.84	0.40
Implement conflict resolution programs between families and the school	3.09	2.96	3.03	0.65	0.52
Average Mean Scores Across Competencies	3.58	3.59	3.59	N/A	N/A

As noted in Table 4.15, the comparisons of competencies from special education directors and SBSEAs did not yield any statistically significant differences (p > 0.05). That is, there were no significant differences between special education directors and SBSEAs on how they rated the importance of each competency on the effective leadership of special education programs in schools. The t-statistical values were all low and the p-values were above the statistical significance level of 0.05.

As shown in Table 4.15, the competencies of communicating and demonstrating a high standard of ethical practice, interpreting case law and federal, state, and local policies, making decisions about students with exceptionalities based on open communication, trust, and mutual respect, and ensuring case management procedures provide appropriate services to students with disabilities had the highest combined average mean scores (≥ 3.80). The competencies of developing and implementing transition plans, developing and implementing a discipline policy for students with disabilities, developing strategic plans that provide opportunities for collaboration with agencies, implementing conflict resolution programs between families and the school, and developing parent and family education programs had the lowest average mean scores (≤ 3.40). The competencies that were rated as most important were also included in the list of standards developed by CEC (2009). Chapter 5 includes further comparisons of the findings from this study to existing literature.

The first research question asked if special education directors and SBSEAs' perceptions differed on the essential competencies needed for effective leadership of special education programs within schools. The quantitative findings from this research support that special education directors and SBSEAs perceptions were similar. These two groups were in agreement on competencies that were necessary for the effective leadership of special education programs.

51

In addition to the quantitative survey questions, the survey included a qualitative question. The open-ended question asked survey participants to provide competencies that they thought were essential to the effective leadership of special education programs, but were not included in the list of competencies in the survey. The open-ended question yielded 22 responses from special education directors and 14 responses from SBSEAs who completed the survey. Appendix G includes a comprehensive list of open-ended survey responses.

The open-ended responses were analyzed to find themes by inputting all responses in a spreadsheet. The responses were segmented to locate meaningful data and then the data were coded by assigning category names. As a result of the qualitative analysis, themes emerged (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

The themes that emerged from the open-ended responses from special education directors and SBSEAs were developing positive relationships with families, effectively communicating with all stakeholders, managing time and funding, and fostering positive relationships with staff and students. Survey participants also provided responses on the importance of understanding and implementing special education law and procedures. While this competency was included in the list of competencies that were provided, survey participants also included it in their open-ended responses. Table 4.16 shows three responses around each theme. Chapter 5 will include an analysis of how these themes compare to existing research.

Table 4.16: Open-ended Response Themes

Themes	Participant Responses[2]
Developing positive relationships with families	• The ability to have a positive relationship with families. • The ability to see the bigger picture and negotiate on a personal level with parents/families so everyone can arrive at a place they feel confident and comfortable with services.

---

[2] Phrases around themes are included in this table. Appendix G includes a complete list of survey responses.

	• Have an open door policy for parents; put effort into establishing and maintaining relationships.
Effectively communicating with all stakeholders	• The ability to be an effective listener. • Serve as an advocate for special education staff in communications with parents and other administrators. • Communication with other administrators, teachers, agencies, paraprofessionals, and families.
Managing time and funding	• Securing and managing funding/budgets for special education programs. • Have knowledge of budgeting and financing of programs. • Develop an appropriate budget and secure resources for alternative instructional materials and assistive technology.
Fostering positive relationships with staff and students	• Create a trusting/comfortable bond between classroom teachers and students. • Assure students have the best opportunity to be successful. • Cultivate positive relationships between special education and regular education teachers.
Knowledge of special education law, policies, and procedures	• Have knowledge of special education regulations, case law, and the role of the VA Department of Education. • Fully understand a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). • Interpret national trends in special education related legislation and school board legislative priorities.

R₂: Do training experiences predict school-based special education administrators' self-reported ratings on effective leadership competencies?

The second research question asked if training experiences predicted the self-reported ratings of school-based special education administrators. Table 4.17 first shows the mean scores of the self-reported proficiency levels of SBSEAs. In addition, the table includes the standard deviations of each competency, which indicate the spread of the self-reported proficiency levels from the average mean scores. The competencies in Table 4.17 are arranged from highest to lowest self-reported proficiency mean scores.

Table 4.17 Self-reported Proficiency of SBSEAS

Competencies	Proficiency Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Make decisions about students with exceptionalities based on open communication, trust, and mutual respect	4.70	0.47
Communicate and demonstrate a high standard of ethical practice	4.63	0.56
Advocate for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities	4.52	0.70
Serve as an advocate for individuals with exceptionalities and their families	4.48	0.70
Respect and support students' self-advocacy rights	4.44	0.64
Ensure that case management procedures provide appropriate services to students with disabilities	4.41	0.5
Understand and interpret data/information about individual students	4.37	0.63
Support school personnel in implementing a range of strategies that promote positive behavior	4.37	0.63
Implement a variety of procedures to ensure clear communication among administrators and personnel	4.30	0.67
Collaborate and engage in shared decision-making to support programs for students with disabilities	4.30	0.61
Communicate an inclusive vision to various constituencies	4.26	0.66
Develop and provide effective communication with parents and families of individuals with disabilities	4.26	0.76
Develop building level supports for inclusive educational settings	4.22	0.8
Implement programs to assess the strengths and weaknesses of individuals with disabilities	4.19	0.74
Develop and implement a discipline policy for students with exceptionalities	4.19	0.56
Ensure that outcomes for individuals with disabilities are addressed in general/regular education standards and curriculum	4.15	0.66
Develop collaborative general and special education programs	4.15	0.77
Develop and implement ongoing evaluations of special education programs	4.00	0.78
Develop and implement strategies for professional development for teachers of students with disabilities	3.93	0.78
Interpret case law and federal, state, and local policies	3.89	0.80

Assist in development of special education curriculum and instructional models for all students	3.89	0.70
Develop and implement transition plans	3.74	0.66
Implement conflict resolution programs between families and the school	3.56	0.85
Develop strategic plans that provide opportunities for collaboration across programs and agencies	3.52	0.89
Develop parent/family education programs	3.26	0.90
Average Mean Scores Across Competencies	4.15	N/A
Proficiency Index (Additive Index of 25 competencies across all subjects)	4.15	0.47

SBSEAs self-reported the highest proficiency levels (mean scores ≥ 4.52) on the competencies of making decisions about students with exceptionalities based on open communication, trust, and mutual respect, communicating and demonstrating a high standard of ethical practice, and advocating for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities. In addition, SBSEAs self-reported lower proficiency levels (mean scores ≤ 3.56) on the competencies of implementing conflict resolution programs between families and the school, developing strategic plans that provide opportunities for collaboration across programs and agencies, and developing parent and family education programs.

In comparison to the ratings from special education directors and SBSEAs on the importance of each competency outlined in Table 4.15, the highest self-reported proficiency levels of SBSEA on competencies were also identified as the two most important competencies related to the effective leadership of special education programs within schools. These competencies included making decisions about students with exceptionalities based on open communication, trust, and mutual respect and communicating and demonstrating a high standard of ethical practice. The three lowest self-reported proficiency level ratings on competencies by SBSEAs were also rated as being the least important with regards to effective special education leadership. Developing strategic plans that provide opportunities for collaboration across

programs and agencies, developing parent and family education programs, and implementing

conflict resolution programs between families and the school were the competencies that

received a lower importance rating and self-reported proficiency level rating as compared to

other competencies.

In order to analyze the self-reported proficiency levels of SBSEAs on the competencies

listed in the survey, an index was created for the self-reported proficiency levels. According to

Johnson and Christensen (2012), when a group of numbers are homogenous, measures of central

tendency (i.e., mean, median, and mode) can be used to represent data values. There was not a

significant amount of variance in the mean scores of the self-reported proficiency levels on each

competency; therefore, an index was created from the mean scores of self-reported proficiency

levels of SBSEAs on competencies outlined in the study. Thus, the index was created by using

an additive scale. The mean values of self-reported proficiency level ratings were added together

and divided by the total number of competencies. The index was created on a scale from one to

five (A=4.15, SD=0.47).

The self-reported proficiency levels and competencies were tested for reliability using

Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha. The reliability coefficient for the SBSEAs self-reported ratings

of proficiency levels with the competencies was 0.95. Therefore, the items on the survey were

significantly interrelated.

A bivariate correlation analysis was then conducted to determine the correlations between

the dependent variable (i.e., index of self-reported proficiency levels on competencies) and the

independent variables (i.e., training experiences). The training experiences were included in

order to get a comprehensive list of all the ways in which SBSEAs can gain training in the field

of special education to influence their effectiveness as a special education leader. Degree

programs, certificate programs, licensure endorsements, experience in education, professional

workshops, conference attendance, and on-the-job training and support programs by being a

mentor or mentee were experiences that were identified in which SBSEAs could receive training

related to special education leadership. These training experiences were the independent

variables included in the analysis.

Table 4.18 depicts the correlation between each independent variable to the dependent

variable and the respective significance levels. Pearson's correlation signifies how well the

variables were related to the self-reported proficiency levels of SBSEAs. According to the

bivariate correlation analysis, the training experiences that were significant ($p \leq 0.05$) and

moderately related to the self-reported proficiency levels of SBSEAs ($r \geq 0.40$) included

licensure endorsements in early childhood special education ($p = 0.03$, $r = 0.41$), licensure

endorsements in speech and language ($p = 0.02$, $r = -0.42$), and participating in a mentoring

program as a mentor ($p = 0.03$, $r = 0.40$).

Table 4.18: Bivariate Correlation Analysis of Training Experiences

Measures of Training Experiences	Index: Self-reported Proficiency Levels	
	Pearson's Correlation (r)	Significance Levels (p-value)
Years in education	-0.00	0.96
Years as a teacher	-0.01	0.95
Years in your current position	0.19	0.32
Highest degree you have attained	0.19	0.33
Degrees in special education (i.e., yes or no)	0.10	0.61
Degrees in special education (i.e., Bachelors, Masters, Ed.S., Doctorate)	0.30	0.26
Special education licensure endorsements	0.00	0.97
Learning Disability	0.00	0.97
Emotional Disability	0.27	0.16
Mental Retardation	0.18	0.35

Severe Disabilities	0.27	0.15
Special Education General Curriculum	N/A	N/A
Special Education Adapted Curriculum[3]	N/A	N/A
Early Childhood Special Education	**0.41**	**0.03**
Speech and Language	**-0.42**	**0.02**
Hearing Impairments	0.21	0.29
Certificate Program	0.10	0.61
Professional Workshops	0.01	0.93
Conferences	0.31	0.11
Degree Programs	0.13	0.51
Mentoring: Mentor	**0.40**	**0.03**
Mentoring: Mentee	0.04	0.84

The bivariate correlation analysis was used to determine the training experiences that were statistically significant. As a result of this analysis, a multivariate approach was used to find the relationship between specific training experiences and self-reported proficiency levels of SBSEAs on competencies presented in the study.

Due to the small sample size, the experiences that were included in the regression analysis were the training experiences that were significant in the bivariate correlation analysis and training experiences that were hypothesized to predict effective special education leadership within schools based on the literature. As indicated in Table 4.18, the experiences that were included in the multiple regression analysis were licensure endorsements in early childhood special education and speech and language. The training experience of conference attendance was also included in the analysis because this training experience would be significant at the 0.05 level if analyzed using a one-tailed test. Special education degrees and the highest degree attained were also included in the multiple regression analysis, not because of the significance of these variables but due to the fact that it was hypothesized that these types of training

---

[3] The special education licensure endorsement of general curriculum and adapted curriculum did not yield any responses from survey participants; therefore, there were no data to compute here.

experiences would influence the self-reported ratings of SBSEAs on their levels of proficiency with each competency.

The relationships between independent variables (i.e., training experiences) and dependent variables (i.e., self-reported proficiency level ratings) were tested by controlling for the level at which SBSEAs work, specifically the high school level and the number of years working in the field of education. The training experience of being a mentor was not included in the multiple regression analysis, although it was significant. Mentors by nature have already been identified as being effective and able to help others become effective. Therefore, this type of training experience may not help individuals become effective; they presumably are effective if chosen to be a mentor. Thus, this training experience was not included in the multiple regression model.

The significance model of the multiple regression analysis is presented in Table 4.19. The overall model predicts 66% of the variance in the dependent variable (i.e., self-reported proficiency level ratings on competencies). The model is significant ($F= 5.15$, $p=0.00$).

Table 4.19: Multiple Regression Analysis: Analysis of Variance

ANOVA	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance	R Square
Regression	3.71	7	.53	5.15	.00	0.66
Residual	1.96	19	.10			
Total	5.67	26				

Table 4.20 includes the significance level of each selected training experience analyzed using the multiple regression analysis. In the multiple regression model, four variables were significant at the 0.05 level. Those variables included licensure endorsements in early childhood special education and speech and language, conference attendance, and working at the high school level. There were two variables that were significant at the 0.10 level. Those variables

were the amount of years in education and the highest degree attained. Table 4.20 also includes

the importance level of each training experience to self-reported proficiency levels. The beta

coefficient explained the importance of each training experience to the self-reported proficiency

levels by holding all variables in the model constant. Working at the high school level was the

training experience that was the most important when compared to other training experiences on

the self-reported proficiency levels of SBSEAs ($\beta = 0.57$). Licensure endorsements in speech

and language ($\beta = -0.51$) and early childhood special education ($\beta = 0.28$), and conference

attendance ($\beta = 0.35$) were training experiences that were also important to self-reported

proficiency levels on competencies.

Table 4.20 Multiple Regression Analysis: Coefficients

Training Experiences	b	Beta	Significance (One-tailed Test)
Early Childhood Special Education Licensure Endorsement	0.49	0.28	0.03
Speech and Language Licensure Endorsement	-1.23	-0.51	0.00
Conference Attendance	0.62	0.35	0.02
School Level: High School	0.55	0.57	0.00
Degrees in special education	-0.17	-0.18	0.15
Years in education	-0.09	-0.25	0.09
Highest degree attained	0.17	0.19	0.10

As Table 4.20 indicates, SBSEAs with a licensure endorsement in early childhood special

education rate their proficiency levels as a special education administrator significantly higher

than those without this endorsement (b = 0.49, p = 0.03). In addition, SBSEAs with a licensure

endorsement in speech and language rate their proficiency levels on competencies needed to be

an effective special education administrator significantly lower than those without this

endorsement (b = -1.23, p = 0.00). SBSEAs that attend conferences rated themselves

significantly higher on competencies than SBSEAs that do not attend conferences (b = 0.62, p = 0.02). SBSEAs with a degree in the field of special education self-reported proficiency levels on competencies lower than individuals without degrees in the field of special education (b = -0.17, p = 0.15). SBSEAs with a higher post graduate degree self-reported proficiency levels on competencies were significantly higher than other SBSEAs who completed the survey (b=0.17, p=0.10).

The results in the multiple regression analysis indicated that working at the high school level was the most important training experience that impacted the self-reported proficiency levels on competencies. In addition, special education conference attendance was related to an increase in self-reported proficiency levels on competencies by SBSEAs.

The second research question that asked if training experiences predict the self-reported proficiency levels on competencies was examined using bivariate correlation and multiple regression analyses. Some training experiences had an impact on the self-reported proficiency levels of SBSEAs on the competencies outlined in the study. Specifically, working at the high school level (β = 0.57) and licensure endorsements in speech and language (β = -0.51) were the most important training experiences that impacted the self-reported proficiency levels on competencies. In addition, conference attendance (p = 0.02) and licensure endorsements in early childhood special education (p = 0.03) were related to an increase in self-reported proficiency levels of SBSEAs on competencies essential to the leadership of special education programs.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to determine the effective leadership competencies of school-based special education administrators (SBSEAs) and the training experiences that predict high proficiency levels on competencies. The data presented in this chapter were analyzed using

descriptive statistics, an independent samples t-test, bivariate correlation analysis, multiple regression analysis, and an analysis of qualitative data by finding themes.

Data from the survey demonstrated that special education directors and SBSEAs' perceptions were similar on the competencies that are essential to the effective leadership of special education programs. The themes that emerged from participants' open-ended responses on the survey yielded similar results as the closed-ended responses. Both SBSEAs and special education directors reported that positive relationships, communication, and knowledge of special education law and procedures were needed for the effective leadership of special education programs. Training experiences were suggested to be a predictor of higher self-reported proficiency levels on competencies. Working at the high school level was the most important training experience to the self-reported proficiency levels.

This study was based on research conducted by Wigle and Wilcox (1999). The competencies they presented in their research as being essential to the leadership of special education programs were included in this study to determine effective leadership competencies of SBSEAs. The next chapter will discuss survey results and what the results mean to this research, implications for the field of special education, and future research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a discussion of the research. There are five sections in the chapter. The first part discusses the research related to this study, followed by an interpretation of the research findings that were presented in Chapter 4. The third section includes limitations to the research. The fourth section presents implications for future practice. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research.

Research Study

This study was developed to determine the competencies needed for the effective leadership of special education programs within schools. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC, 1997) published 35 standards for the leadership of special education programs. Wigle and Wilcox (1999) used those standards to survey special education leaders that included teachers, school administrators, and special education directors. Their findings concluded that school-based special education administrators (SBSEAs) perceived themselves to be less skilled in the competency areas than special education directors. The purpose of this study was to determine the skill areas special education directors and SBSEAs perceive as essential to the leadership of special education programs at the school level. In addition, the purpose was to capture SBSEAs level of self-reported proficiency on each competency since they were identified by a special education director as being effective in their leadership role of overseeing special education programs at the school level. Lastly, this study sought to determine predictor variables that impact self-reported proficiency levels on competencies.

Special education directors in Virginia were identified as the target group to complete surveys. They were asked to rate, by level of importance, competencies that they considered to be necessary for the effective leadership of special education programs at the school level. In

63

addition, these individuals were asked to identify SBSEAs they thought had acquired the competencies that were essential to the effective leadership of special education programs. The identified SBSEAs were then asked to rate the importance of each competency and then self-report their level of proficiency.

Interpretation of Findings

Research Questions and Hypothesis Analysis

R_1: *Do special education directors' perceptions of effective competencies related to the leadership of school-based special education programs differ from the perceptions of school-based special education administrators related to the same set of competencies?*

It was hypothesized that perceptions between special education directors and SBSEAs would differ. However, perceptions for SBSEAs and special education directors on essential leadership competencies necessary for the effective leadership of special education programs were similar. While there were slight differences in the mean scores of competencies, as noted in Table 4.15, the competencies did not yield any statistically significant differences. Therefore, the results suggested that special education directors and SBSEAs' perceptions were similar as it related to the level of importance each competency had on the essential nature of special education leadership in schools. The consistency in survey responses suggested that the 25 competencies included in the study were a true representation of the competencies needed for effective leadership of special education programs. In addition, this study suggested that the special education leadership competencies developed by CEC (1997) are still important to the effective leadership of special education programs today.

Most of the competencies that were rated by special education directors and SBSEAs were consistent. Five competencies were rated slightly higher by SBSEAs than special education directors (t-statistical value ≥ 1.17). Those competencies were the implementation of programs to assess the strengths and weaknesses of individuals with disabilities, the development

64

of collaborative general education and special education programs, collaboration and engagement in shared decision-making to support programs for students with disabilities, support school personnel in implementing a range of strategies that promote positive behavior, and developing and providing effective communication with parents and families of individuals with disabilities. This difference in ratings may be due to the nature of these competencies and how they relate specifically to SBSEAs being in schools where they are directly engaged with students and instructional personnel on a daily basis. Special education directors, who are removed from the actual school environment, may see lesser value in these five competencies.

Three competencies were rated lower by both special education directors and SBSEAs. Those competencies were developing and implementing transition plans, developing parent/family education programs, and implementing conflict resolution programs between families and the school. These competencies still fell within the moderately essential to most essential range. Implementing conflict resolution programs between families and the school received the lowest ratings of all the competencies. The mean score for this competency for SBSEAs was 2.96. Likewise, the mean score for this competency according to special education directors was 3.09. Nevertheless, Passman (2008) and Maher (1986) stated implementing conflict resolution programs was essential to the effective leadership of special education programs at the special education director's level of leadership. They found more value in this competency at the special education director's level than survey participants from this study at the SBSEA level of leadership. Therefore, it can be suggested that this level of competence is more essential at the school division level of special education leadership.

While all competencies were rated as essential to the leadership of special education leadership within schools, SBSEAs and special education directors in this study rated four

competencies higher than the other competencies (combined mean score ≥ 3.8). These competencies were consistent with the standards published by CEC (2009). There was also congruency among the highest rated competencies and the special education leadership competency categories outlined in the literature review. The first competency in this study that was rated as most essential was communicating and demonstrating a high standard of ethical practice. Lashley (2007) stated that ethical practice should be a competency that must be acquired by special education administrators. The findings from this study are consistent with the findings from Lashley (2007), the standard outlined by CEC (2009) of program development and ethical practice, and the competency category of professionalism and ethical practice outlined in the literature review.

The second competency that had a high rating by SBSEAs and special education directors was interpreting case law and federal, state, and local policies. Leadership and policy was a special education leadership competency category that was derived from the review of literature. In addition, knowledge of special education law was a theme that emerged from the open-ended responses from survey participants. Special education law and procedures were noted to be a component that special education administrators should understand (Furney et al., 2005; Lashley, 2007; Passman, 2008; Goor & Schwenn, 1997; CEC, 2009).

Making decisions about students with exceptionalities based on open communication, trust, and mutual respect was the third competency that had a high mean score. Likewise, developing positive relationships with families and fostering positive relationships with staff and students were themes that emerged from the open-ended responses. The effective leadership of special education programs, according to Furney et al. (2005) should encompass shared decision making, vision, and planning. Findings from this research study suggest that special education

directors and SBSEAs rated making decisions about students with exceptionalities based on open communication, trust, and mutual respect as very essential to the leadership of special education programs within schools. The themes from open-ended responses also suggested that special education directors and SBSEAs value building positive relationships in order to make appropriate decisions for students. These findings are consistent with the CEC (2009) standard of collaboration and the special education leadership competency category of collaboration among personnel, families, and community members that was noted in the literature review.

The fourth competency that had a high combined mean score in the current study was ensuring that case management procedures provide appropriate services to students with disabilities (combined mean score of 3.83). This competency was consistent with the CEC (2009) standards of program development and organization and research and inquiry. In addition, this competency was in line with special education leadership competency categories of data analysis for planned decision making, program development and organization, and individual and program research-based practices and evaluations that were discussed in the literature review. When these standards are implemented, case management procedures can be implemented and evaluated in order to provide appropriate services for students with disabilities.

One standard that was recognized by the CEC (2009) as being essential to special education leadership was the evaluation of students and programs. The competency in the current study that closely related to this standard was implementing programs to assess the strengths and weaknesses of individuals with disabilities. While this competency received a high combined mean score, it was not a competency that received a combined mean score of 3.80 or higher in the current research. The combined mean score for this competency was 3.75. In addition, there was a discrepancy between special education directors and SBSEAs mean scores

on this competency. The special education director's mean score on this competency was 3.67 and the SBSEAs mean score was 3.82. While they were both high ratings, SBSEAs rated this competency as being more essential to the leadership of special education programs than special education directors. Lashley (2007) and Furney et al. (2005) agreed that this competency was important to the leadership of special education programs as they suggested that special education administrators should use data to match programs for the appropriate education of students with disabilities.

In the current study, SBSEAs and special education directors reported that developing and providing effective communication with parents and families of individuals with disabilities was essential to the effective leadership of special education programs (combined mean score of 3.76). In addition, effectively communicating with all stakeholders was a theme that emerged from open-ended responses. CEC (2009) stated collaboration as an essential standard to the leadership of special education programs. Stevenson-Jacobson et al. (2006) and Furney et al. (2005) agreed that collaborative efforts are essential to the leadership of special education programs which supports these findings. Specifically, Furney et al. (2005), in their study of effective leadership teams in Vermont, concluded that fostering a shared vision, decision-making, and planning led to each team's successful implementation and leadership of special education programs. Stevenson-Jacobson et al. (2006) also stated that the roles of special education leaders should include fostering collaborative relationships between professional staff and the community.

R$_2$: Do training experiences predict school-based special education administrators' self-reported ratings on effective leadership competencies?

Training experiences were hypothesized to predict self-reported proficiency levels of SBSEAs on leadership competencies. Sixty-six percent of the variance, as determined by the

regression analysis, in SBSEAs' self-reported proficiency levels was explained by the training experiences. Therefore, the regression model was significant (F=5.15, p=0.00). The training experiences that were included in this model were licensure endorsements in early childhood special education, licensure endorsements in speech and language, attending conferences related to special education, degrees in the field of special education, amount of years in education, and the highest degree attained. These training experiences were included in this model because the bivariate correlation analysis yielded three statistically significant training experiences (i.e., licensure endorsements in early childhood special education, licensure endorsements in speech and language, and being a mentor). Two of the three were used in the multiple regression analysis; being a mentor was omitted due to the nature of this training experience. Being a mentor means that an individual has already been identified as an effective SBSEA and thus this training experience may not impact self-reported proficiency levels on competencies. In addition to the three training experiences that yielded statistical significance from the bivariate correlation analysis, working at the high school level and the amount of years in education were controlling variables in the multiple regression model. The training experiences of having degrees in the field of education and the highest degree attained were also included because it was hypothesized that these training experiences would impact the self-reported proficiency levels of special education administrators.

Training experiences that were significant to the self-reported proficiency levels of SBSEAs included working at the high school level, conference attendance, and licensure endorsements in early childhood special education and speech and language. In addition, working at the high school level was the most important training experience that impacted self-reported proficiency levels. SBSEAs who attended conferences related to special education,

self-reported a significant increase in proficiency levels on competencies than SBSEAS who did not attend conferences. SBSEAs who had a licensure endorsement in early childhood special education self-reported a significant increase in proficiency levels on competencies than SBSEAs with other licensure endorsements. SBSEAs with speech and language licensure endorsements, self-reported lower proficiency levels on competencies. This may be due to individuals with speech and language licensure endorsements not entering the field of special education administration often.

Forty-eight percent of SBSEAs reported that they had a degree in special education. Therefore, it was suggested that education in general does matter; however, a specific degree in special education apparently did not matter when it related to self-reported proficiency levels on competencies needed for the effective special education leadership within schools. In addition, for every additional degree attained by SBSEAs, they self-reported a significant increase in proficiency levels on competencies as described in Table 4.20.

Stevenson-Jacobson et al. (2006) also reported in their study that special education leaders in schools who had an endorsement in special education had more responsibility in leading special education programs than administrators without special education licensure endorsements. The findings from this study suggest that special education licensure endorsements in general do not necessarily impact self-reported proficiency levels of competencies by SBSEAs. However, there are two exceptions. The special education licensure endorsements that yielded statistical significance to self-reported proficiency levels in this study were early childhood special education and speech and language licensure endorsements with the latter having a negative impact.

IDEA (2004) states that professional development opportunities should be provided to special education leaders in order to ensure appropriate educational services for students with disabilities. Pontius' (2010) study of school administrators in Virginia determined the need for more professional development opportunities in the field of special education. In addition, he stated the need for ongoing training related to federal and state special education mandates. This study supports this notion and also specifies the type of professional development opportunities that may have the biggest impact on effective leadership practices. According to this current study, attending conferences correlated to self-reported higher proficiency levels on the competencies presented in this study. Conferences related to special education can keep leaders in the field abreast to new trends, policies, procedures, and leadership strategies. Therefore, this may be a reason why conferences were correlated to higher self-reported proficiency levels, because the individuals who attend conferences are able stay current on special education issues in order to be effective special education leaders. In addition, conference attendance can strengthen knowledge related to special education law which was a competency that SBSEAs rated with lower proficiency levels.

Pontius (2010) also stated training experiences should occur before a SBSEA begins the special education leadership role. Goor and Schwenn (1997) also discussed the importance of preparation programs that focus on special education leadership. They stated that if SBSEAs are prepared for their role prior to becoming a special education leader, then they will be more effective. However, in this study, the training experience of completing a degree in special education which would be attained before beginning a special education leadership role did not impact self-reported proficiency levels on effective special education leadership competencies.

Training in special education leadership can have an impact on the effective leadership of special education programs within schools. The competencies described in this study are essential to the leadership of special education programs in schools. Individuals who assume the role of a school-based special education administrator should have opportunities to receive training in order to be effective special education leaders.

Limitations

There were seven limitations to this study. First, the research was done solely in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Therefore, the information is specific to the demographics of Virginia and the structure of special education leadership. Generalization to other states may be difficult because the development of leadership hierarchies with regards to special education can be different within schools.

A second limitation was the return rate from both surveys. While there was a 62 percent response rate for special education directors and a 59 percent response rate for SBSEAs, a greater number of responses to the survey would have yielded more data to enhance research.

Third, the survey for special education directors had an inadvertent question that did not pertain to their position (what school level do you currently work?). This question may have deterred survey participants from finishing the survey because they were not able to skip the question or answer it accurately before proceeding to the next question. Omitting this question may have yielded a higher survey completion response rate.

A fourth limitation was relying solely on special education directors to identify effective special education administrators within schools. This information was by its nature, subjective. More responses from this question would have yielded a bigger sample size for the SBSEA survey. In addition, survey participants may have been reluctant to answer this question because

they were asked to release contact information for other individuals. A suggestion for future research would be to have a direct link to the survey that special education directors could send directly to effective leaders they have identified. In this way, contact information would not have to be released to a third party in order to send out the survey.

A fifth possible limitation was providing only four options to consider when rating the importance of each competency related to the effective leadership of special education programs within schools. As compared to a Likert scale with five options, this may have limited the variety of responses, which may have contributed to the greater similarity or congruence of mean scores on this question.

A sixth limitation was relying on the SBSEAs to self-report their proficiency levels on competencies. This may not have been a true representation of their proficiency levels. Survey participants may have under-rated or over-rated their true proficiency levels. Specifically, individuals with a degree and/or background in special education may have been more critical on their self-analysis of proficiency levels on competencies. A colleague or supervisor may have provided a more accurate representation of proficiency levels if asked to rate SBSEAs' levels of proficiency on competencies.

Differences in school sizes were not controlled in this study which was a seventh limitation. School sizes vary throughout the state of Virginia; therefore, individuals who lead special education programs in schools may have multiple job responsibilities and may not be able to fully concentrate on effectively leading special education programs. Controlling for school sizes may have impacted study findings.

While the study had limitations as stated above, this research is nevertheless important because it addresses elements of special education leadership, which is essential to ensuring that

a free and appropriate public education is provided for all students with disabilities. Therefore, some implications for future practice are included in the next section.

Implications for Practice

The topic of special education leadership and the essential competencies needed for effective leadership is one that will aid in educating students with disabilities. IDEA (2004) mandated that individuals with disabilities have access to a free and appropriate public education. Special education leaders are critical in ensuring this access. In order for special education leaders to be able to effectively lead special education programs, there are competencies that should be acquired by these leaders.

School divisions who hire special education leaders may use the list of competencies that survey participants rated as essential to the effective leadership of special education programs to screen applicants. Criteria can be set to screen applicants who are able to express these competencies through an interview process or application screening process. In addition, interview questions could be tailored around competencies in order to understand applicants' knowledge base surrounding competencies when giving responses to questions.

Schools could use the 25 competencies as a basis for professional development opportunities to train and develop current SBSEAs. Professional development opportunities could focus on the areas in which SBSEAs did not rate their proficiency levels as high, in addition to the competencies that were rated highly important to the effective leadership of special education programs.   One competency that SBSEAs did not rate themselves as highly proficient, but was rated as very essential to the effective leadership of special education programs, was interpreting case law and federal, state, and local policies. Professional development opportunities should focus on this essential competency.

School divisions should invest the time and resources in conference attendance for SBSEAs. This training experience yielded statistical significance in this study. Therefore, attending conferences related to special education may help SBSEAs improve their practice and become more effective.

Recommendations for Future Research

The effective leadership of special education programs is essential to the effective programming of special education within schools. Therefore, this area of research warrants further consideration.

One recommendation is to study how teachers, students, and parents view the leadership of special education programming in schools. They are the people that are affected by the leadership and their insights would likely add value to this topic.

A second recommendation is to specifically look at school leadership programs that offer coursework in special education. A suggestion would be to compare degree programs that do not offer special education courses to those that do and evaluate how SBSEAs that go through these programs differ in their leadership.

Third, this study could be replicated in future research. Researchers could include a larger sample size that encompasses more states.

A fourth recommendation is to study SBSEAs at the high school level. Since working at the high school level was the most important training experience in this study, researchers could investigate the job roles of leaders at this level that may require and aid them in being more proficient in special education leadership.

A final recommendation is to investigate why special education leaders rate the following competencies lower: developing and implementing transition plans, developing and

implementing discipline policies for students with disabilities, developing parent/family education programs, and implementing conflict resolution programs. These competencies were rated lower than the other competencies by both special education directors and SBSEAs. A future research study could investigate these specific competencies in relation to leading special education programs.

Conclusion

Special education is a federal mandate that is governed by state and local policies. In order for schools to provide a free and appropriate public education to students with disabilities, school leaders must be competent in order to effectively lead these programs.

In order to investigate what competencies are needed by leaders in special education to be more effective, competencies developed by the CEC (1997, 2009) and studied by Wigle and Wilcox (1999) as being essential to the leadership of special education programs were included in this study. Special education directors and school-based special education administrators rated the importance of each competency. The ratings were analyzed and it was suggested that special education directors and SBSEAs' perceptions were similar on the competencies that are essential to the effective leadership of special education programs. This validates special education leadership competencies outlined in the literature (CEC, 1997, 2009; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999). The 25 competencies presented in this study are essential to the effective leadership of special education programs within schools. In addition, training experiences were analyzed in relation to competencies. This study demonstrated that the leadership of special education programs can be more effective when leaders receive appropriate training experiences.

Special education programs for students with disabilities are an essential component of public school education. School-based special education administrators (SBSEAs) are

responsible for leading these programs in order to provide a free and appropriate public education to students with disabilities. School divisions should focus on equipping school leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively lead special education programs.

REFERENCES

Angelle, P., & Bilton, L. M. (2009). Confronting the unknown: Principal preparation training in

    issues related to special education. *AASA Journal of Scholarship & Practice, 5*(4), 5-9.

    Retrieved from

    http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ831175&site=ehost-

    live;http://www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/Journals/AASA_Journal_of_Scholarshi

    p_and_Practice/Winter09FINAL.pdf

Arick, J. R., & Krug, D. A. (1993). Special education administrators in the United States:

    Perceptions on policy and personnel issues. *Journal of Special Education*, *27*(3), 348-

    364.

Bertrand, L., & Bratberg, W. D. (2007). Promoting the success of all students: The principal's

    role in providing quality special education services. *Academic Leadership*, *5*(4), 1.

Boscardin, M. L. (2005). The administrative role in transforming secondary schools to support

    inclusive evidence-based practices. *American Secondary Education, 33*(3), 21-32.

    Retrieved from

    http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ697361&site=ehost

    -live; http://www3.ashland.edu/ase

Boscardin, M. L. (2007). What is special about special education administration? Considerations

    for school leadership. *Exceptionality, 15*(3), 189-200. Retrieved from

    http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ773648&site=ehost

    -live; http://leaonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09362830701503537

Bozonelos, J. (2008). Retention in special education: Reducing attrition through supportive

    administrative interventions. *International Journal of Learning*, *15*(1), 149-157.

Conderman, G., & Pedersen, T. (2005). Promoting positive special education practices. *NASSP*

Bulletin, *89*(644), 90-98.

Council for Exceptional Children (2009). *What every special educator must know: Ethics, standards, and guidelines for special educators* (6th ed.). Arlington, VA: Author.

Crockett, J. B., Becker, M. K., & Quinn, D. (2009). Reviewing the knowledge base of special education leadership and administration from 1970-2009. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, *22*(2), 55-67.

Davidson, D. N., & Algozzine, B. (2002). Administrators' perceptions of special education law. *Journal of Special Education Leadership, 15*(2), 43-48. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ659284&site=ehost-live

DiPaola, M., Tschannen-Moran, M., & Walther-Thomas, C. (2004). School principals and special education: Creating the context for academic success. *Focus On Exceptional Children*, *37*(1), 1-10.

Frick, W. C., Faircloth, S. C., & Little, K. S. (2013). Responding to the collective and individual "best interests of students": Revisiting the tension between administrative practice and ethical imperatives in special education leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *49*(2), 207-242.

Furney, K. S., Aiken, J., Hasazi, S., & Clark/Keefe, K. (2005). Meeting the needs of all students: Contributions of effective school leaders. *Journal of School Leadership, 15*(5), 546-570. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ846908&site=ehost-live; http://www.rowman.com/Page/JSL

George, D. & Mallery, P. (2014). *IBM SPSS statistics 21 step by step: A simple guide and reference* (13th Ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson. (ISBN 978-0-205-98551-7)

Goor, M. B., & Schwenn, J. O. (1997). Preparing principals for leadership in special education. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 32*(3), 133-141. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ540908&site=ehost-live

Hughes, H., Combes, B. H., & Metha, S. (2012). Managing autism: Knowledge and training in autism spectrum disorders among special education administrators in Texas. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, *25*(2), 90-98.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, 20 U.S.C. § 1412a14.

Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. (2011). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches* (4th Ed.). New York: Sage. (ISBN 978-1-4129-7828-6)

Johnson, L. R. (1998). Performance evaluation of special education administrators: Considerations and recommendations. *NASSP Bulletin*, *82*(594), 24-32.

Jones, R., Blevins, D., Barrack, R., & Abrams, P. (Eds.) (2007). *Collaborating for student success*. Richmond, VA: Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals and Virginia Foundation for Educational Leadership

Kretlow, A.G., & Blatz, S.L. (2011). The ABCs of evidence-based practice for teachers. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 43(5), 8-19.

Lashley, C. (2007). Principal leadership for special education: An ethical framework. *Exceptionality, 15*(3), 177-187. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ773649&site=ehost-live; http://www.leaonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09362830701503511

Lashley, C., & Boscardin, M. (2003). *Special education administration at a crossroads: Availability, licensure, and preparation of special education administrators* (COPSSE Document No. IB-8). Gainesville: University of Florida, Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education.

Maher, C. A. (1986). Evaluation of a program for improving conflict management skills of special services directors. *Journal of School Psychology*, *24*(1), 45-53.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 20 U.S.C. § 6319 (2008).

Passman, B. (2008). Case in point: Knowledge, skills, and dispositions. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, *21*(1), 46-47.

Pontius, N. F. (2010). *Principal's desirability for professional development in competencies related to leading special education programs.* University of Virginia. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses,* 164. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/820528201?accountid=12198. (820528201).

Protz, B. M. (2005). Administrators' understanding of special education law in the schoolhouse. *Journal of Special Education Leadership, 18*(2), 15-23. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ807912&site=ehost-live; http://www.casecec.org/

Pyle, C., & Grimes, J.C. (2012, June 29). NCLB waiver approved by US Department of Education: Flexibility plan does away with complex & unrealistic "AYP" objectives [Press release]. Retrieved from http://www.doe.virginia.gov/news/news_releases/2012/jun29.shtml

Rascoe, P. A. (2007). *An analysis of virginia's high school principals educational background,*

knowledge and perceptions related to special education. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses,* Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/1031214488?accountid=12198. (1031214488).

Stevenson-Jacobson, R., Jacobson, J., & Hilton, A. (2006). Principals' perceptions of critical skills needed for administration of special education. *Journal of Special Education Leadership, 19*(2), 39-47. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ804089&site=ehost-live; http://www.casecec.org/

Thomas, N. (2007). Case in point: Collaboration is key to leadership. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, *20*(1), 44-45.

Thompson, J. R., & O'Brian, M. (2007). Many hats and a delicate balance: The lives and times of today's special Education directors. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, *20*(1), 33-43.

U.S. Department of Education. 34 C.F. R. pt. 300 (2006).

Virginia Board of Education. *8VAC20-22-10 (2011)*

Virginia Department of Education (2010). Parent's guide to special education. Retrieved from http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/parents/parents_guide.pdf

Wellner, L. (2012). Building parent trust in the special education setting. *Leadership*, *41*(4), 16-19.

Wigle, S. E., & Wilcox, D. J. (1999). The special education competencies of general education administrators. *Reading Improvement, 36,* 4-15

Yell, M. L., Katsiyannis, A., & Bradley, R. (2003). A special role. *Principal Leadership: High School Edition*, *4*(2), 22-28.

Appendix A[4]: CEC (1997) Important Skills Needed for Special Education Administration

Communicate an inclusive vision to various constituencies	Interpret case law, and federal, state, local policies	Plan, communicate, and negotiate student and family needs and programs
Develop and implement programs that respond to individual and family characteristics	Advocate for the inclusion of individuals with exceptionalities	Implement an assessment program for individuals with exceptionalities
Understand and interpret data/information about individual students	Ensure that outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities are addressed in general system standards and curriculum	Develop and implement strategies for professional development for teachers of students with exceptionalities
Develop and implement a technology plan for teachers of students with exceptionalities	Assist in development of curriculum and instructional models for all students	Develop collaborative general and special education programs
Ensure that decision and management procedures provide appropriate services to students with exceptionalities	Develop and implement ongoing evaluations of special ed. Programs	Develop and implement interagency agreements
Develop and implement flexible service delivery programs	Develop and implement professional development programs that include use of technology	Develop strategic plans that provide opportunities for collaboration across programs and agencies
Develop district budgets and procure funding to ensure effective allocation of resources	Develop building level supports for inclusive educational settings	Develop and implement transition plans
Use a variety of technologies to enhance management of resources	Develop and implement a district discipline policy for students with exceptionalities	Support individual school sites in implementing a range of strategies that promote positive behavior
Implement a variety of procedures to ensure clear communication among administrators and personnel	Develop parent/family education programs	Implement conflict resolution programs
Develop and support communication and collaboration with educational and other agencies	Collaborate and engage in shared decision-making to support programs for students with exceptionalities	Develop and provide effective communication with parents and families of individuals with exceptionalities
Implement effective consultation and collaboration techniques	Serve as advocate for individuals with exceptionalities and their families	Respect and support students' self advocacy rights
Communicate and demonstrate a high standard of ethical practice	Make decisions about students with exceptionalities based on open communication, trust, mutual respect	

---

[4] Wigle & Wilcox, 1999, pp. 8-10

Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Request and Approval

IRB Request for Expedited Review

Title of Project: Determining Effective Leadership Competencies of School-based Administrators Overseeing Special Education Programs within Virginia Public Schools

Reasons for Expedited Review: Please identify the reason(s) that you are applying for expedited review and specify which conditions that you believe are being met to qualify this research for an expedited review (See Procedures for Review).

I am applying for expedited review because the research I am conducting is in the form of an online survey instrument for individuals 18 years or older. The survey is asking individuals to rate competencies based on their perceptions and to self-rate their proficiency level on each competency. There are no identifiable risks associated with completing the survey.

To the best of my knowledge, the proposed research complies with the conditions described on the IRB for Human Subjects Research website.
Principal Investigator (signature): ____Patrice Thompson_____
Date_____4/22/13_____
Faculty Research Sponsor (signature): _____Sally Selden_____
        (required if the principal investigator is a student)
Date_____4/22/13_____

Date: April 26, 2013

To: Patrice Thompson

Re: Approval of Research Proposal

Your request for an expedited review of your research project: "Determining Effective Leadership Competencies of School-Based Administrators Overseeing Special Education Programs within Virginia Public Schools" has been completed. The proposal and related study comply with the standards set by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45 CFR Part 46, Protection of Human Subjects, effective as of July 14, 2009. The study is therefore approved.

Please remember that if any modifications are necessary, these changes need to be approved by this committee. Approval for this proposal is for one year. If necessary, re-approval must occur prior to April 25, 2014. Please feel free to give me a call at X8962 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Beth McKinney

Beth McKinney, PhD, MPH, CHES

Chair, Human Subject Research Committee (IRB)

Appendix C: Letter to Special Education Directors

Dear VA Special Education Director,

My name is Patrice Thompson and I am currently a doctoral of education student at Lynchburg College. I am conducting research to determine the competencies needed to be an effective school-based special education administrator. As a result of this study, I would like to compare the competencies that special education directors rate as essential to that of identified school-based special education administrators.

I hope that you will take 15-20 minutes of your time to complete this survey. The survey includes some demographic information that will help me understand your background in special education. In addition, I am asking you to rate each identified competency on how essential they are to the effective leadership of special education programs within schools. One final item will ask you to identify an effective school-based special education administrator that exhibits the competencies mentioned in the survey. Your identification of individuals will help me to complete my research. All responses will be anonymous to the researcher and parties reviewing the research. If you do not feel comfortable identifying an effective school-based special education administrator, you may submit the survey without answering this question.

Please understand that participation is completely voluntary. **Please respond to the questions and send the completed survey back in the enclosed postage paid envelope.** By doing so you are agreeing that you understand the above information, have had all of questions about participation in this research study answered, and you are voluntarily agreeing to participate in the research study described above.

You will be entered into 3 drawings for a $50 Visa gift card by returning the completed survey.

If you have any questions or would like additional information about this research, please contact me by phone at 434-728-0518 or by email at thompson_pa@students.lynchburg.edu. You can also contact my advisor by phone at 434-544-8655 or by email at polloway@lynchburg.edu. The Lynchburg College Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research has approved this project. You may also contact the IRB Chair, Dr. Beth McKinney through the Health Promotion Department at Lynchburg College at 434.544.8962 or mckinney.b@lynchburg.edu with any questions.

Thank you for participating in this research study. Please retain this letter to participate in the research study for your records and as evidence of informed consent.

Sincerely,

Patrice Thompson, M.Ed.

Appendix D: Letter to School-based Special Education Administrators

Dear Effective School-based Special Education Administrator,

Congratulations! You were identified as an effective special education administrator.

My name is Patrice Thompson and I am currently a doctoral student at Lynchburg College. I am conducting research to determine the competencies needed to be an effective school-based special education administrator. Special education directors in Virginia have participated in this research by completing this survey. You were identified by one or more of these individuals as being very effective in your school leadership.

I hope that you will take 15-20 minutes of your time to complete this survey. The survey includes some demographic information that will help me understand your background in special education. In addition, I am asking you to rate each identified competency on how essential they are to the effective leadership of special education programs within schools and to self rate your perceived level of proficiency in each area. All responses are anonymous to the researcher and parties reviewing the research.

Please understand that participation is completely voluntary. **Please respond to the questions and send the completed survey back in the enclosed postage paid envelope.** By doing so you are agreeing that you understand the above information, have had all of your questions about participation in this research study answered, and you are voluntarily agreeing to participate in the research study described above.

Just for completing the survey, your name will be entered into 3 drawings for a $50 Visa gift card.

If you have any questions or would like additional information about this research, please contact me by phone at 434-728-0518 or by email at thompson_pa@students.lynchburg.edu. You can also contact my advisor by phone at 434-544-8655 or by email at polloway@lynchburg.edu. The Lynchburg College Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research has approved this project. You may also contact the IRB Chair, Dr. Beth McKinney through the Health Promotion Department at Lynchburg College at 434.544.8962 or mckinney.b@lynchburg.edu with any questions.

Thank you for participating in this research study. Please retain this letter for your records and as evidence of informed consent.

Sincerely,

Patrice Thompson, M.Ed

Appendix E: Special Education Directors' Survey Instrument

*1. Do you have responsibility for supervising special education programs in your school division?

◯   Yes

◯   No

2. Please rate how you perceive the essential nature of each competency as it relates to the effective leadership of special education programs within public k-12 schools.

	Not Essential	Minimally Essential	Moderately Essential	Most Essential
Communicate an inclusive vision to various constituencies	○	○	○	○
Interpret case law and federal, state, and local policies	○	○	○	○
Advocate for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities	○	○	○	○
Implement programs to assess the strengths and weaknesses of individuals with disabilities	○	○	○	○
Understand and interpret data/information about individual students	○	○	○	○
Ensure that outcomes for individuals with disabilities are addressed in general/regular education standards and curriculum	○	○	○	○
Develop and implement strategies for professional development for teachers of students with disabilities	○	○	○	○
Assist in development of special education curriculum and instructional models for all students	○	○	○	○
Develop collaborative general and special education programs	○	○	○	○
Ensure that case management procedures provide appropriate services to students with disabilities	○	○	○	○
Develop and implement ongoing evaluations of special education programs	○	○	○	○

Develop strategic plans that provide opportunities for collaboration with agencies	◯	◯	◯	◯
Develop building level supports for inclusive educational settings	◯	◯	◯	◯
Develop and implement transition plans	◯	◯	◯	◯
Develop and implement a discipline policy for students with disabilities	◯	◯	◯	◯
Support school personnel in implementing a range of strategies that promote positive behavior	◯	◯	◯	◯
Implement a variety of procedures to ensure clear communication among administrators and school personnel	◯	◯	◯	◯
Develop parent/family education programs	◯	◯	◯	◯
Implement conflict resolution programs between families and the school	◯	◯	◯	◯
Collaborate and engage in shared decision-making to support programs for students with disabilities	◯	◯	◯	◯
Develop and provide effective communication with parents and families of individuals with disabilities	◯	◯	◯	◯
Serve as an advocate for individuals with disabilities and their families	◯	◯	◯	◯
Respect and support students' self-advocacy Rights	◯	◯	◯	◯
Communicate and demonstrate a high standard of ethical practice	◯	◯	◯	◯
Make decisions about students with disabilities based on open communication, trust, and mutual respect	◯	◯	◯	◯

3. Please list any competencies that you believe are essential to the effective leadership of special education programs within schools, but are not indicated above.

Please answer the following question. The information you provide will remain confidential and will only be seen by the researcher. Identified participants will be asked to take part in the same survey. Survey data will only be used to identify a set list of competencies that are essential to the effective leadership of special education programs.

4. Please provide one to three names and contact information for administrators (e.g., principals or assistant principals) who are responsible for leading special education programs within individual schools that you see as proficient in majority of the competencies you rated as essential above. The identified people may be people you work with currently or have known in the past.

Name:
School Position/Title:
Email address
Phone number:

Name:
School Position/Title:
Email address
Phone number:

Name:
School Position/Title:
Email address
Phone number:

5. Are you?

◯ Male

◯ Female

6. What is your race? Mark one or more.

◯ White

◯ Black or African American

◯ Asian

◯ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

◯ American Indian or Alaska Native

◯ Other

*7. At what school level do you currently work?

○ PreK

○ Elementary

○ Middle

○ High

○ Combined (Middle/High)

*8. How many years have you been in education?

○ 1-5

○ 6-10

○ 11-15

○ 16-20

○ 21-25

○ 25+

*9. How many years were you a teacher?

○ 0

○ 1-5

○ 6-10

○ 11-15

○ 16-20

○ 21-25

○ 25+

✱10. How many years have you been in your current position?

○ 1-5

○ 6-10

○ 11-15

○ 16-20

○ 21-25

○ 25+

✱11. What is the highest degree you have attained?

○ Bachelors

○ Masters

○ Ed.S.

○ Doctorate

✱12. Are any of your degrees in the field of special education?

○ Yes

○ No

13. Please indicate the degrees that are in the field of special education.

○ Bachelors

○ Masters

○ Ed.S

○ Doctorate

✱14. Do you have any special education endorsements on your professional license?

○ Yes

○ No

15. Please select all endorsements that apply.

◯   Learning Disabilities

◯ Emotional Disabilities

◯ Mental Retardation

◯ Severe Disabilities

◯ General Curriculum

◯ Adapted Curriculum

◯ Early Childhood Special Education

◯   Speech and Language

◯   Vision Impairments

◯   Hearing Impairments

◯   Other (please specify)

*16. What training experiences have you had related to special education? Please select all that apply.

◯   Certificate program

◯ Professional workshops

◯   Conferences

◯   Degree programs

◯ Mentoring; as mentor

◯ Mentoring; as mentee

◯ Other (please specify)

Appendix F: School-based Special Education Administrator's Survey

*1. Do you have primary responsibility for supervising special education programs in your school?

◯ Yes

◯ No

2. Please rate how you perceive the essential nature of each competency as it relates to the effective leadership of special education programs within public k-12 schools.

	Not Essential	Minimally Essential	Moderately Essential	Most Essential
Communicate an inclusive vision to various constituencies	◯	◯	◯	◯
Interpret case law and federal, state, and local policies	◯	◯	◯	◯
Advocate for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities	◯	◯	◯	◯
Implement programs to assess the strengths and weaknesses of individuals with disabilities	◯	◯	◯	◯
Understand and interpret data/information about individual students	◯	◯	◯	◯
Ensure that outcomes for individuals with disabilities are addressed in general/regular education standards and curriculum	◯	◯	◯	◯
Develop and implement strategies for professional development for teachers of students with disabilities	◯	◯	◯	◯
Assist in development of special education curriculum and instructional models for all students	◯	◯	◯	◯
Develop collaborative general and special education programs	◯	◯	◯	◯
Ensure that case management procedures provide appropriate services to students with disabilities	◯	◯	◯	◯

Develop and implement ongoing evaluations of special education programs	○	○	○	○
Develop strategic plans that provide opportunities for collaboration with agencies	○	○	○	○
Develop building level supports for inclusive educational settings	○	○	○	○
Develop and implement transition plans	○	○	○	○
Develop and implement a discipline policy for students with disabilities	○	○	○	○
Support school personnel in implementing a range of strategies that promote positive behavior	○	○	○	○
Implement a variety of procedures to ensure clear communication among administrators and school personnel	○	○	○	○
Develop parent/family education programs	○	○	○	○
Implement conflict resolution programs between families and the school	○	○	○	○
Collaborate and engage in shared decision-making to support programs for students with disabilities	○	○	○	○
Develop and provide effective communication with parents and families of individuals with disabilities	○	○	○	○
Serve as an advocate for individuals with disabilities and their families	○	○	○	○
Respect and support students' self-advocacy rights	○	○	○	○
Communicate and demonstrate a high standard of ethical practice	○	○	○	○
Make decisions about students with disabilities based on open communication, trust, and mutual respect	○	○	○	○

3. Please list any competencies that you believe are essential to the effective leadership of special education programs within schools, but are not indicated above.

*4. Please rate your perceived personal level of proficiency as it relates to each of the competencies below.

	Not Proficient	Beginning Proficiency	Developing Proficiency	Proficient	Highly Proficient
Communicate an inclusive vision to various constituencies	○	○	○	○	○
Interpret case law and federal, state, and local policies	○	○	○	○	○
Advocate for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities	○	○	○	○	○
Implement programs to assess the strengths and weaknesses of individuals with disabilities	○	○	○	○	○
Understand and interpret data/information about individual students	○	○	○	○	○
Ensure that outcomes for individuals with disabilities are addressed in general/regular education standards and curriculum	○	○	○	○	○
Develop and implement strategies for professional development for teachers of students with disabilities	○	○	○	○	○
Assist in development of special education curriculum and instructional models for all students	○	○	○	○	○
Develop collaborative general and special education programs	○	○	○	○	○
Ensure that case management procedures provide appropriate services	○	○	○	○	○
Develop and implement ongoing evaluations of special education programs	○	○	○	○	○

97

Develop strategic plans that provide opportunities for collaboration with agencies	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Develop building level supports for inclusive educational settings	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Develop and implement transition plans	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Develop and implement a discipline policy for students with disabilities	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Support school personnel in implementing a range of strategies that promote positive behavior	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Implement a variety of procedures to ensure clear communication among administrators and school personnel	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Develop parent/family education programs	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Implement conflict resolution programs between families and the school	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Collaborate and engage in shared decision-making to support programs for students with disabilities	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Develop and provide effective communication with parents and families of individuals with disabilities	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Serve as an advocate for individuals with disabilities and their families	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Respect and support students' self-advocacy rights	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Communicate and demonstrate a high standard of ethical practice	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Make decisions about students with disabilities based on open communication, trust, and mutual respect	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

*5. Which best represents the level of responsibility you have for leading special education programs in your school?

○   25% or less

○   More than 25%, but less than 50%

○   50% -75%

○   More than 75%, but less than 100%

○   100%

6. Are you?

○   Male

○   Female

7. What is your race? Mark one or more.

○   White

○   Black or African American

○   Asian

○   Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

○   American Indian or Alaska Native

○   Other

✱8. At what school level do you currently work? Please select all that apply.

○　　PreK

○　　Elementary

○　　Middle

○　　High

○　Combined (Middle/High)

✱9. How many years have you been in education?

○　　1-5

○　　6-10

○　　11-15

○　　16-20

○　　21-25

○　　25+

*10. How many years were you a teacher?

◯   0

◯   1-5

◯   6-10

◯   11-15

◯   16-20

◯   21-25

◯   25+

*11. How many years have you been in your current position?

◯   1-5

◯   6-10

◯   11-15

◯ 16-20

◯ 21-25

◯   25+

*12. What is the highest degree you have attained?

◯ Bachelors

◯ Masters

◯ Ed.S.

◯ Doctorate

*13. Are any of your degrees in the field of special education?

◯ Yes
◯ No

*14. Please indicate the degrees that are in the field of special education. Please select all that apply.

◯ Bachelors

◯ Masters
◯ Ed.S.
◯ Doctorate

*15. Do you have any special education endorsements on your professional license?

◯ Yes

◯ No

⁎16. Please select all endorsements that apply.

◯ Learning Disabilities

◯ Emotional Disabilities

◯ Mental Retardation

◯ Severe Disabilities

◯ General Curriculum

◯ Adapted Curriculum

◯ Early Childhood Special Education

◯ Speech and Language

◯ Vision Impairments

◯ Hearing Impairments

◯ Other (please specify)

⁎17. What training experiences have you had related to special education? Please select all that apply.

◯ Certificate program

◯ Professional workshops

◯ Conferences

◯ Degree programs

◯ Mentoring; as mentor

◯ Mentoring; as mentee

◯ Other (please specify)

⁎18. How many people in your school, not including yourself, have a special education degree and/or endorsement?

◯ 1-5

◯ 6-10

◯ 11-15

◯ 16-20

◯ 21-25

◯ 25+

Appendix G: Open-ended Survey Responses[5]

#3: List any competences that you believe are essential to the effective leadership of special education programs within schools, but are not indicated above.	
Special Education Directors	**SBSEAs**
Knowledge of Budgeting and financing of programs.	Clear IEP procedures and meeting expectations Articulated plan and process for referring to child study Professional development for staff to know laws, differences in 504/child study/RTI/Elg/IEP.
List was quite comprehensive and thorough. I applaud whoever completed it.	Cultivate positive relationships between special ed and regular ed. teachers.
Ensure that IEPs and instruction are appropriately individualized to meet each student's unique needs.	Create a trusting/comfortable bond between classroom teacher and student, to assure the student has the best opportunity to be successful.
Work cooperatively with Director of SPED to provide FAPE to individual students.	Good communicator/Great listener/Trustworthy/Excellent data analyzer.
Conflict transformation, systems change strategies.	Help them have an understanding that strategies will work for all students not just students with special needs. Monitor accommodations and see that they are being implemented appropriately.
Difficult to evaluate these items as all are absolutely essential and are high priorities. To rate any of the as moderately essential would devalue their importance.	I believe most of the competencies were indicated above.
Develop an appropriate budget and secure resources for alternative instructional materials and assistive technology/Maintain sustainability of initiatives linked to PD.	Make sure accommodations are met for special education students. Understand special education timelines.
Ability to see the bigger picture and negotiate on a personal level with parents/families so everyone can arrive at a place they feel confidant and comfortable with services.	I believe that all the areas were identified in the list above.
N/A	No other competencies.
Securing and managing funding/budgets for SPED programs.	I believe that ALL of the above are "most essential" however, some are so "required" for lack of a better word - planning for them isn't essential because it isn't and hasn't be optional for a very long time :)
Time management - in order to comply with regulations but have effective programs. Items checked as minimally essential is because I have found that I do not have to take that role - if all school staff are	None at this time.

---

[5] Responses are presented exactly as participants reported in the survey.

competent professionals. I have also found that in the real world there is not as much separation between general ed. and special ed. as folks would think.	
Continual, clear, consistent communication with school based administrators (LEAs) is essential.	I like all the choices above but realistically you can't put all as very important and implement them w/ fidelity. You must pick and choose what are the priorities. I would add more personnel as a choice b/c that is what is also needed.
Create an understanding of the multi-faceted levels of diversity of the students served in public education today. For instance, disability, poverty, cultural, homelessness, single parent or grandparent raising, language, tragedy, etc. Essential that all teachers feel obligation to reach and teach regardless of circumstances.	Adopted a implementing a programs that create a child centered school for all students. Develop the vision and the direction that you are going and let staff help decide how to get there. Do not get caught up in debates over trivial issues that do not effect student achieve or outcomes.
Interpret national trends in sped related legislative and school board legislative priorities.	Open door policy for parents; put effort into establishing and maintaining relationships with all of your customers.
Communication with other administrators, teachers, agencies, paraprofessionals, families cannot be stresses enough! Full knowledge of regulations is also a must. Creativity in problem solving and the willingness to listen to others concerning solutions is also necessary.	
Ensuring school and division compliance with state and federal regulations Resolving conflicts and problems between parents and teachers/administrators regarding special education matters, especially when teachers/school did not comply with policies/regulations.	
Listening Skills, Treating people with dignity and respect. Respecting diverse cultural, economic and environmental experiences.	
Serve as an advocate for special education staff in communications with parents, other administrators.	
Trust, honesty, integrity, and ability to communicate to a wide variety of groups.	
Team building skills/Ability to be an effective listener.	
Knowledge of Special education regulations,	

case law, and the role of the VA Dept. of Education. Moreover, you need to know how to set appropriate boundaries and full understanding of FAPE and LRE.	
The ability to have a positive relationship with families.	