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Factors that Influence Special Education Teacher Retention

by

Samantha Lou Henderson

February 28, 2014

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University in

partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

Factors that Influence Special Education Teacher Retention

by

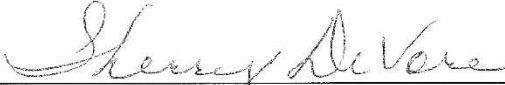
Samantha Lou Henderson

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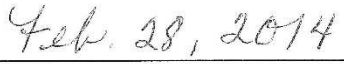
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Lindenwood University, School of Education



Dr. Sherry DeVore, Dissertation Chair



Date



Dr. Cherita Graber, Committee Member



Date



Dr. Terry Reid, Committee Member




Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

Full Legal Name: Samantha Lou Henderson

Signature:  Date: 2/28/14

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First, I would like to thank my committee members for their patience and encouragement throughout the process of completing my dissertation. Dr. Cherita Graber and Dr. Sherry DeVore have provided motivation and invaluable input that have enabled this study to come to its completion within a timely manner. Without them, this project would not have been possible.

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Finally, my deepest and most sincere appreciation go to my family and friends. All of them have encouraged and supported me through prayer, unconditional love, conversation, good-natured teasing, and just being there. My husband, Brad, has never doubted my ability to get this done, has cooked countless meals for me, and has put up with my stressed-fueled writing rants. My parents have modeled for me a belief in God, hard work, and helping others. Without their love and support, I would not be the person I am today.

Abstract

In this study, the factors that influence special education teachers to remain in their profession for at least five years were identified and analyzed. The study involved a mixed-methods design including a survey and interviews with experienced special educators. The survey items and their categorizations as relational support or organizational factors were based upon Billingsley's (2004) landmark research. The population consisted of special educators who remained in their current teaching positions for at least five years. The sample group for the survey included 35 veteran special educators from eight school districts in Missouri, and the stratified interview sample of five educators was gleaned from the survey participants. Survey and interview data were collected and analyzed. Quantitative findings indicated no significant difference existed at a 5% probability level between the response data modes for relational support factors and the response data modes for organizational factors. The four most influential retention factors included enjoyment gained from job, ability to make a difference in the lives of students, support of district-level special education administrators, and support of fellow special education teachers. Four themes emerged from the interview data gathered: making a difference was of utmost influence, relational support factors were more influential than organizational factors, and the actions of both building-level and special education administrators promoted an increase in special education teacher retention. The data collected in this study may assist administrators as they address influential teacher retention factors in order to increase the retention of experienced and qualified special education teachers.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Special education teachers are an integral part of all quality educational teams within the public school system (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Ronfeldt, & Wyckoff, 2010). School building administrators who may not have an abundance of personal experience or a high level of comfort with special education practices and policies are relieved when they are able to rely on the expertise of special educators who have stood the test of time within the field (Berry, Petrin, Gravelle, & Farmer, 2011). Administrators should not only attract qualified special education teachers, but must also make every effort to retain these professionals for as long as possible (Carr, 2009).

This chapter addressed the background and purpose of a mixed methods study focusing on the reasons special education teachers choose to stay in the special education teaching profession for more than five consecutive years. The conceptual framework was introduced, along with the specific problem and research questions that were addressed within the study. Terms were defined, and limitations and assumptions of the study were outlined.

Background of the Study

The most recent *Teacher Shortage Areas Nationwide Listing* indicated that in all 50 states, special educators continue to be in short supply (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Most school administrators sense this shortage of special education teachers and concede quality special educators are difficult to hire and retain (Berry et al., 2011). Although building and district-level administrators recognize the inconvenience and expense of this situation in terms of time, effort, and financial resources, they must also acknowledge the long-term consequences may be dire for students with disabilities

(Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). Lack of competent and experienced special educators typically leads to lower academic and social achievement for special education students (Feng & Sass, 2009).

The first step toward addressing the shortage of special educators is to attract qualified, well-trained teachers into the profession. Carr (2009) noted that in order to attract new special education teachers, administrators should use emotional appeals to promote the potential of significant student-teacher relationships. Bruinsma and Jansen (2010) revealed teachers who were intrinsically motivated to enter the field were more likely to take advantage of and benefit from their pre-service teacher training and were expected to continue their teaching careers for extended periods of time. Novice special education teachers with considerable understanding of instructional strategies and pedagogy tended to be more confident in their abilities to reach all students and were also more likely to remain in the special education profession (Kaufman & Ring, 2011; Morewood & Condo, 2012).

After qualified special education teachers are hired, school administrators must attempt to help special educators avoid the typical pitfalls that lead to burnout. Carr (2009) deduced scarcity of relevant professional development and a lack of perceived support from administrators and colleagues were key components that lead to teacher attrition. In addition, Padilla (2011) stated low morale and the desire to move to different and better positions were significant motives which caused teachers to leave the field of special education. Role confusion, paperwork expectations, and job-related stress were of particular concern to special education teachers who chose to leave the field (Billingsley, 2004). In another study, the primary reasons given for leaving special

education included retirement, personal issues, paperwork, better salary and benefit packages in other districts, a desire to be a general educator or administrator, lack of training, stress and burnout, and lack of administrative support (Berry et al., 2011). Albrecht, Johns, Mounstevan, and Olorunda (2009) asserted overwhelming workload, excessive paperwork requirements, and negative school culture and climate were the factors special education teachers noted most frequently when they made the decision to leave the field of special education.

In order to avoid an ongoing shortage of special educators, it is imperative to focus on more than just the reasons teachers leave the profession. It is equally important to identify the specific reasons special education teachers choose to remain in the field (Billingsley, 2004). School district administrators should then reflect upon those given reasons and consider making changes to increase the long-term retention of special education teachers (Billingsley). As asserted by Feng and Sass (2009), retention of quality special educators will likely lead to increased student achievement for students with disabilities.

Conceptual Framework

Retention of experienced special education teachers has become even more essential since the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 requirements were enforced for highly qualified teachers. NCLB obligates special education teachers who directly teach core academic subjects to meet highly qualified status in each of those subjects in addition to meeting special education certification requirements. As the majority of special educators teach multiple subjects throughout the day, this requirement makes it difficult for them to acquire and maintain the certifications necessary to be

considered highly qualified in all aspects of their teaching assignments (Hodge & Krumm, 2009). School administrators scramble to assist special education teachers in the pursuit of additional certifications and are compelled to do whatever possible to retain these valuable educators once they have managed to meet the requirements to be regarded as highly qualified (Hodge & Krumm).

Following a landmark critical analysis of 20 research studies on special education teacher retention and attrition, Billingsley (2004) discovered a number of retention factors that can presumably be controlled to some extent by school administrators. As salary levels and benefits increase, special education teachers move around and leave their districts less frequently (Billingsley). In addition, teachers who have greater access to relevant, high-quality professional development opportunities are more likely to stay in special education teaching positions (Billingsley). When teachers sense a positive school climate, administrative support, and collegiality with other teachers in their buildings, they tend to remain in their current teaching assignments (Billingsley). As administrators would expect, special education teachers who feel overwhelmed by paperwork, who find their various teaching roles to be ambiguous or conflicting, and who are under chronic and unrelenting stress are more likely to leave the special education profession (Billingsley).

More recent studies have furthered the research on retention factors that influence special educators to remain in the profession. Billingsley, Griffin, Smith, Kamman, and Israel (2009) established teacher induction and mentoring are generally understood to improve the quality of new teachers and to increase special education teacher retention. It also appears teachers who have experienced instructional success were more satisfied

with their jobs and tended to remain in their current teaching positions (Boyd et al., 2010). Relevant professional development has also been found to reduce stress, increase proficiency, and promote commitment of teachers to special education (Berry et al., 2011).

Berry (2012) discovered perceived support increases the commitment of special education teachers to the profession. Special educators expressed a desire for administrative support, closely followed in importance by the support of general education teachers within their buildings (Berry). They also wished for colleagues to understand the roles of special educators and to share in the responsibility of educating students with disabilities (Berry).

Statement of the Problem

In a 2008 report to Congress on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the U.S. Department of Education (2011) reported the 2005 national shortage of highly qualified special education teachers for students ages six to 21 was 9.6%, or the equivalent of 40,732 teachers. This scarcity has remained fairly consistent over the course of the past 20 years (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Traditionally, research addressing the shortage of special educators has been focused on methods for attracting teachers and on the reasons teachers choose to leave the field (Billingsley, 2004). There is limited research available concerning the factors that influence special education teachers to stay in their teaching positions.

Feng and Sass (2009) argued that in order to keep special educators in the field of education and in their current special education teaching roles, it is necessary to study the factors that encourage special education teachers to remain in the field. School

administrators can then use this information to address the retention factors that may encourage their special education teaching staff to continue in the special education teaching profession (Feng & Sass). In the long term, retention of highly qualified special education teachers should lead to higher achievement for students with disabilities (Feng & Sass).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the specific factors that have encouraged special education teachers to remain in the field of special education for more than five years. Previous research has focused primarily on ways to attract special educators and on the reasons they leave the field. This study furthered the research available concerning the positive factors that have influenced teachers to stay in their special education teaching positions for an extended period of time. In addition, the data collected through the study were used to determine whether special educators feel influenced more by relational support factors or by organizational factors when making the choice to remain in the special education profession. In order to keep experienced special educators in the field of education and in their current special education teaching positions, school administrators must take action and address the retention factors within their control.

Research questions. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What difference exists, if any, between the influence of relational support factors and organizational factors as reported by special education teachers who remain in their current teaching positions for five years or more?

2. What retention factors do special education teachers most often report to be influential reasons for staying in their current teaching positions for five years or more?

3. What attitudes are expressed by special education teachers regarding the influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on their decisions to remain in their current teaching positions for five years or more?

Null hypothesis (H₁₀). There is no difference between the reported influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on special education teacher retention.

Alternative hypothesis (H_{1a}). There is a difference between the reported influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on special education teacher retention.

Definitions of Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms were defined:

Core academic subjects. Core academic subjects were defined as inclusive of all of the following: English, reading or language arts, math, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography (Council for Exceptional Children, 2006).

Google forms. Within the context of this study, Google forms was defined as a free online service that enables individuals to create web-based surveys accessible through electronic communication or web links. Survey responses were recorded into a Google forms spreadsheet and were accessed online by the survey's creator (Google, 2012).

Highly qualified. Highly qualified special education teachers were defined in this study as those who are certified in special education and who also earn highly qualified status in each of the core academic subjects for which they are the primary instructor (Council for Exceptional Children, 2006).

Organizational factors. For the purposes of this study, organizational factors were defined as those variables of a special education teacher's work environment associated with salary and benefits, teacher roles, paperwork, and case load issues (Billingsley, 2004).

Relational support factors. Within this study, relational support factors were defined as those variables of a special education teacher's work environment associated with school culture and climate, administrative support at both the building and district levels, support of colleagues, support through induction and mentoring programs, and professional development opportunities (Billingsley, 2004).

Special education teachers. Special education teachers were defined for the purposes of this study as teachers who deliver specialized instruction and services to students with disabilities as required by the Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) of those students (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2010). In this study, special education teachers did not include related service providers such as speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, nurses, counselors, consultants, and social workers.

Limitations and Assumptions

The following limitations were identified in this study:

Sample demographics. The demographics of the special educators who responded to the survey and to the interviews were a limitation of the study. The sample consisted of special education teachers from eight southwest Missouri public school districts within a particular conference. The conference is a group of school districts from a specific geographic area that are of similar size and implement comparable programming. The sample was consequently limited in terms of geographic location and school district composition. The results of this study might differ in other states or regions or in school districts with dissimilar demographics.

Sample size. The size of the survey sample was another limitation of the study. The survey link was sent to 112 experienced special education teachers, but only 35 responses were received within the survey window. The results of a survey of 35 teachers and of interviews with five teachers cannot be generalized as representative of the opinions of all special educators who remain in the special education teaching field for five years or more.

Instrument. The study involved original survey and interview questions, which must be considered a limitation. As explained in Chapter Three of this dissertation, survey items and interview questions were designed to avoid confusion; however, survey participants were not able to check for understanding with the survey designer while completing the survey. Some teachers who participated in the study failed to complete all survey items or chose to discontinue the interview process, which caused those teachers to be eliminated from the sample.

Categorization of retention factors. Although relational support factors and organizational factors were broadly defined by in Billingsley's (2004) work, specific retention factors that were used as survey items were categorized for the purposes of this study based upon those broad criteria. The pilot group confirmed the categorizations utilized in the study matched their understandings of relational support and organizational factors.

The following assumptions were accepted in this study:

1. The survey and interview items and the terms included within those items were clear enough to the participants to enable them to respond appropriately.
2. The responses of the participants were offered honestly and without bias.

Summary

In order to keep special educators in the field of education and in their current special education teaching positions, school administrators must take action and address the retention factors within their control. An ongoing shortage of qualified special education teachers is evident (Berry et al., 2011). Billingsley's (2004) landmark work outlined various reasons that special educators provided when asked why they remained in the profession.

The principal goal of this study was to identify influential retention factors based upon the survey and interview responses of special education teachers who have chosen to remain teachers in the field of special education for five years or longer. One quantitative and two qualitative research questions were answered. Survey data was utilized to determine whether or not a difference existed between the reported influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on special education teacher

retention. Survey and interview responses qualified the data and allowed for further analysis.

The following chapter discussed previous research studies that have established a nationwide shortage of special education teachers, identified strategies for attracting special educators, addressed the increasing certification needs of special education teachers, and delineated the reasons teachers provide for leaving the field of special education. Other included studies were focused primarily upon the factors that have influenced special educators to stay in the field for extended periods of time. The research studies discussed within the next chapter served as groundwork and orientation for the study.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

To strengthen public school teaching teams, qualified and experienced special education teachers must be attracted and retained by school districts. Administrators and building teams should make every effort to keep these special education professionals in their employ for as long as possible. The purpose of this study was to identify specific retention factors that have influenced special education teachers to continue teaching in the special education field for at least five consecutive years. With knowledge of the factors that motivate seasoned special education teachers to stay in the field, administrators should attempt to address the factors within their control that will most likely encourage longevity in the special education teaching profession. Teacher retention has been shown to influence student achievement positively (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

Within this chapter, the work of other researchers, experts, and theorists was presented, analyzed, and synthesized in order to provide a comprehensive review of recent research literature related to the retention of special education teachers. The literature review included information on the ongoing special education teacher shortage, reasons for special education teacher burnout and attrition, preparation of new special education teachers, methods for attracting quality special educators, and the factors that have been found to influence special education teachers to remain in the field. The information included in the literature review was relevant, current, and necessary to the establishment of a need for the study. Some of the reviewed research guided the development of the survey and interview instrumentation outlined in Chapter Three. Survey items included special education teacher retention factors outlined and studied in

previous research (Albrecht et al., 2009; Beesley, Atwill, Blair, & Barley, 2010; Berry, 2012; Berry et al., 2011; Billingsley, 2004; Carr, 2009; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Prather-Jones, 2011).

Special Education Teacher Shortage

In April 2012, the U.S. Department of Education indicated in the *Teacher Shortage Areas Nationwide Listing* that a shortage of special education teachers was evident in all 50 states. An earlier report for the U.S. Department of Education by Provasnik and Dorfman (2005) entitled *Mobility in the Teacher Workforce* described teacher shortages as a major contributing factor to “institutional instability” (p. 1). The national turnover rate for teachers who transferred schools or left the teaching profession grew from 14% to 16% between 1987-1988 and 1999-2000 (Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005).

The 2008-2009 Teacher Follow-Up Survey to the most recent Schools and Staffing Survey by the National Center on Educational Statistics (NCES) indicated 8% of public school teachers left the teaching profession altogether following the 2008-2009 school year. For educators with only one to three years of teaching experience, the attrition rate was 9.1% (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). According to a report to the Missouri General Assembly entitled *Recruitment and Retention of Teachers in Missouri Public Schools* (2013), “the percentage of first-year teachers that left the classroom after only one to five years increased by 7.8% compared to the last year’s figure” (p. 2). Carroll and Foster (2010) reiterated attrition of first-year teachers has increased steadily since 1994 and over 30% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years of teaching.

Carroll and Foster (2010) found teachers progressively improve their instructional skills and efficacy throughout their first seven years of teaching. Often, beginner teachers leave “before they have had time to become proficient educators” (Carroll & Foster, 2010, p. 4). As Kukla-Acevedo (2009) discussed, “staff turnover always imposes training, interviewing, and productivity costs on an organization” (p. 443).

Feng and Sass (2009) reiterated districts have significant difficulties fully staffing their special education programs. Billingsley (2004) established special education teacher shortages were apparent in 98% of school districts in the United States. In mid-size to large school districts, special education teachers were the most difficult teachers to attract and recruit (Beesley et al., 2010).

In rural areas, the special education teacher shortage was found to be especially noteworthy and even critical (Sundeen & Wienke, 2009). Hodge and Krumm (2009) claimed, “The highly qualified teacher (HQT) mandates of NCLB increase the difficulty of rural administrators attempting to staff special education positions” (p. 21). Berry et al. (2011) found 51% of school administrators surveyed in their research “reported moderate to extreme difficulties filling special education teacher vacancies in their rural districts” (p. 6). Moreover, 7% of special education teaching positions were left unfilled, and 13% of the special education positions were filled by educators with provisional or initial licenses (Berry et al.).

Courtade, Servilio, Ludlow, and Anderson (2010) found many building principals in rural areas “feel pressured to hire teachers who are highly qualified rather than teachers who fit the school or job better” (p. 37). Despite this pressure, the majority of these building-level administrators decided to employ candidates who appeared capable and

then supported the new educators as they attained highly qualified status (Courtade et al., 2010). Unfortunately, the increased qualification requirements of NCLB “may well worsen the already significant critical shortages and attrition rates in rural special education” (Courtade et al., 2010, p. 46). Courtade et al. (2010) concluded the best solution to combat the ongoing scarcity of highly qualified special education teachers was to increase the supply of novice teachers who will supplant those who will inevitably leave the field.

Due to a simultaneous ongoing shortage of special education faculty at universities, it continues to be difficult to prepare qualified special education teachers (Smith, Robb, West, & Tyler, 2010). A direct relationship has been established between the shortage of university-level special education faculty and the shortage of special education teachers (Smith, Montrosse, Robb, Tyler, & Young, 2011). Smith et al. (2011) found that each year, one unfilled special education faculty position at a university produced an average of 25 fewer highly-trained special education teachers. These 25 fewer special educators could then affect up to 400 students with disabilities who would likely have to be instructed by less-qualified special education teachers (Smith et al., 2011).

Overall, Baker-Doyle (2010) indicated teacher shortage and turnover issues were symptoms of systemic problems with methods for teacher attraction and recruitment, new teacher induction, and retention of experienced teachers. DeAngelis and Presley (in press) found approximately two-thirds of beginning teachers either left the profession or transferred schools during their first five years of teaching. Interestingly, teacher turnover was found to occur more often “in clusters of employees occupying similar

roles” (Baker-Doyle, 2010, p. 7), which does not bode well due to the historical and continuing trend toward a significant shortage of special education teachers. In the following section, factors that have convinced special educators to leave the field are examined.

Special Education Teacher Burnout

The aforementioned shortage of special education teachers was likely caused in part by teacher stress and burnout that led educators to leave the special education profession. Berry et al. (2011) found teachers who entered the special education profession without adequate training, certification, and experience were even more likely to leave the field than were well-trained and practiced special educators. In the study, building principals and special education teachers were interviewed comprehensively to gather information on the topics of special education teacher recruitment and retention (Berry et al.). Of the building administrators surveyed, 72% cited ongoing difficulty with special education teacher retention and attrition (Berry et al.). Primary reasons given by teachers for leaving special education included retirement, personal issues, paperwork, better salary and benefits packages in other districts, a desire to be a general educator or administrator, lack of training, stress and burnout, and lack of administrative support (Berry et al.).

The literature review conducted by Billingsley et al. (2009) classified the concerns of new special education teachers into “three categories: inclusion, collaboration, and interactions with adults; pedagogical concerns; and managing roles” (p. 2). In terms of inclusion, collaboration, and adult interactions, the novice special educators often cited the perception of unsupportive building climates as an area of

significant concern that might lead to special education teacher burnout and attrition (Billingsley et al., 2009). Pedagogically, the special education teachers struggled to meet all student needs, both academically and behaviorally (Billingsley et al., 2009). In relation to managing roles, novice special educators struggled to balance the numerous and varying expectations placed upon them by colleagues, building administrators, and district-level supervisors (Billingsley et al., 2009).

Provasnik and Dorfman (2005) identified retirement, general family reasons, pregnancy and raising children, a desire for better salary and benefits, and the wish for a different career as the most commonly-cited reasons for teachers leaving the field of education. Furthermore, teachers who left the field or who transferred to other teaching jobs recognized the following primary sources of job dissatisfaction: lack of planning time, overwhelming workload, low salary, student behavior problems, and large class sizes (Provasnik & Dorfman). Other noted sources of dissatisfaction included lack of influence over policies and practices, subpar facilities and technology, lack of parental support, ineffective or irrelevant professional development, and a lack of professional advancement opportunities (Provasnik & Dorfman). Although the attrition of unqualified or ineffective teachers was desirable, all teacher turnover required administrators to hire and train replacements (Provasnik & Dorfman).

Greenlee and Brown (2009) discovered teachers in challenging schools most frequently reported that concerns with negative student behavior and overall undesirable working conditions caused them to leave their teaching positions. These negative working conditions included the lack of resources and facilities within school districts, inadequate ability to participate in building-level decision making, lack of administrator

support, and a generally unmanageable workload (Greenlee & Brown). With all of these apparent challenges and without a feeling of professional success, teachers in high-needs schools tended to leave and find positions elsewhere that were perceived to be less difficult (Greenlee & Brown).

O'Donovan (2011) reported teachers made the decision to leave the field of education due to general dissatisfaction with the profession, salary issues, and a decrease in funds available to purchase educational resources. Albrecht et al. (2009) asserted overall teacher workload, excessive paperwork requirements, and negative school climate were the themes mentioned most often when special education teachers left the profession. Even when special education teachers entered the field with optimism and eagerness, Kaufman and Ring (2011) found they were “at risk of burnout without a plethora of supports to guide and reinforce confidence” (p. 52). Special education teachers who left after a short career often cited lack of support as their primary reason for leaving (Kaufman & Ring).

In a study on special education teacher burnout, Bataineh and Alsagheer (2012) reiterated negative work conditions and low job satisfaction caused many teachers to leave the field. Most burnout was due specifically to excessive work load, student misbehavior, and lack of perceived professional success (Bataineh & Alsagheer). They found special educators who experienced both support from family and colleagues and “personal accomplishment” could better fight the propensity to burnout (Bataineh & Alsagheer, 2012, p. 10).

Emery and Vandenberg (2010) noted, “Special education teachers are chronically faced with the arduous task of teaching challenging student populations in the context of

demanding working environments” (p. 119). Both “professional stress due to student-teacher characteristics and workplace manageability” were found to be associated with the high burnout rate of special education teachers (Emery & Vandenberg, 2010, p. 119). Even prior to leaving the field, special educators who expressed the desire to resign lost energy and motivation, dreaded their jobs, and performed at a diminished level in the classroom (Emery & Vandenberg).

Berry (2012) surveyed 203 special education teachers and discovered 89% of them were “satisfied or very satisfied with the instructional aspects of their position. However, 67% of teachers indicated they were dissatisfied or strongly dissatisfied with the non-instructional aspects of teaching” (Berry, 2012, p. 9). The most frequently-mentioned and negative non-instructional aspect of special education teaching was paperwork (Berry). Unfortunately, only half of the teachers surveyed in the study expressed the intent to remain in their current special education teaching positions for the next five years (Berry).

Albrecht et al. (2009) established four variables that proved to be significant factors contributing to the intent of special education teachers to leave the profession. When administrators and other personnel only provided support when requested, as opposed to unsolicited support on a daily basis, teachers were more likely to express the intent to leave teaching (Albrecht et al.). Additionally, when special education teachers had been teaching between two and five years total, they were more likely to change professions (Albrecht et al.). Kukla-Acevedo (2009) also established, “Novice teachers were nearly 1.5 times as likely to leave the field of teaching and 2 times as likely to switch schools as were experienced teachers” (p. 446). These findings support the

suggestion school administrators should make every effort to retain special education teachers for five years or longer.

Preparing New Special Education Teachers

In order to prevent the teacher burnout and attrition described above, novice special education teachers need adequate preparation. Feng and Sass (2009) established, “Pre-service preparation in special education has statistically significant and quantitatively substantial effects on the ability of educators to promote gains in achievement for students with disabilities” (p. 1). The number one factor that determined student achievement was found to be teacher quality (Feng & Sass). Professional development courses offered to special education teachers who entered the field without full pre-service training and certification were found to be insignificant in terms of student achievement gains, although this professional development did positively influence special education teacher productivity (Feng & Sass). Special education teachers with advanced degrees, unlike their general education counterparts, were found to be more highly correlated with student achievement gains than were special educators with bachelor degrees only (Feng & Sass).

Hanline (2010) discovered special education teaching candidates required preparation specific to differentiated instructional practices, practical and authentic pre-service teaching experiences, and opportunities to experience various inclusive settings. When pre-service teachers initiated a successful learning incident with an individual student during a field experience, the teacher candidates were more likely to express enthusiasm and commitment to their chosen profession (Hanline). These practicum student teachers were also appreciative of the expertise and guidance provided by

cooperating teachers and were better able to reflect on the special education service delivery models they experienced first-hand (Hanline). Working in various school settings with experienced teachers allowed pre-service special education teachers to “make connections between coursework and practice” (Morewood & Condo, 2012, p. 16). These connections fostered instructional knowledge as well as teacher confidence (Morewood & Condo).

Freedman and Appleman (2009) furthered the idea that pre-service teacher candidates required adequate preparation both pedagogically and practically. These future educators also benefited from training in reflective action research and from ongoing support through their undergraduate student cohort peers (Freedman & Appleman). Most importantly, pre-service teachers needed to practice and hone their teaching skills in the types of authentic settings in which they would eventually become fully-certified, practicing educators (Freedman & Appleman). Following a survey of new teachers in high-needs schools, Petty, Fitchett, and O’Connor (2012) reported educators expressed the need for more pre-service practicum experiences in classrooms within challenging schools.

Quigney (2010) found special education teachers who entered the field through alternative certification methods proved inadequate in the classroom without further training in special education-specific pedagogy. Alternatively-certified special educators also required ongoing, job-embedded training and support, including mentoring and feedback from practicing special education mentors (Quigney). Nontraditional and alternative certification routes accounted for approximately 40% of all teachers (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012).

Ingersoll et al. (2012) researched the preparation and retention of math and science teachers; however, their research has implications for all teachers, including special education teachers. For the study, they divided first-year math and science teachers into two groups: those with little or no pedagogical preparation and those with comprehensive pedagogical preparation (Ingersoll et al.). Comprehensive pedagogical preparation included most or all of the following: courses in teaching methods and strategies, courses in learning theory or child psychology, materials selection instruction, practice teaching, observations of other teachers, and feedback on teaching (Ingersoll et al.).

After dividing first-year teachers into the two groups based on the national Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), the researchers examined the data and discovered math and science teachers were less likely to have completed comprehensive pedagogical preparation than were other teachers (Ingersoll et al., 2012). Of all first-year teachers in the study, those “receiving little or no pedagogy were more than twice as likely to leave after one year as those who received a comprehensive pedagogy package” (Ingersoll et al., 2012, p. 33). The researchers concluded that adequate pedagogical preparation may be even more important than strong subject-matter knowledge in terms of retaining teachers (Ingersoll et al.).

Over the years, it has been consistently established by research that novice teachers make significant teacher quality gains in their first year of teaching and show continued gains over their next several years in the profession (Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005). Feng and Sass (2009) found first year teachers were outperformed by those with only a few years of experience, but after four to five years of teaching, the gains

attributed to experience proved to be inconsequential. Dillon (2009) also noted, “It takes new teachers three to seven years to hit their stride and become quality instructional leaders” (p. 27) within the educational environment. This research supports the need to retain special education teachers in the field for at least five years so their skills and value as special educators can be fully developed and realized within the classroom, all to the benefit of students with disabilities.

Attracting Special Education Teachers

School administrators must attract qualified and adequately-prepared special education teachers so as to retain them. Beesley et al. (2010) found a “high correlation between difficulties with recruiting and with retention” (p. 1). Carr (2009) established in order to attract educators, administrators must understand the teachers’ motivations for joining the profession. Although money does talk, educators were less likely than non-educators to cite money-related factors as a primary motivating contributor when choosing a career (Carr).

Teachers tended to be more intrinsically motivated, desiring to make a contribution or to make a difference in the lives of others (Carr, 2009). Carr (2009) encouraged districts to focus on providing initiatives such as mentoring, professional development, teacher support, and leadership development more than they focus on monetary incentives when recruiting teachers. With the intention of attracting new educators, administrators were advised to use emotional appeals to promote relationship-building and the types of students the teacher will be able to reach (Carr). For younger potential employees, social media and websites were found to be helpful for recruiting candidates (Carr).

Bruinsma and Jansen (2010) also found intrinsic motives were foremost when analyzing the reasons teachers chose to enter their profession. The Bruinsma and Jansen (2010) research established pre-service teachers who reported primarily intrinsic motivations for becoming educators were more likely to be interested in and to participate fully in their pre-service teacher training. Morewood and Condo (2012) further ascertained the intrinsic motivation of pre-service special education teachers must move “beyond the idea of helping people to a deeper knowledge and commitment to educating all people” (p. 15). Education program graduates were more likely to remain committed when they felt confident in their pre-service preparation and when they perceived available support once they entered the teaching profession (Morewood & Condo).

In high-poverty, urban settings, Freedman and Appleman (2012) found most educators were attracted to the teaching profession due to a personal sense of mission and a propensity toward hard work and perseverance. Williams (2011) reiterated that teachers who expressed a wish to make a “significant difference in the lives of their students” would prove more able to effectively manage the difficulties that would inevitably occur within their places of employment (p. 11). Cochran-Smith et al. (2011) also discovered teacher disposition and commitment to the teaching profession were connected to higher rates of teacher retention.

Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd (2012) discovered teachers “with higher intrinsic motivational drivers exhibited a more positive intention to remain” (p. 17) in the field. These intrinsic motivational drivers included a philosophical belief in the power of teaching, the aspiration to work with children, and the need to make a difference in

students' lives (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd). The top five reasons participants in the Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd (2012) study provided for being attracted to the teaching profession were all characterized as intrinsic. The only exceptions to this strong inclination towards intrinsic motivation were those respondents who had already made up their minds to leave the field of education (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd). Intrinsic motivation coupled with job satisfaction and fulfillment tended to result in the retention of experienced, quality teachers (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd).

Baker-Doyle (2010) posited that research on ways to attract teachers has placed too much emphasis on financial incentives, alternative entry requirements, and development of human capital, which are all part of a labor market perspective on teacher recruitment. These “front-end attractiveness solutions” tended to focus more on recruiting new teachers than on attracting and subsequently retaining them (Baker-Doyle, 2010, p. 3). In fact, Beesley et al. (2010) established signing bonuses were offered at a higher rate to new teachers in districts that proved to be unsuccessful than to those who were successful at retaining teachers.

Similarly, Maranto and Shuls (2012) reiterated, “Although widespread, monetary incentives have not proved their ability to attract teachers” (p. 32). In Arkansas, the effects of signing bonuses, housing assistance, and loan forgiveness on teacher recruitment were found to be unpredictable and to “undermine the public service ethic of the teaching profession” (Maranto & Shuls, 2012, p. 38). Instead, Maranto and Shuls (2012) suggested the use of financial incentives in combination with an emphasis on public service, classroom autonomy, advancement opportunity, professional growth and development, teamwork, and achievement results in order to attract teachers. Baker-

Doyle (2010) also argued a social network perspective on teacher recruitment would better serve school districts that wished to attract and keep teachers than would monetary incentives.

Beesley et al. (2010) attempted to identify specific teacher recruitment and retention strategies implemented by administrators in rural schools. They interviewed seven successful high school principals to obtain further descriptive information about the recruitment and retention strategies they utilized (Beesley et al.). The successful principals in the study employed a grow-your-own strategy by hiring former graduates and by encouraging residents of the area to become teachers (Beesley et al.). They also made use of federal and state monies to help new teachers attain highly-qualified status (Beesley et al.). Most universally, they explicitly promoted the advantages of teaching in their community to potential employees (Beesley et al.).

In rural areas, Sundeen and Wienke (2009) discovered building administrators needed to work closely with local universities in order to identify a “qualified pool of potential applicants” (p. 4). Additionally, the study revealed special education teaching candidates might need to be recruited from other university programs such as psychology, liberal arts and interdisciplinary studies, communication science and disorders, and social work (Sundeen & Wienke). When recruiting outside special education majors, rural administrators were cautioned to find candidates who had the desire to become special educators and who were also committed to the field (Sundeen & Wienke).

Retaining Special Education Teachers

Teacher induction and mentoring. Billingsley et al. (2009) stressed teacher induction programs with an emphasis on mentoring were generally accepted to improve the quality of novice teachers and to increase special education teacher retention. The process of teacher induction included adjusting to the profession as well as establishing quality instructional practices, teaching routines, and relationship-building approaches (Billingsley et al., 2009). Billingsley et al. (2009) organized their findings related to special education teacher induction within the following categories: “inclusion, collaboration, and interaction with adults; pedagogical concerns; and managing roles” (p. 16). Their findings suggested novice special education teachers gleaned support not only from assigned mentors, but from fellow special educators, other school staff members, building administrators, and district-level supervisors (Billingsley et al., 2009). Although not usually a recognized part of formal mentorship programs, informal emotional support in combination with deliberate professional support were reported to be invaluable to new special education teachers (Billingsley et al., 2009).

Within the numerous studies reviewed by Billingsley et al. (2009), the researchers concluded certain commonly-cited recommendations for teacher induction programs showed potential for increasing teacher retention. They recommended induction programs be utilized as an initial means for encouraging inclusive collaboration and collegiality among school staff members (Billingsley et al., 2009). Systematic, structured, and supported mentoring programs were highly encouraged (Billingsley et al., 2009). Within these programs, mentors were expected to provide “direct feedback, narratives that offered stories of their own experiences, and regular support” (Billingsley

et al., 2009, p. 45). In addition, goal-setting, professional development opportunities, and technology-based tools were recommended as part of successful special education teacher induction programs (Billingsley et al., 2009). Accessibility to mentors through e-mentoring options proved to support and increase mentor-mentee interaction (Billingsley et al., 2009).

After reviewing the literature on special education teacher induction, Billingsley et al. (2009) recommended these induction programs prioritize certain issues in order to provide adequate support and to retain novice special educators. With the goal in mind of improving the work conditions of new special education teachers, induction programs should be designed to encourage a culture and climate that embraces special educators and the inclusion of students with identified disabilities (Billingsley et al., 2009). When possible, novice special educators should be assigned reduced responsibilities and work load (Billingsley et al., 2009). This would allow new teachers to focus on improving job performance with the goal of increasing student achievement (Billingsley et al., 2009). Induction programs should address the unique needs of special educators through comprehensive information, structured mentorships, and professional development opportunities (Billingsley et al., 2009).

Wiebke and Bardin (2009) described high-quality mentoring as an essential component of comprehensive teacher induction programs. They argued building principals must provide support to establish the credibility of mentors and to provide the time and resources needed to promote effective mentoring (Wiebke & Bardin). This mentoring must be focused on instructional practices and professional support (Wiebke &

Bardin). Billingsley et al. (2009) reiterated mentors must also be carefully chosen and matched to novice special educators.

Dempsey, Arthur-Kelly, and Carty (2009) also established, “The initial professional experiences of early career teachers are closely associated with their longevity in the field” (p. 294). In their study, mentoring was defined as a structured, comprehensive program that included one-on-one personal interaction with mentors away from class, meetings with groups of mentors and mentees, telephone conversations, online discussion groups, and frequent classroom modeling and observation (Dempsey et al.). Although novice teachers reported placing a high value on the mentor-mentee relationship, fewer than half reported they experienced true mentoring as defined in the study (Dempsey et al.).

Billingsley, Israel, and Smith (2011) found in some situations, online resources could be incorporated with traditional mentoring programs in order to support special education teachers with information focused on their immediate and unique needs. Quality online resources were discovered to contain extensive information on topics of concern to special educators including content, instructional and behavioral strategies, assessment, collaboration, time management, and stress management (Billingsley et al., 2011). In today’s schools, traditional mentoring was found to present difficulties (Billingsley et al., 2011). Time for planning, feedback, and observations was difficult to find; therefore, online resources were suggested as a supplement to conventional mentoring programs (Billingsley et al., 2011).

Johnson, Humphrey, and Allred (2009) also described the establishment of online mentoring for special education teachers, specifically those in rural areas. A Technology

Accentuated Transformative Education for Rural Specialists (TATERS) group was implemented by the U.S. Department of Education and the Idaho Department of Education (Johnson et al.). The TATERS program included online access to training and mentoring to provide flexible options for the delivery of teacher induction information and professional development to teachers in rural areas (Johnson et al.). The impact of the TATERS program was expected to be positive in terms of providing “a rural cohort group, mentorship support, and stronger collaborations” to special education teachers in isolated areas (Johnson et al., 2009, p. 20).

Huling, Resta, and Yeargain (2012) described the Novice Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) that was initiated in 2002. Retention research on the NTIP teachers was completed in 2009 and revealed, “Program participants have remained in the profession at higher rates than nonparticipants” (Huling et al., 2012, p. 141). The primary focus of the NTIP program was to insure quality, ongoing mentoring and support for new teachers, with the program facilitated through universities (Huling et al.). The mentorship component of the program enlisted paid, recently-retired mentors to attend extensive mentorship training before spending two days per week with their novice mentees, observing and providing support (Huling et al.). The mentors also spent one evening each week with a group of NTIP teachers, for which the NTIP novices earned free graduate credit through a grant (Huling et al.). The NTIP teachers “consistently reported high satisfaction with their program experience” (Huling et al., 2012, p. 141). The results of the study supported the idea that high-quality, structured mentoring and support strongly influences new teachers to remain in the educational profession (Huling et al.).

Washburn-Moses (2010) compared mentoring practices for general education and special education teachers. Although the policies and programs utilized by most school districts for mentoring are the same for general and special educators, it was found mentoring practices for special education teachers often differed from established policy (Washburn-Moses). The special education teachers in the study reported mentors and related mentoring programming were less available to them than to general educators (Washburn-Moses).

Teacher quality and professional development. Since the inception of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements for highly qualified teachers, it has proven difficult for special educators to become and to remain highly qualified (Beesley et al., 2010). In rural areas, special education teachers have found it even more difficult to attain highly qualified status (Berry et al., 2011). It has been common for a special educator to be the teacher of record for various subjects and classes, despite a lack of preparation and certification (Beesley et al.). In many cases, rural special educators have been expected to provide a wide range of services for which they were not adequately prepared, trained, or certified (Beesley et al.). In order to attain effectiveness and to remain committed to their teaching positions, these special educators need further training and administrative support (Berry et al.).

Unfortunately, Therrien and Washburn-Moses (2009) found universities seem to expect school districts to help novice teachers become highly qualified, rather than adjusting teacher preparation programs to address the need. The researchers' suggestion was to establish collaboration among higher education institutions, K-12 public school districts, and state departments of education in order to assist new teachers with meeting

the requirements for highly qualified status (Therrien & Washburn-Moses). Ensuring novice special education teachers are highly qualified should serve to increase their commitment to the profession (Therrien & Washburn-Moses). Quigney (2009) supported the theory that institutions should work together to assist new special education teachers with becoming highly qualified. This assistance would help potential special education teachers avoid the perception that “their role would not carry the prestige, credibility and respect afforded general education teachers without additional proof of their qualifications, and thus deter them from pursuing a career as special educators” (Quigney, 2009, p. 54).

As noted by Provasnik and Dorfman (2005), “Increased teacher turnover does not necessarily mean that there will be greater proportions of inexperienced teachers in the workforce” (p. 9). Their finding was that many teachers who were newly hired in school districts were actually experienced teachers who transferred from other teaching positions (Provasnik & Dorfman). Overall, however, transfers tended to be younger and less experienced (Provasnik & Dorfman). They were also more likely to be hired without full training and certification (Provasnik & Dorfman).

Bruinsma and Jansen (2010) reported increased teacher self-efficacy was found to be positively related to a more definitive expectation and intention to remain in the teaching profession. Certain other personal characteristics and personality traits of educators have been found to contribute to teacher retention (Bruinsma & Jansen). For example, Kaufman and Ring (2011) discovered, “The ability to cope calmly with difficult situations, creativity, decisiveness, efficiency in use of time and energy, effective communication skills, empathy, problem solving, and respect for diversity” were more

likely to be personality traits of effective teachers who intended to remain in the teaching profession (p. 54).

Interestingly, teachers who entered the field from highly competitive colleges and with higher exam scores were more likely to transfer from their current teaching positions to other educational positions (Boyd et al., 2010). On the other hand, more experienced teachers who had proven effective in terms of student achievement were less likely to leave the teaching profession (Boyd et al.). It appeared teachers who experienced success were more satisfied with their jobs and tended to remain in their current positions (Boyd et al.).

Berry et al. (2011) found the topics of highest demand for additional professional development to encourage teacher retention included the following: special education processes and paperwork, technology, behavior management, general curriculum content, and disability-specific information. Working with paraprofessionals, working with parents, and including students with disabilities in the general education curriculum were also important topics for training (Berry et al.). This research confirmed relevant and timely professional development could reduce stress, increase proficiency, and promote commitment of teachers to special education (Berry et al.).

Graduates of professional development school models that emphasized ongoing professional learning were found to feel more prepared to teach and to persist longer in the profession (Cochran-Smith et al., 2011). Burbank, Kauchak, and Bates (2010) established professional development through teacher book clubs provided effective training for teachers. Book clubs proved to be an alternative means of providing professional development that could be attractive to teachers due to the following:

“opportunities to think about and reflect on current practices; a vehicle for increasing teacher dialogue, both within and across school sites; and as a platform to discuss pressing, professional issues in a nonthreatening way” (Burbank et al., 2010, p. 63). In general, the opportunity for professional development was cited as the most significant school climate and workplace condition that contributed to teacher retention (Albrecht et al., 2009).

Work conditions. Billingsley et al. (2009) reviewed literature related to special education teacher induction programs and discovered clear and evident support from building principals led special educators to express a greater overall sense of job satisfaction. Furthermore, teachers who sensed strong building principal support were more committed to their profession and were positively influenced to remain in the special education teaching field (Billingsley et al., 2009). The special educators supported by their principals expressed a belief they had more opportunities for professional development, were supported by their peers, experienced fewer role confusion issues, and were less stressed than their special education counterparts who did not have supportive principals (Billingsley et al., 2009).

In a study by Prather-Jones (2011), 13 special education teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders were interviewed extensively concerning their teaching backgrounds and their reasons for remaining in the special education teaching field for seven years or longer. Questions were divided into categories based on Billingsley’s 2004 work and addressed external factors, personality factors, and employment factors (Prather-Jones). Patterns emerged showing a fundamental need for administrative and collegial support, especially during the first few years of teaching

special education with students identified as having emotional and behavioral disorders (Prather-Jones).

Prather-Jones (2011) attempted to define administrative support and found three themes emerged. First, special educators desired principals to enforce consequences and to include the teacher in decisions when discipline issues occurred (Prather-Jones). Second, teachers wanted to feel respected and appreciated by their principals (Prather-Jones). Finally, special educators wished for principals to create a culture and climate that enabled special education teachers to gain collegial support from the other teachers around them (Prather-Jones). In addition, the research suggested principals should become more knowledgeable about special education in order to show their support to special educators (Prather-Jones). Albrecht et al. (2009) also found administrative support was crucial for special education teacher retention. In the study, teachers who were supported on a daily basis by administrators and other personnel expressed the intent to continue as special educators (Albrecht et al.).

Berry (2012) furthered the suggestion that perceived support increases the commitment of special education teachers to the profession. In the study, three variables emerged as critical for job satisfaction of special educators (Berry). First and foremost, the teachers desired administrative support, closely followed in importance by the support of general education teachers (Berry). The final factor was the desire for colleagues to understand the role of special educators and to share in the responsibility of educating students with disabilities (Berry). Within the study, special educators seemed to agree the most helpful support they received was from other special education teachers in the same building (Berry).

Kukla-Acevedo (2009) discovered support from administrators was the only factor that showed a statistically significant relationship to overall teacher mobility. In that study, “the odds of a teacher leaving his or her current post were reduced by 16.9% for every standard deviation increase in perceived support from the school’s administrative staff” (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009, p. 448). Interestingly, first-year teachers were much more strongly influenced to persist in or to leave the teaching field by all studied workplace conditions than were more experienced teachers (Kukla-Acevedo). For the novice teachers, behavioral climate was the most significant factor linked to retention (Kukla-Acevedo). In opposition to the majority of studies and to the results of this study in terms of all teachers, first-year teachers were actually more likely to leave the profession when they experienced increased principal support (Kukla-Acevedo).

Although respondent educators expressed a belief that monetary incentives were the best way to retain teachers, Petty et al. (2012) discovered the most frequently-cited motives for exiting the teaching profession were “psychological burnout and lack of administrative support” (p. 78). Teachers desired recognition for achievement, access to adequate teaching resources, and the opportunity to enjoy their school building and their students (Petty et al.). When teachers articulated the intent to stay in their teaching positions, they mentioned relationships, administrative support, positive school environment, and community connections as their primary reasons for staying (Petty et al.).

Kaufman and Ring (2011) asserted special education teachers should establish relationships with other like-minded professionals to cultivate a support system that could provide resolve and prevent surrender during especially challenging times. They also

suggested special educators should create and maintain a “healthy balance in their personal lives” to decrease the likelihood of burnout and attrition (Kaufman & Ring, 2011, p. 59). Wiebke and Bardin (2009) agreed a network of trusted professionals was vital to supporting and retaining teachers. In addition, Freedman and Appleman (2012) found an ongoing support network was a primary reason teachers stayed in the profession.

Baker-Doyle (2010) furthered the belief that a social network perspective would best serve efforts to retain experienced educators. This perspective “focuses on the patterns of links and interactions between individuals or groups in a social network and how these trends shape their experiences and choices” (Baker-Doyle, 2010, p. 5). An emphasis on professional communities and relationships acknowledges the established link between the mobility of teachers and their perceptions concerning social networks (Baker-Doyle). When teachers developed what Baker-Doyle (2010) called Intentional Professional Networks, educators felt better supported and reported a stronger sense of self-determination within the school hierarchy. Finally, Baker-Doyle (2010) emphasized social network perspectives were found to increase the “development of teacher quality, school capacity, and student achievement” in schools (p. 8). Although professional relationships were found to be of positive importance in the retention of teachers, the quality of student-teacher relationships was also revealed to contribute significantly to teacher retention (Cochran-Smith et al., 2011).

When studying teachers working within especially challenging schools, Greenlee and Brown (2009) found the most commonly-used method for attracting and retaining teachers was some form of incentive program, generally salary increases, bonuses, tuition

reimbursement, or increased benefits. The results of their study revealed these financial incentives do increase teacher retention; however, other retention factors, such as working conditions and administrator support, were equally, if not more, effective (Greenlee & Brown). Teachers expressed the desire to work in buildings with principals who took the time to build relationships with and advocate for staff members, allowed teachers to become leaders through participation in decision-making, were accessible to and receptive of teachers, and provided the resources and time for teachers to grow and develop (Greenlee & Brown).

The specific principal behaviors Greenlee and Brown (2009) reported were most effective to encourage teacher retention included the following:

creates a positive school culture (41%); creates conditions that enhance the staff's desire and willingness to focus energy on achieving educational excellence (37%); demonstrates integrity and well-reasoned educational beliefs based on an understanding of teaching and learning (19%); and provides opportunities for teachers to think, plan, and work together (19%). (p. 102)

Overall, Greenlee and Brown (2009) contended although financial incentives were important to teacher retention, the incentives alone were not enough to convince teachers to remain in challenging schools.

Apart from building administrator support, Albrecht et al. (2009) discovered numerous other workplace conditions that were important to special education teachers. When special educators had "adequate time to complete paperwork," they were more likely to continue in their current teaching positions (Albrecht et al., 2009, p. 1012). Other retention factors included the following: access to technology resources, adequate

classroom space, access to curricular materials, support from colleagues, overall positive school climate, and availability of other special education personnel (Albrecht et al.). All of these factors were rated as significant workplace conditions that led special educators to remain committed to the profession (Albrecht et al.).

Overall, the responses of the 511 teachers surveyed by Albrecht et al. (2009) revealed five main themes. First, teachers noted “the support system provided by administrators, other teachers, and parents. Additional reasons given for staying in their current position included job satisfaction, interest in students’ welfare, convenience and familiarity, and the desire for consistency through the teaching career” (Albrecht et al., 2009, p. 1016).

Gilbar (2012) echoed the argument that building principals should address certain work-related variables within their control in order to retain experienced special education teachers. The retention factors outlined in her research that could conceivably be influenced by building administrators included the following: “school climate, administrative support, colleague support, mentoring, and professional development” (Gilbar, 2012, p. 2). School culture and climate with a clear vision of collaboration established and encouraged by principals proved to promote special education teacher retention (Gilbar). This culture and climate should then foster an environment of support among all staff members (Gilbar). Finally, systematic mentoring programs and access to quality professional development opportunities have reinforced the retention of special education teachers (Gilbar).

Summary

According to recent research, the retention of special education teachers is influenced by various factors, both within and outside the control of building principals and district-level administrators (Billingsley et al., 2009). There is no question special educators are in short supply and continue to be difficult for school districts to hire and retain (Feng & Sass, 2009). Many issues contribute to the burnout of all types of teachers, but certain additional factors cause special education teachers to leave the field (Berry et al., 2011).

When special educators are well-trained, fully certified, and adequately prepared for their teaching positions, they are more likely to stay in the field (Beesley et al., 2010). According to Billingsley et al. (2009), it is essential to attract fully-qualified and well-trained special education teachers and then to address those retention factors within the control of administrators. Teacher quality, preparation, professional development, work conditions, and mentoring can all contribute to greater retention success for special education teachers (Billingsley et al., 2009). Of these, professional development, work conditions, and mentoring are at least somewhat controllable and within the influence of school administrators.

The following chapter outlined the specific research methodology that was employed to identify the factors that have influenced special education teachers to remain in the field for five years or longer. The research design, population and sample, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis were explained thoroughly in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four, the survey data and interview results collected were organized,

analyzed, and synthesized. Finally, in Chapter Five, conclusions and implications of the research were elucidated.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to identify the specific factors that have influenced public school special education teachers to remain in the special education teaching field for five years or longer. Quantitative and qualitative methodology were utilized to discover the factors that long-term special educators ranked as most influential when asked why they have remained in their teaching positions. Nonparametric statistics were used to determine whether or not a difference exists between the reported influence of relational support and organizational factors on special education teacher retention. Descriptive research was applied following a survey of teachers who have continued to work within public school districts as special education teachers for at least five consecutive years. In addition, qualitative information was gleaned through interviews with veteran special education teachers.

Within this chapter, the specific methodology of the study was further delineated. Following a brief review of the research problem, the purpose of the study, the guiding research questions, and the research design were more thoroughly explained. Population and sample, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis were also described in detail.

Problem and Purpose Overview

A report to Congress on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) by the U.S. Department of Education revealed that in 2005, more than 40,000 special education teaching positions were left unfilled by highly qualified special educators (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). This ongoing personnel shortage should compel researchers to pinpoint the reasons special education teachers remain in the field for an

extended period of time. School administrators can then address those factors in hopes of retaining experienced special education teachers.

Feng and Sass (2009) found students with disabilities who were taught by inexperienced and less qualified special education teachers suffered in terms of social and academic achievement. In fact, their research indicated, “The effects of experience are much larger in special education classroom settings than in general education classrooms” (Feng & Sass, 2009, p. 20). The study described in this dissertation furthered a body of research that may help districts increase the longevity of special education teachers and thus prevent this setback in achievement of students with disabilities (Feng & Sass).

Research questions.

1. What difference exists, if any, between the influence of relational support factors and organizational factors as reported by special education teachers who remain in their current teaching positions for five years or more?
2. What retention factors do special education teachers most often report to be influential reasons for staying in their current teaching positions for five years or more?
3. What attitudes are expressed by special education teachers regarding the influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on their decisions to remain in their current teaching positions for five years or more?

Null hypothesis (H₁₀). There is no difference between the reported influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on special education teacher retention.

Alternative hypothesis (H1_a). There is a difference between the reported influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on special education teacher retention.

Research Design

The research design of this study was quantitative, qualitative, and non-experimental in nature. According to Kisely and Kendall (2011), survey results call for inductive data analysis that allows “meaning to emerge from the data” (p. 364). Responses to the survey were analyzed through a descriptive method that depicted the data as presented. Ravid (2011) explained descriptive research involves the collection and interpretation of data “without any manipulation or intervention” on the part of a researcher (p. 7). The survey and interview questions for this study were designed to elicit candid responses from participants that could be summarized and reviewed without bias.

Surveys were distributed to the sample through electronic communication. The communication contained clear and concise instructions along with a web-based link to the online survey. The online survey format allowed the participants and their responses to remain anonymous. Access to the participants was assured through the special education directors of the school districts included in the sample. Electronic mail addresses were also collected through the special education directors of those school districts.

The qualitative component of the study involved interviews with five special education teachers who have remained in their current teaching positions for long periods of time. Potential interview participants were identified through communication with

special education directors of the school districts included in the sample. Interviews were conducted in person, and responses were used to identify themes and categories that emerged regarding relational support and organizational factors that have influenced special education teacher retention.

Population and Sample

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012), there were 459,600 special education teachers in the United States during the 2011-2012 school year. The most recent 2007-2008 Schools and Staffing Survey by the National Center on Educational Statistics (NCES, 2009) indicated approximately 40% of teachers leave the building in which they teach before five years have passed. If 60% of all teachers stay for five years, then the approximate population for the proposed study was 275,000 special education teachers.

Kisely and Kendall (2011) described sampling as purposive, which indicates the participants have the capacity to provide data necessary and relevant to the topic of study. The participants in this study were representative of the population of public school special education teachers who have remained in special education teaching positions for five or more consecutive years. More particularly, the participating teachers have served as special education teachers in their current public school districts for at least the past five years.

The specific purposive sample for the survey portion of this study included all special education teachers who met the above criterion and who taught within a school district affiliated with a particular Missouri conference. The eight districts within the selected conference are of analogous size, have comparable special education

administrative staffing, and implement similar special education services and programming (MODESE, 2012). The sampling method employed was the cluster sample, which is defined by Sullivan (2008) as the inclusion of all members within a selected subgroup of the population. The number of participants included in this cluster sample was 35 special education teachers. The specific unit of analysis was the individual teacher.

For the qualitative interview portion of the study, five of the special education teachers included in the survey sample were interviewed individually. The interview sample was stratified based upon years of experience in the participants' current teaching positions. The intention was to interview one teacher from each of the following stratum: five to nine years in current position, 10-14 years in current position, 15-19 years in current position, 20-24 years in current position, 25-29 years in current position, and more than 30 years in current position. Among the population of 112 special educators contacted for the study, there were no teachers who had been in their current teaching positions for more than 30 years.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation for this study included an online survey accessed through a web-based link within an electronic communication. The survey was created for the study based upon the conceptual framework and recent research outlined in Chapter Two. The survey included a five-point Likert rating scale for each closed item. These closed items required the participants to rate the influence of specific factors on their decisions to remain in the field of special education. The factors chosen for the closed Likert items included special education teacher retention factors outlined in previous research

(Albrecht et al., 2009; Beesley et al., 2010; Berry, 2012; Berry et al., 2011; Billingsley, 2004; Carr, 2009; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Prather-Jones, 2011). The closed survey questions were designed to be as clear and unambiguous as possible. A final open-ended survey item allowed the participants to provide their own reasons for remaining in their special education teaching positions. The survey was included as part of the Appendix within the dissertation (see Appendix A).

For the qualitative portion of the study, the instrumentation included eight structured interview questions. The questions related directly to the survey items and were designed to elicit candid information from the participants about the retention factors that have influenced them to continue in their special education teaching positions for long periods of time. The interview questions were used to bring forth participant opinions about the relative influence of relational support and organizational factors on teacher retention.

The survey and interview questions were piloted by a group of 10 educational professionals who previously served as special education teachers for five years or longer. These professionals remained in the field of education and were still connected to special education in some way (e.g. special education directors, special education process coordinators, educational diagnosticians, consultants, interventionists), but they were no longer special educators in the classroom setting. The pilot group completed the survey and suggested revisions in terms of survey instructions, item content, overall clarity of language, and logistics required to complete the online form. Adjustments to the survey were made according to suggestions offered by the pilot group. The pilot group took the

revised survey and suggestions for change were welcomed again. Two revisions were required before the final iteration of the survey was completed.

Once the survey items were finalized, the pilot group was asked to determine whether each of the retention factors included in the survey items should be categorized as a relational support factor or as an organizational factor. The categorizations provided by the pilot group affirmed the categorizations obtained from previous research. The pilot group was also tasked with reviewing the interview questions for clarity and relevance. Adjustments to the interview questions were made based upon pilot group suggestions.

Data Collection

Following approval of the Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix B), the data collection process began with an electronic communication sent to each participant of the survey sample containing a letter of recruitment and informed consent (see Appendix C). The letter of informed consent specified the following assurances: responses were confidential, no risks or benefits of participation were anticipated, and initial and continued participation in the survey was voluntary. The letter of informed consent was sent to participants upon initiation of the survey window.

Survey data were collected within a one-month survey window. The window opened upon delivery of an instructional electronic communication containing the web-based survey link. Survey responses received within the one-month window were included in the data set for the research study.

Data were collected through free web-based survey software available from Google forms. As surveys were completed, participant responses were automatically recorded into a comprehensive spreadsheet accessible through Google forms. The survey structure allowed an end date to be set for survey completion of one month from the instructional electronic communication. Participants were prompted to complete all survey questions but were allowed to withdraw from the process at any time. The Google forms software prevented individual participants from completing more than one survey.

For the qualitative portion of the study, special education teacher interviews were requested and scheduled by phone (see Appendix D). An electronic communication was then sent to each participant containing a letter of informed consent (see Appendix E) for the interview portion of the study. The interview questions (see Appendix F) and a reminder of the date, time, and location of the interview were sent to each of the participants approximately one week prior to the interview. The interviews were conducted in person and audiotaped for accuracy. Participants were allowed to withdraw from the interview process at any time.

Ravid (2011) described validity as the “extent to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure and the appropriateness of the ways it is used and interpreted” (p. 203). Validity in studies involving surveys implies the instrument will be used in the way the researcher indicated it was to be used (Ravid). The survey and interview instruments utilized in this study were intended to bring forth honest responses from participants. These responses were recorded and analyzed but were not manipulated to fit any preconceived ideas. This reduced the possibility of researcher bias.

Although the factors for special education teacher retention included on the closed survey items were predetermined, all survey participants were given the opportunity to provide their own unique answers on the open-ended survey question. During the interviews, all responses were audio recorded. Open and axial coding was used to identify common words and phrases that resulted from the interview responses. From those common words and phrases, themes and categories emerged.

Face validity was established for the study, because the survey and interview items were designed to elicit accurate information about the characteristics of special education teachers who have remained in the field for an extended period of time. The survey instrument obviously “appears to measure what it is intended to measure” (Ravid, 2011, p. 207). Ravid (2011) explained sufficient face validity should allow participants to recognize the survey’s relevance and increase their motivation and interest in involvement. Although many researchers discount the value of face validity, in this study it proved to encourage appropriate and positive participant attitudes toward the survey and interviews (Ravid).

Selection bias did affect the external validity of this study (Ravid, 2011). The sample was comprised of special education teachers from eight southwest Missouri public school districts and was consequently limited in terms of geographic location and school district composition. In other states or in districts with dissimilar demographics, the results might not be properly generalized.

As established by Niaz (2009), a survey of 35 teachers cannot be generalized as absolutely representative of the beliefs of all special educators who have remained in the special education teaching field for five years or longer. The survey responses can,

however, be considered as authentic by the research community (Niaz). Niaz (2009) further stated, “It is generally accepted by...researchers that generalizability is neither desirable nor necessary, as such studies are not designed to allow systematic generalizations to some wider population” (p. 544).

Loss of participants during the research process might also have affected the validity of the proposed study. Some teachers who participated in the proposed study failed to complete all survey items, which resulted in those teachers being eliminated from the sample. Other participants chose to discontinue participation during the course of the survey portion of the study.

Within research based on surveys, data must be assessed in terms of trustworthiness in order to assess its validity and reliability (Kisely & Kendall, 2011). Ravid (2011) maintained studies are reliable when they “provide consistent and accurate results” (p. 192). In this study, reliability was increased following the survey of the pilot group and the consequent survey and interview question revisions. The pilot group process helped to increase the quality of clear, unambiguous instructions and of survey and interview items. The pilot group took the survey on three occasions, and the results were similar each time the pilot participants completed a revised iteration of the survey. In order to increase reliability, objectivity was maintained concerning the results of the survey. The results were reported in an unbiased, descriptive manner as suggested by Ravid (2011).

All information and responses collected through the online survey and through the in-person interviews remained anonymous. No participants were harmed through administration of the survey or interviews, and all participants could choose to

discontinue their involvement at any time. Ravid (2011) insisted the rights of all participants should be defended throughout the course of the study. All ethical procedures were considered and addressed in order to prevent harm and to protect the participants in this study.

Data Analysis

As is typical of descriptive research, this study was designed to “classify, organize, and summarize numerical data” (Ravid, 2011, p. 238). Data were coordinated, organized, and summarized following the survey. Likert scales were developed in 1932 by Rensis Likert to examine attitudinal data through a quantitative measure (Paul, 2010). In order to avoid respondent bias, Paul (2010) suggested five-point Likert rating scales were preferable to scales with even-numbered rating choices when survey participants could be expected to express neutral feelings about items. Unfortunately, the option for a neutral response can lead to central tendency bias, wherein respondents tend to avoid extreme responses (Paul). The resulting neutral data may not provide the clear attitudinal information researchers are looking to quantify (Paul).

Data from Likert items are considered to be ordinal rather than nominal, interval, or ratio (Boone & Boone, 2012; Paul, 2010). Ordinal data are ranked in an order of magnitude, but the difference among ratings on the continuum does not remain constant and cannot be quantified or standardized amongst respondents (Boone & Boone, 2012). Due to the ordinal nature of the data, Paul (2010) maintained mean scores and standard deviations should not be utilized for analysis of Likert data. Rather than parametric statistics, such as the *t*-test, Likert scale data require nonparametric analysis (Wuensch, 2013).

Bertram (2011) reiterated responses to Likert scales should be treated as ordinal data, because those surveyed do not perceive the intervals between response levels to be equal. In this study, a frequency distribution of Likert ratings was presented for each survey factor (Ravid, 2011). As suggested by Ravid (2011), the raw scores of each factor, representing the frequency of Likert responses for each survey question, were converted to percentages to indicate how many participants chose each Likert scale level for each influential factor.

After figuring the frequency distribution of Likert scores, the mode was determined for each survey factor. The data were presented in a table containing the frequency percentage and mode scores for all survey items. Using these statistical analyses allowed themes to emerge from the data (Ravid, 2011). The factors that have influenced special education teacher retention were clearly ranked, according to the responses of the participants. In addition, the participant answers to the open-ended survey question allowed for summarization of replies and identification of themes within the responses.

For this survey, the Mann-Whitney U test was the most appropriate nonparametric statistical test (Winter & Dodou, 2010). The Mann-Whitney U test determined whether or not a significant difference existed between the response data modes for relational support factors versus the modes for organizational factors that have influenced special education teachers to remain in their teaching positions for at least five years. These data answered the second research question and were used to prove or disprove the null and alternative hypotheses of the study.

According to Winter and Dodou (2010), in order to perform the Mann-Whitney U test, the mode response for each survey question must be rank-ordered from lowest to highest while maintaining a label on each mode to delineate relational support factors (R) from organizational factors (O). In this study, when ties occurred, the rank-ordered positions of all survey items with equal modes were averaged and assigned the average rank (Winter & Dodou). The next piece of data at a higher mode was assigned the rank order that corresponded to its cardinal location in the data set (Winter & Dodou). The sum of the ranks for each group, relational support (R) factors and organizational (O) factors, was then calculated (Winter & Dodou, 2010; Wuensch, 2013).

The sum of the ranks in the relational support (R) group and the organizational (O) group were then used to calculate the Mann-Whitney U value for each group (Winter & Dodou, 2010). The U value was calculated for each group as follows:

$$U_1 = R_1 - [n_1(n_1 + 1) / 2].$$

The smaller Mann-Whitney U value, whether from the relational support (R) group or the organizational (O) group, was then employed to calculate the mean and standard deviation of the U value (Winter & Dodou). The mean and standard deviation of U were subsequently utilized to determine the z value (Wuensch, 2013). As stated by Ravid (2011), a z score indicates the distance above or below the mean in terms of standard deviation units. The p value can also be calculated using the U value, which indicates the probability a null hypothesis is rejected in error (Ravid). In this study, a probability level of 5% ($p < .05$) served as the critical level to determine whether or not the null hypothesis (H_{10}) should be rejected.

The qualitative interview portion of the study elicited participant attitudes regarding relational support and organizational factors that have influenced special education teacher retention. A standardized open-ended interview format was used so that all participants were asked identical open-ended questions, which “allows the participants to contribute as much detailed information as they desire and it also allows the researcher to ask probing questions as a means of follow-up” (Turner, 2010, p. 756). Common words and phrases were identified through open and axial coding of interview responses. Themes and categories emerged from these commonly-used words and phrases.

Summary

In summary, the purpose of this study was to identify the specific retention factors that have influenced special educators to remain in their special education teaching positions for five years or longer. Once identified and detailed, the data collected through surveys and interviews were available to inform and to assist school district administrators who wished to do all in their power to retain experienced special education teachers. The study was quantitative, qualitative, and non-experimental in nature and involved a survey of and interviews with special educators in southwest Missouri who had chosen to continue their careers in special education for at least five consecutive years.

The survey involved closed items requiring participants to rate influential factors on a Likert scale and an open item that allowed participants to detail any other factors relevant to their professional longevity. Data collected from the survey were presented in

the form of frequency distributions. Mode scores were then analyzed to determine the most regularly-provided responses.

The Mann-Whitney U test was employed to determine whether or not a difference existed between the reported influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on special education teacher retention. Participant answers to the open-ended survey question were summarized and analyzed to identify possible underlying themes. The qualitative interview portion of the study elicited attitudes from a stratified sample of veteran special education teachers that allowed for themes and categories to emerge following open and axial coding of responses.

The methodology including research design, population and sample, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis were explained thoroughly in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four, the results of the surveys and interviews were organized, analyzed, and synthesized. Finally, in Chapter Five, conclusions and implications of the research were elucidated.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

Background

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors that have influenced special education teachers to stay in their current teaching positions for five years or more. As of 2005, more than 40,000 special education teaching positions were vacant or were occupied by persons who were not considered highly qualified (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Students with disabilities have been found to achieve more when they are taught by experienced and highly qualified special education teachers (Feng & Sass, 2009). The data collected in this study should help to determine influential retention factors school administrators can address in order to increase their chances of retaining experienced special education teachers. This study augmented the small body of research focused on the retention of special educators rather than on the reasons they leave the field.

Following surveys and interviews, both quantitative and qualitative methodology were utilized to delineate the specific factors ranked as most influential when veteran special education teachers were asked why they have remained in the special education teaching profession. The online survey consisted of closed Likert items that required participants to rate the influence of 50 specific retention factors on their decisions to remain in their current special education teaching positions for at least five years. The factors chosen for the Likert items included retention factors outlined in previous research and were categorized as either relational support factors or organizational factors (Albrecht et al., 2009; Beesley et al., 2010; Berry, 2012; Berry et al., 2011; Billingsley, 2004; Carr, 2009; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Prather-Jones, 2011). An open-ended item was

also included at the end of the survey, which allowed participants to provide input on additional factors that have influenced their longevity as special educators. In addition, five experienced special education teachers were interviewed to bring forth further reasons for remaining in the field and to solicit opinions about the relative influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on special education teacher retention.

Research questions. The survey items and interview questions were designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What difference exists, if any, between the influence of relational support factors and organizational factors as reported by special education teachers who remain in their current teaching positions for five years or more?
2. What retention factors do special education teachers most often report to be influential reasons for staying in their current teaching positions for five years or more?
3. What attitudes are expressed by special education teachers regarding the influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on their decisions to remain in their current teaching positions for five years or more?

The quantitative data collected in order to answer research question one were utilized to determine whether to support or reject the following null hypothesis and alternative hypothesis:

Null hypothesis (H_{1_0}). There is no difference between the reported influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on special education teacher retention.

Alternative hypothesis (H1_a). There is a difference between the reported influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on special education teacher retention.

Within this chapter, the first research question was addressed through quantitative statistical analysis of data gathered from closed, Likert scale survey items. Due to the ordinal nature of ratings collected from Likert scales, the data required nonparametric analysis (Wuensch, 2013). The nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test was utilized to determine whether or not a significant difference existed between the response data modes for relational support factors versus the response data modes for organizational factors that have influenced surveyed special education teachers to remain in their teaching positions for at least five years. The mean and standard deviation of the Mann-Whitney U value was translated into the z value (Wuensch). The p value was also calculated from the Mann-Whitney U value, with a probability level of 5% ($p < .05$) serving as the critical level to determine whether or not the null hypothesis (H1₀) was rejected (Ravid, 2011).

The second research question was answered through descriptive statistical analysis performed using the data collected through the online survey. As is characteristic of descriptive research, this study was designed to insure unembellished raw data would be coordinated, organized, and summarized following the survey (Ravid, 2011). A frequency distribution of Likert ratings was presented for each item on the survey (Ravid). The raw scores of each factor, representing the frequency of Likert responses for each survey question, were then converted to percentages that indicated

how many participants chose each Likert scale level for each of the 50 influential factors (Ravid).

Finally, information gleaned from interviews of veteran special educators was utilized to answer the third research question. The interview questions were designed to elicit candid participant attitudes regarding relational support and organizational factors that have influenced them to remain in the field of special education for longer than five years. Common words and phrases were identified through open and axial coding of interview responses, which allowed themes and categories to emerge from these commonly-used words and phrases. Following presentation and analysis of the results of the study, including graphical representations of the data, deductive conclusions were presented.

Quantitative Data

To perform the nonparametric Mann-Whitney *U* test, the survey questions were divided into items representing relational support (R) factors and items representing organizational (O) factors. Although relational support factors and organizational factors were broadly defined by Billingsley (2004) in her landmark research study, the specific retention factors that were developed into closed survey items were categorized based upon those broad criteria. The pilot group confirmed the categorizations of the factors utilized in the survey matched their understandings of relational support and organizational factors.

When ranked as required to perform the Mann-Whitney *U* test, the modes of the 28 relational support (R) factors depicted in Table 1 resulted in a mean rank of 30.5, while a mean rank of 23.1 was established for the modes of the 22 organizational (O)

factors depicted in Table 2 (Winter & Dodou, 2010; Wuensch, 2013). Following calculation of the mean ranks, the z value of 1.74 was established (Wuensch, 2013). In addition, the p value for a two-tailed test was calculated and was found to be 0.0819 (Ravid, 2011).

For the purposes of this study, the null hypothesis (H_{10}) stated there was no difference between the reported influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on special education teacher retention. With the p value calculated for a two-tailed test from the Mann-Whitney U value and established at 0.0819, the null hypothesis (H_{10}) was not rejected ($p < .05$). Conversely, the alternative hypothesis (H_{1a}) that there was a difference between the reported influence of relational support factors and of organizational factors on special education teacher retention was not supported. No statistically significant difference was found to exist between the influence of relational support and organizational factors on special educator retention as reported by special education teachers who taught for five years or longer in their current special education teaching positions.

Qualitative Data

Survey results. A total of 35 special education teachers who have remained in their current positions within the special education teaching profession for five years or longer completed the online survey (see Appendix A). The total number of certified special educators who were offered the opportunity to respond to the survey included 112 experienced special education teachers from eight school districts within a specific Missouri conference. Of the 112 teachers who received the electronic communication

introducing the survey, 35 teachers completed the survey for a participation rate of 31.25%.

A summary of the frequency of responses for specific survey items designated as relational support factors was depicted below in Table 1. In addition, Table 1 presented the modes of Likert rating responses for each relational support factor. Overall, teachers tended to rate relational support factors as somewhat influential or extremely influential. No relational support factors were rated as the opposite of influential or not influential.

Table 1

Frequency Data for Relational Support Factors

Survey Item	Rated 1	Rated 2	Rated 3	Rated 4	Rated 5	Mode
4	0%	9%	9%	49%	34%	4
5	0%	3%	17%	49%	31%	4
12	0%	29%	31%	34%	6%	4
13	9%	14%	43%	14%	20%	3
14	11%	14%	29%	31%	14%	4
17	0%	3%	20%	43%	34%	4
18	0%	6%	29%	51%	14%	4
23	0%	26%	23%	20%	31%	5
27	3%	11%	20%	14%	51%	5
29	0%	0%	3%	31%	66%	5
31	3%	0%	14%	43%	40%	4
32	11%	9%	11%	31%	37%	5
33	9%	11%	11%	37%	31%	4
34	3%	9%	9%	29%	51%	5
35	3%	11%	11%	40%	34%	4
36	0%	0%	3%	43%	54%	5
37	0%	14%	34%	49%	3%	4
38	0%	20%	54%	11%	14%	3
39	9%	11%	14%	34%	31%	4
40	0%	26%	43%	23%	9%	3
41	0%	43%	40%	17%	0%	3
42	9%	11%	11%	31%	37%	5
43	9%	9%	11%	43%	29%	4
45	0%	0%	17%	37%	46%	5
46	0%	9%	26%	34%	31%	4
48	6%	3%	20%	29%	43%	5
49	6%	11%	23%	26%	34%	5
50	6%	11%	11%	40%	31%	4

Note. Survey sample comprised of 35 participants. Items rated 1 were defined as the “opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education).” Items rated 2 were defined as “not influential.” Items rated 3 were defined as “neutral.” Items rated 4 were defined as “somewhat influential.” Items rated 5 were defined as “extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator).”

Within Table 2, a summary of the frequency of responses for specific survey items designated as organizational factors was depicted. Table 2 also displayed the modes of Likert rating responses for each organizational factor. Overall, teachers tended to rate organizational factors as somewhat influential or extremely influential. Unlike the data collected on relational support factors, some organizational factors were rated most frequently as the opposite of influential or not influential.

Table 2

Frequency Data for Organizational Factors

Survey Item	Rated 1	Rated 2	Rated 3	Rated 4	Rated 5	Mode
1	11%	9%	20%	49%	11%	4
2	0%	6%	20%	51%	23%	4
3	0%	11%	23%	54%	11%	4
6	14%	11%	11%	29%	34%	5
7	34%	9%	11%	23%	23%	1
8	9%	11%	23%	23%	34%	5
9	9%	0%	26%	43%	23%	4
10	3%	9%	20%	43%	26%	4
11	11%	20%	14%	37%	17%	4
15	3%	11%	31%	46%	9%	4
16	3%	11%	6%	40%	40%	4, 5
19	0%	17%	6%	34%	43%	5
20	11%	11%	29%	34%	14%	4
21	6%	23%	26%	23%	23%	3
22	0%	29%	51%	14%	6%	3
24	3%	34%	31%	23%	9%	2
25	0%	31%	26%	31%	11%	2, 4
26	29%	14%	3%	29%	26%	1, 4
28	3%	11%	23%	34%	29%	4
30	11%	26%	29%	26%	9%	3
44	6%	14%	20%	40%	20%	4
47	0%	9%	26%	40%	26%	4

Note. Survey sample comprised of 35 participants. Items rated 1 were defined as the “opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education).” Items rated 2 were defined as “not influential.” Items rated 3 were defined as “neutral.” Items rated 4 were defined as “somewhat influential.” Items rated 5 were defined as “extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator).”

Among the 28 survey items categorized as relational support factors, 10 retention factors were most frequently ranked by veteran special education teachers as being extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator). Four of these 10 survey items received the extremely influential ranking from more than 50% of the participating special education teachers. Of the 35 special education teachers surveyed, 51% rated enjoyment gained from job and 66% rated ability to make a difference in the lives of students as extremely influential on their decisions to remain in the profession. Both of these factors were student-related relational support factors. Support of district-level special education administrators and support of fellow special education teachers were both colleague-related relational support factors ranked as extremely influential by 51% and 54% of the teachers surveyed, respectively.

Only four of the 22 survey items designated as organizational factors were most frequently ranked by surveyed special education teachers as being extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator). None of the organizational factors received the extremely influential ranking from more than 50% of the surveyed special educators. The organizational factor with the highest percentage of extremely influential ratings by respondents to the survey was job security/tenure (43%).

The final item on the survey was an open-ended item that allowed participants to share additional factors that had influenced them to stay in the field of special education for more than five years. One respondent mentioned the convenience of having access to online special education paperwork preparation tools from home, which would be

considered an organizational factor. Other organizational factors mentioned by respondents included getting summers off, having convenient work hours, and receiving an early retirement option. Relational support factors described by participants in the final survey item included the “self-satisfaction of working with students in a job that is always interesting each day and never boring.” Other teachers described relational support factors including friendships with colleagues, the chance to laugh every day, and the opportunity to “see growth in attitudes and acceptance of special needs students getting involved with regular education students through clubs and committees” within the school district.

Interview results. For the qualitative interview portion of the study, five of the special education teachers who participated in the online survey were interviewed individually and in person. The interview sample was stratified based upon years of experience in the current special education teaching positions of the participants. The intention was to interview one teacher from each of the following stratum: five to nine years in current teaching position, 10-14 years in current teaching position, 15-19 years in current teaching position, 20-24 years in current teaching position, 25-29 years in current teaching position, and more than 30 years in current teaching position.

Within the eight Missouri school districts designated as the sample for the study, 112 special educators were recruited to take the survey and to serve as possible interview participants. Among these 112 potential participants, there were no educators who had been in their current special education teaching positions for more than 30 years; therefore, it was only possible to include special education teachers from the first five stratum in the interview sample. The five interview participants represented four of the

eight school districts and were coded within the same numbered set. Code names for each interview participant and years of experience in their current special education teaching experience were contained in Table 3.

Table 3

Qualitative Interview Participants

Participating Districts	Years of Experience	Coded Names
D1	5-9	T1
D2	10-14	T2
D2	15-19	T3
D3	20-24	T4
D4	25-30	T5

Note. Years of Experience: All qualitative interview participants had been teaching in their current special education teaching positions for the number of years designated in the stratum.

Interview question one. What retention factors have most influenced you to remain in your current special education teaching position for more than five years?

All five of the interview respondents referenced the ongoing influence of enjoyment and fulfillment through working with students with disabilities and seeing those students succeed. Throughout the interviews, all five participants repeatedly

mentioned phrases such as “making a difference for kids” and “helping students reach their potential” as their primary motivators for remaining in the field of special education. T2 declared a personal connection and loyalty to the area and the district based upon upbringing and graduation from that school district. T5, the most experienced special educator who was interviewed (25-29 years in current teaching position), cited an overall satisfaction with the school district as a whole and the desire to finish a career in T5’s current district.

Interview question two. What is the single factor that has most influenced your decision to remain in your current special education teaching position for more than five years? Why?

Analogous to the responses to the first interview question, all five interview participants expressed the single most influential factor on their longevity within the field of special education was a love for students with disabilities and a passion for a profession that provided them the chance to help those students succeed. When asked why this relational support factor continued to be influential, T3 responded, “No other job would give me as much enjoyment and satisfaction” as being a special education teacher. T1 replied that the job afforded the chance to encounter different challenges every day that presented the opportunity to problem solve and laugh one’s way to better relationships with students.

Interview question three. Has that most influential factor changed over time throughout the course of your career? Why or why not?

Reactions to this interview question resulted in more varying responses than did the first two interview questions. T1 emphasized that although still appreciative of the

support of fellow special education teachers to answer paperwork and compliance questions, this factor was no longer as important as it had been in the early years of T1's career. T1 expressed support from colleagues and administrators through trusting relationships and professional respect had become more important as T1's career progressed.

Both T3 and T4 expressed the chance to make a difference in the lives of students had always been the most influential factor for them and had not changed over the course of their careers. Although T4 qualified the response with the caveat that students were still the most important factor, T4 expressed after teaching for 20 years, T4 now considered the investment in retirement and salary to be an extremely influential reason to stay in the field of education, at least until having worked long enough to retire comfortably.

Interview question four. Do you think you possess personality traits that have kept you in your profession for five years or longer despite the presence or absence of the retention factors you have mentioned? Why or why not? If so, what are those personality traits?

Personality traits of special education teachers mentioned by the interview participants included the capacity to work well with others and the desire to teach more than one subject area and in more than one type of educational setting. T2 emphasized the need for special educators to be competent at working not only with students, but with parents, community members, paraprofessionals, regular education teachers, and administrators. Organization was cited by T1 as a personality trait that made it easier to cope with numerous lesson preps and with required special education paperwork and data

collection. Finally, the desire to “create real relationships with students” was named by T4 as a difference between special education teachers and many regular education teachers. This teacher expressed the belief special educators often become almost a “parent-figure” to their students and tended to take ownership of the failures and successes of those students.

Interview question five. As a whole, to what extent have relational support factors influenced your decision to remain in your profession? [Provide definition and examples of factors].

Again, the common theme described specifically by T3 as “making a difference in a positive way in the lives of students” emerged following the five interviews. All five respondents expressed relational support factors definitely influenced their longevity as special education teachers. Enjoyment of the job, the opportunity to laugh each day, and a passion for children were notably influential to all five participants in terms of remaining in their current roles as special educators. T1 reiterated the importance of friendships with other teachers and appreciation of the support and professional development provided by D1’s special education administration. Professional development and training opportunities specific to students with disabilities were highly valued by both T4 and T5.

Interview question six. As a whole, to what extent have organizational factors influenced your decision to remain in your profession? [Provide definition and examples of factors].

Although all five interview respondents seemed more willing to emphasize the influence of relational support factors on their longevity, they also reported

organizational factors played an important part in their decisions to stay in the field of special education. Specific organizational factors mentioned as especially influential included tuition reimbursement for advanced degree coursework, reasonable case loads, time to plan and complete required paperwork, and the opportunity to design curriculum. T2 expressed appreciation for the “increase of professionalism, unity, and consistency in the special education program” for D2.

Interview question seven. What factors do you think building-level administrators should address in order to retain special education teachers? Please explain why you feel this way.

Three of the five interview participants (T1, T3, and T4) responded building principals should make every effort to create a culture and climate of collaboration within their buildings. These respondents expressed when administrators displayed appreciation for special education teachers and publicly accepted students with disabilities as welcome members of the student population, the morale of special educators and their students improved and made the working environment even more enjoyable. T5 articulated that four administrators had served as building principal over the course of T5’s special education teaching career. With two of those principals, T5 was assured the special education staff members in the building were highly regarded and respected as integral members of the teaching staff. Under the leadership of the other two principals, T5 perceived special educators were “second-class citizens” to their regular education counterparts. Although T5 made the decision to stay in the current special education teaching position, T5 considered leaving the district or transferring to a regular education

position while working with principals who did not seem to appreciate the importance of special educators.

Two of the interview participants (T3 and T4) communicated special education teachers need to feel supported by their building principals when student discipline issues occur. T3 articulated:

When I finally reach the point of sending a student to the office for help with a discipline issue, I want the principal to respect and believe that I have done all I can to take care of the problem in my classroom. I hardly ever write a referral, but when I do, I want the administration to take it seriously. What's best is for the principal to talk to me about the incident and about what I think would be a reasonable consequence for the behavior.

T4 agreed "feeling supported" by the principal during behavior-related interactions with students and parents was a key to retaining special education teachers for extended periods of time.

In terms of organizational retention factors, the interview respondents expressed building administrators should be helpful to all teachers by insuring access to necessary teaching materials, technology, and resources. Two elementary-level special education teachers (T2 and T3) voiced the belief principals should "share the wealth when assigning extra duties." They observed their principals seemed to assign more before school, lunchtime, and after school duties to special education teachers than to regular education teachers.

Interview question eight. What factors do you think district-level administrators should address in order to retain special education teachers? Please explain why you feel this way.

The interview participants appeared to divide district-level administrators into two distinct groups when answering this question. The first group, including administrators such as superintendents, were referred to as separate from the group of special education administrators at the district level. The respondents expressed superintendents and other non-special education district-level administrators should primarily address the organizational retention factors over which they have control. The organizational factors mentioned included salary, benefits, professional development funding, building infrastructure, and class size. Similar to the responses to question seven, the interview participants also expressed a desire for district-level administrators to establish and promote a district culture and climate inclusive of students with disabilities and of special education teachers.

When referring to district-level special education administration, T1 articulated special education teachers needed support and ongoing training in order to keep up with the ever-changing legal requirements and compliance issues related to special education paperwork. All five participants appreciated the ability to access special education administrators quickly when emergencies arose. Finally, T5, a 26-year veteran of special education expressed:

One of the best ways to keep special ed teachers around is to make sure they feel like someone above them in administration understands what it's like to teach

special ed and do all of the paperwork. Our special ed administrators used to teach, and they get it.

Deductive Conclusions

The results of the quantitative portion of this study answered the first research question and revealed the null hypothesis (H_{1_0}) was not rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_{1_a}) was not supported. The Mann-Whitney U test was utilized to determine no significant difference existed between the response data modes for relational support factors versus the response data modes for organizational factors that have influenced surveyed special education teachers to remain in their teaching positions for at least five years. Although the modes of the 28 relational support factors depicted in Table 1 resulted in a mean rank of 30.5, and a mean rank of 23.1 was established for the modes of the 22 organizational factors depicted in Table 2, the p value was not significant at a probability level of 5% ($p < .05$).

In order to answer the second research question, an online survey of 35 experienced special education teachers was conducted. A total of 14 of the 50 items were most frequently ranked by survey participants as being extremely influential on their decisions to remain in the field of special education for at least five years. Four retention factors received the extremely influential ranking from more than 50% of the surveyed special education teachers. These four most influential retention factors included the following: enjoyment gained from job, ability to make a difference in the lives of students, support of district-level special education administrators, and support of fellow special education teachers.

The third and final research question was answered through five interviews to determine the attitudes expressed by special education teachers regarding the influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on their decisions to remain in their current teaching positions for five years or more. The themes of making a difference and of enjoying the profession were most frequently shared by the interview respondents, which were both categorized as relational support factors. The participants also shared their suggestions for building and district-level administrators concerning retention factors that should be addressed in order to retain qualified and experienced special educators in the profession.

Summary

Within Chapter Four, the results of the Mann-Whitney *U* test were detailed, which allowed the first research question to be answered and revealed the null hypothesis (H_{1_0}) was not rejected while the alternative hypothesis (H_{1_a}) was not supported. Data to answer the second research question were attained following an online survey of 35 experienced special education teachers. Of the 50 survey items, 14 were most frequently ranked by participants as being extremely influential on their decisions to remain in the field of special education. Four retention factors received the extremely influential ranking from more than 50% of the surveyed special education teachers. In order to answer the third and final research question, five interviews were conducted to determine the attitudes expressed by special education teachers regarding the influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on their decisions to remain in their current teaching positions for five years or more.

In Chapter Five, the quantitative and qualitative findings of the study were further discussed. Conclusions based upon the data collected during the study were elucidated, and the answers to the three research questions were articulated. Implications for practices that could increase special education teacher retention as well as recommendations for future research in the area of retention of special education teachers were outlined.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to identify the specific retention factors that have influenced special education teachers to stay in their current teaching positions for five years or more. The U.S. Department of Education (2011) has repeatedly recognized there is an ongoing shortage of qualified special education teachers. As of 2005, more than 40,000 special education teaching positions were left vacant or were filled by teachers who were not considered highly qualified (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). When provided instruction by experienced and highly qualified special education teachers, it has been established students with disabilities achieve more than when they are instructed by novice teachers with limited qualifications (Feng & Sass, 2009).

The data collected in this study facilitated the opportunity for school and district-level administrators to address influential teacher retention factors within their control in order to increase the chances of retaining experienced and qualified special education teachers. Most previous research has concentrated on the reasons special education teachers choose to leave the profession. This study augmented the limited body of research focused on the retention of special educators rather than on the reasons they leave the field.

After surveying and interviewing experienced special education teachers, both quantitative and qualitative methodology were employed to delineate the specific retention factors ranked as most influential by veteran special education teachers when asked why they have remained in the profession. The online survey consisted of 50 closed Likert items that required participants to rate the influence of specific retention factors on their decisions to remain in their current special education teaching positions

for at least five years. The factors chosen for the Likert items on the survey included retention factors delineated in previous research and were categorized as either relational support factors or organizational factors (Albrecht et al., 2009; Beesley et al., 2010; Berry, 2012; Berry et al., 2011; Billingsley, 2004; Carr, 2009; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Prather-Jones, 2011). An open-ended item at the end of the survey allowed participants to describe additional factors that have influenced their longevity as special educators. In addition, five experienced special education teachers were interviewed to bring forth their attitudes and reasons for remaining in the field and to solicit opinions about the relative influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on special education teacher retention.

Within this chapter, findings from the quantitative and qualitative research data were discussed. Conclusions were drawn based upon the data in order to answer the three research questions outlined in the previous chapters of this dissertation. Implications for future practice based upon the results of this study were proposed. Finally, recommendations were made to guide future research related to the retention of special education teachers.

Findings from Quantitative Data

Data utilized to perform quantitative statistical analysis through the Mann-Whitney *U* test were gathered through an online survey presented to experienced special education teachers within eight Missouri school districts affiliated with a particular conference. The conference is a group of school districts from a specific geographic area that are of similar size and implement comparable programming. A total of 35 teachers responded to the survey out of a possible 112 participants, for a participation rate of

31.25%. The same survey, along with interviews of veteran special educators, was utilized to gather qualitative data. The themes which emerged from the qualitative data were considered.

To perform the Mann-Whitney U test, a nonparametric statistical analysis as required by surveys using Likert rating scales, the survey questions were divided into those representative of relational support factors and those representative of organizational factors (Wuensch, 2013). Billingsley (2004) broadly defined relational support factors and organizational factors in her landmark work, and the specific retention factors that were developed into closed survey items were categorized based upon those broad criteria. The pilot group confirmed the categorizations of the factors utilized in the survey matched their understandings of relational support and organizational factors.

After calculation of the Mann-Whitney U value, the z value and p value were calculated. The p value calculated for a two-tailed test from the Mann-Whitney U value and established at 0.0819. This p value was utilized to not reject the following null hypothesis (H_{10}) at a critical probability level of 5% ($p < .05$): There was no difference between the reported influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on special education teacher retention. The following alternative hypothesis (H_{1a}) was not supported with the p value of 0.0819: There was a difference between the reported influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on special education teacher retention.

Although no statistically significant difference was found to exist between the influence of relational support and organizational factors on special education teacher

retention at a probability level of 5% ($p < .05$), a difference would have been established at a 10% ($p < .10$) probability level. With this taken into consideration in the context of this study, relational support factors appeared to be more influential on the longevity of the surveyed special education teachers than were organizational factors. Qualitative interview responses appeared to affirm this assertion, with all five interview participants indicating relational support factors, such as a passion for teaching and the desire to make a difference in the lives of students, were their primary reasons for staying in the field of special education.

Relational support factors comprised 28 of the 50 survey items. Of these 28 items, 10 relational support factors were most frequently ranked by the surveyed special education teachers as being extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator). Organizational factors comprised the other 22 survey items, and only four of those items were most frequently ranked as extremely influential.

Findings from Qualitative Data

Survey findings. The online survey was completed by 35 out of 112 potential participants. The survey was presented to all special education teachers from eight Missouri school districts affiliated with a particular conference who had remained in their current special education teaching positions for at least five consecutive years. Data collected through the online survey were utilized qualitatively in order to determine which retention factors were most frequently reported to be influential on the decision of educators to remain in the special education teaching profession for a lengthy period of time.

Of the 50 closed survey items, 28 were categorized as relational support factors. The remaining 22 items were categorized as organizational factors. A final open-ended item allowed the survey participants to expound upon their own reasons for remaining in their special education teaching positions for more than five years.

As Paul (2010) suggested, a five-point Likert rating scale was chosen for the survey as preferable to an even-numbered Likert rating scale, because survey participants were reasonably expected to express neutral feelings about some items. This option for a neutral response could have contributed to central tendency bias, wherein participants avoid extreme responses (Paul). Out of 50 total closed survey items, the mode response rating of somewhat influential (rating 4) was the most commonly chosen response. Somewhat influential (rating 4) was selected most frequently on 28 of the 50 survey items.

Of the 10 relational support factors most frequently ranked by the surveyed special education teachers as being extremely influential on the decision to remain in the profession, four factors were rated as extremely influential by more than 50% of the survey participants. Two of these four factors were essentially student-related relational support factors. The ability to make a difference in the lives of students was rated as extremely influential by 66% of the teachers surveyed, which was the overall most highly-rated factor on the survey. In addition, 51% of the survey participants found enjoyment gained from job to be extremely influential on their decisions to remain in the special education teaching profession.

Seven of the remaining eight relational support factors ranked most frequently by survey participants as extremely influential could be described as colleague-related

relational support factors. Of utmost importance to 54% of the surveyed teachers was the support of fellow special education teachers, aligned closely to the 51% of survey participants who found the support of district-level special education administrators to be extremely influential. Other colleague-related relational support factors ranked most frequently as being extremely influential included the following: relationships with colleagues (46%); respect and appreciation of others (43%); support of building-level administrators (37%); staff morale, culture, and climate of building (37%); and support with paperwork (34%).

In contrast, only four of the 22 survey items designated as organizational factors were most frequently ranked by surveyed special education teachers as being extremely influential. None of the organizational factors received the extremely influential ranking from more than 50% of the survey participants. The organizational factor with the highest percentage of extremely influential ratings by respondents to the survey was job security/tenure (43%). In addition, both manageable caseloads and salary and benefits were ranked as extremely influential by 34% of survey respondents. Moreover, an equal number of survey participants rated opportunity to teach in varied contexts (co-teaching, resource, self-contained) as being somewhat influential (40%) and as being extremely influential (40%) on their decisions to remain in the special education teaching profession.

Responses to the final open-ended survey item affirmed the data on factors most frequently cited as influential on retention of special education teachers. Relational support factors described by participants in the final survey item included the “self-satisfaction of working with students in a job that is always interesting each day and

never boring” and “the chance to laugh every day.” These responses were analogous to the closed survey item, enjoyment gained from job, which was rated as extremely influential by 51% of survey participants.

In response to the open-ended survey item, other teachers reiterated the importance of “friendships with colleagues,” which corresponded to the item relationships with colleagues that 46% of respondents rated as extremely influential. Finally, one respondent wrote about the opportunity to “see growth in attitudes and acceptance of special needs students getting involved with regular education students through clubs and committees” within the school district. Although more effusive and definitive, this open-ended response could be compared to the closed item ability to make a difference in the lives of students. This item was rated as extremely influential by 66% of the experienced special education teachers surveyed, which was the most highly-rated factor on the survey.

Interview findings. Interview responses were utilized as qualitative data to determine attitudes as expressed by special education teachers regarding the influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on their decisions to remain in their current teaching positions for five years or more. Five of the special education teachers who participated in the online survey were interviewed individually. The interview sample was stratified based upon years of special education teaching experience. One teacher was interviewed from each of the following stratum: five to nine years in current position, 10-14 years in current position, 15-19 years in current position, 20-24 years in current position, and 25-29 years in current position.

Four themes were made evident through analysis of the data collected during interviews:

1. Experienced special education teachers were influenced most by making a difference for children and helping students reach their potential, which was the primary motivator for teachers to remain in the special education teaching profession.
2. Although both relational support factors and organizational factors were designated as somewhat influential or extremely influential on the decisions of experienced special education teachers to remain in their current teaching positions, relational support factors were described as more influential than were organizational factors.
3. Building-level administrators could and should address certain influential retention factors in order to increase the likelihood of retaining special education teachers.
4. District-level special education administrators could and should address certain influential retention factors in order to increase the likelihood of retaining special education teachers.

Theme one. Experienced special education teachers were influenced most by making a difference for children and helping students reach their potential, which was the primary motivator for teachers to remain in the special education teaching profession.

In response to interview questions one, two, and five, all of the interview respondents referenced the ongoing impact of pleasure and fulfillment through working with and helping students with disabilities succeed. When asked these three interview

questions concerning the primary motivating factors for remaining in the special education teaching profession, all five interview participants repeatedly used phrases such as making a difference for kids and helping students reach their potential. T3 expressed, “No other job would give me as much enjoyment and satisfaction” as being a special education teacher. All five respondents communicated the certainty relational support factors had definitely influenced their decisions to continue as special education teachers.

Theme two. Although both relational support factors and organizational factors were designated as somewhat influential or extremely influential on the decisions of experienced special education teachers to remain in their current teaching positions, relational support factors were described as more influential than were organizational factors.

The most common refrain during the five interviews was the retention factor described specifically by T3 as “making a difference in a positive way in the lives of students.” The five interviewees each voiced the assertion relational support factors had definitely influenced their longevity as special educators. All five participants described enjoyment in the job and a passion for children.

The interview respondents seemed more willing to underscore and to expound upon the influence of relational support factors in contrast to the influence of organizational factors on their lasting commitments to the field of special education. Despite this, some specific organizational factors were mentioned as being significantly influential on the participants’ decisions to continue in the special education teaching profession for more than five years. Salary and benefits, manageable case loads,

planning time to complete required paperwork, and the opportunity to design curriculum were all specifically named during the interviews as highly influential organizational factors.

Theme three. Building-level administrators could and should address certain influential retention factors in order to increase the likelihood of retaining special education teachers.

The most common response when asked what building principals could do to retain special educators was that they should make every effort to create a culture and climate of collaboration within their buildings. T1, T3, and T4 suggested administrators should express appreciation for special education teachers and should welcome students with disabilities as accepted and valued members of the student population. Prather-Jones (2011) found special education teachers desired respect and appreciation from their building principals. Special educators also craved a collaborative culture and climate that would garner respect and support for special education teachers from the other teachers around them (Prather-Jones). Without this positive environment, special education teachers might be treated as “second-class citizens” within their buildings, as described by T5.

Both T3 and T4 articulated principals should support special education teachers when handling student discipline issues. Prather-Jones’s (2011) work echoed the desire of special educators for building administrators to enforce consequences and to include the teacher in decisions when discipline issues arose. “Feeling supported” by the principal during exchanges with students and parents was especially important to T4 when student behaviors had to be handled by administration.

In addition to support through a positive culture, observable appreciation, and backing during discipline incidents, certain organizational factors were within the control of building principals. The interview respondents expressed administrators should insure instructional, technological, and monetary resources were available to special education teachers. T2 and T3 also wanted principals to “share the wealth when assigning extra duties.”

Theme four. District-level special education administrators could and should address certain influential retention factors in order to increase the likelihood of retaining special education teachers.

Although desirous of the support of district-level non-special education administrators, the interview participants were more influenced to remain in their current positions by the support of district-level special education administrators. T1 communicated special education administrators should support special educators through timely training and assistance with the ever-changing legal requirements and compliance issues related to special education paperwork. T5 expressed a belief it was especially important for special education administrators to have had experience as special education teachers so they could empathize with and provide useful advice to their employees.

Conclusions

Both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to identify common themes and to answer the three research questions. Relevant information gleaned from the literature review in Chapter Two in combination with the data outlined in Chapter Four were utilized to answer the research questions.

Research question one. What difference exists, if any, between the influence of relational support factors and organizational factors as reported by special education teachers who remain in their current teaching positions for five years or more?

The p value calculated from the Mann-Whitney U value utilizing the survey results was established at 0.0819. At a critical probability level of 5% ($p < .05$), the null hypothesis (H_{1_0}) that there is no difference between the reported influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on special education teacher retention was not rejected. The alternative hypothesis (H_{1_a}) that there is a difference between the reported influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on special education teacher retention was therefore not supported.

Although no difference was found to exist at a probability level of 5% ($p < .05$), a difference would have been established at a probability level of 10% ($p < .10$). At this higher critical level, relational support factors appeared to be more influential than organizational factors on the decisions of the surveyed special education teachers to remain in the field of special education. Qualitative interview participants confirmed this assertion. All five interview participants expressed a passion for teaching and the desire to make a difference in the lives of students, both categorized as relational support factors, were their main reasons for remaining in the special education teaching profession.

Research question two. What retention factors do special education teachers most often report to be influential reasons for staying in their current teaching positions for five years or more?

The retention factors most often reported to be influential reasons for continuing as special education teachers were determined based upon the mode for each survey question. A total of 14 survey items were most frequently reported to be extremely influential by the surveyed teachers. Of those items, 10 were categorized as relational support factors, while the remaining four factors were categorized as organizational factors.

Overall, the ability to make a difference in the lives of students was the most highly-rated retention factor on the survey, with 66% of the surveyed special education teachers rating the item as extremely influential. Of those educators surveyed, 54% rated the support of fellow special education teachers as extremely influential, while 51% of respondents gave the same rating to both enjoyment gained from job and support of district-level special education administrators. The following retention factors are listed in descending order based upon the percentage of survey participants who assigned a rating of extremely influential to each item: relationships with colleagues (46%); respect and appreciation of others (43%); job security/tenure (43%); opportunity to teach in varied contexts (co-teaching, resource, self-contained) (40%); support of building-level administrators (37%); staff morale, culture, and climate of building (37%); and support with paperwork (34%).

Interestingly, unlike the findings of much of the recent research on special education teacher retention, mentoring and teacher induction were not rated highly by the teachers surveyed for this study. Billingsley et al. (2009) stressed quality teacher induction programs with an emphasis on mentoring would increase special education teacher retention. However, the most frequently chosen rank of influence for mentoring

programs was neutral, while new teacher induction programs were ranked most frequently by survey participants as not influential on their decisions to remain in the field of special education. Perhaps this was reflective of the work of Washburn-Moses (2010), who asserted mentoring practices for general education and special education teachers were dissimilar and of different quality. The special education teachers interviewed for the Washburn-Moses (2010) study reported special education mentors and valuable mentoring programming were less available to them than to general educators.

Berry et al. (2011) emphasized relevant and timely professional development was found to increase the commitment of special education teachers. In the work of Albrecht et al. (2009) on teacher retention, professional development opportunities were cited as the most influential school climate and workplace condition. Within the Albrecht et al. (2009) study, professional development opportunities was not rated by participants as one of the top 14 most influential factors. Of the survey respondents, 49% rated it as somewhat influential on their decisions to remain in the field of special education (Albrecht et al.).

Cochran-Smith et al. (2011) established student-teacher relationships contributed significantly to the retention of special education teachers. Albrecht et al. (2009) revealed interest in student welfare to be a key retention factor for special educators. Correspondingly, of the 35 survey respondents in this study, 66% communicated the ability to make a difference in the lives of students was extremely influential to them when considering the option to continue in their current special education teaching positions.

Berry (2012) found special education teachers maintained the support of other special educators in the same building was the most helpful support they received. Albrecht et al. (2009) also revealed the support of other teachers was of primary importance. These findings aligned with the survey results that 54% of the participants rated support of fellow special education teachers as extremely influential on their longevity in the field.

Although it was not the most highly-rated retention factor in this study, support of building-level administrators was rated by 37% of the survey respondents as being extremely influential. Billingsley et al. (2009) discovered strong building principal support influenced special educators to be more committed to their profession and to remain in the special education teaching field. Albrecht et al. (2009) also established building-level administrative support on a daily basis was crucial for special education teacher retention. In a study by Kukla-Acevedo (2009), support from administrators was the only factor that showed a statistically significant relationship to overall teacher retention and mobility.

Research question three. What attitudes are expressed by special education teachers regarding the influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on their decisions to remain in their current teaching positions for five years or more?

The most prevalent attitude expressed during all five interviews with experienced special education teachers was they were primarily influenced to remain in the special education profession by relational support factors, such as making a difference for children and helping students reach their potential. All of the interview respondents articulated they found enjoyment and fulfillment in their current special education

teaching positions. Relational support factors were definitely influential to all five interviewees when making their decisions to continue teaching in the field of special education.

When asked to delineate between the relative influence of relational support factors and organizational factors, the interview participants stressed and expanded more upon the influence of relational support factors than of organizational factors. Monetary inducements, manageable case loads, adequate planning time, and the opportunity to participate in curriculum development were all specifically named during the interviews as highly influential organizational factors. The general attitude appeared to be that feeling supported at work and being invested in the job through relationships were more influential on the decision to remain in the field of special education than were fiduciary and organizational considerations.

Interview participants expressed strong beliefs that administrators should make every effort to address retention factors within their influence and control. The respondents were adamant building principals should create a collaborative, inclusive, and accepting culture and climate within their schools. It was also hoped by the special educators interviewed that principals would support them when student discipline issues arose. Building-level administrators could also assist special education teachers to obtain the resources they needed to provide the best instructional experience for students with disabilities.

At the district level, the support of special education administrators was extremely influential for experienced special educators. Administrators of special education were expected by the interview participants to provide appropriate and timely training and

professional development that would enable special educators to meet the legal requirements of the profession. The respondents also expressed the need for special education administrators to be readily available to provide support when difficulties arose.

Implications for Practice

As established by Boyd et al. (2010), special education teachers play an integral role in the success of all public school systems. Unfortunately, the ongoing shortage of special educators has made it difficult for administrators to hire and retain those who are both qualified and experienced (Berry et al., 2011). Building-level and district-level administrators have expressed relief when they were able to rely on the expertise of experienced special educators who have remained in the field for an extended period of time (Berry et al.). In order to provide the best educational experience possible for all students, especially those with disabilities, administrators should make every effort to retain experienced and qualified special education professionals for as long as possible (Carr, 2009).

Based upon the data collected in this study, building-level principals should make a concerted effort to promote a positive building culture and climate that endorses and expects collaboration, collegiality, and the acceptance of all students and teachers as valuable. Principals should be readily available and should concentrate their efforts on expressing respect and appreciation for the contributions of special educators who make a difference in the lives of students. Finally, building administrators should provide support when behavior issues arise for students with disabilities and should insure access to quality instructional resources for special education teachers and students with

disabilities. These types of efforts by building-level administrators were found to be extremely influential on the decisions of experienced special educators to remain in the field.

At the district level, non-special education administrators should promote the retention of special education teachers by acting as good stewards of financial resources so that the salaries and benefits offered to special educators are competitive. District-level administrators should also make a concerted effort to be visible and available to all teachers. When district-level administrators encounter special education teachers and students with disabilities, the administrators should provide praise, respect, and appreciation for the work being done.

Finally, in order to retain special education teachers, the data collected in this study suggested district-level special education administrators should be available to provide timely and relevant professional development and training opportunities to special educators. When possible, administrators of special education should attempt to assign manageable caseloads and the opportunity for special educators to teach in varied settings and contexts (co-teaching, resource, self-contained). Parallel to the implications described previously, special education administrators should deliver praise to teachers for making a difference and should make it clear special educators are respected and appreciated.

Recommendations for Future Research

Most previous research has focused primarily on the reasons special education teachers leave the profession rather than on the reasons they stay. This study supplemented the limited research on retention factors that influence special education

teachers to remain in their teaching positions for more than five years. Recommendations for future research deriving from this project included, but were not limited to the following:

1. Investigate and analyze the relative influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on the retention of special education teachers in other demographic areas of the state of Missouri, in other states and regions of the United States, and in the United States as a whole. Surveys and interviews similar to those utilized in this study could be conducted with a much larger sample of veteran special education teachers expanded to include other areas of Missouri, other states, regions, or the whole United States.

2. Investigate and analyze the effect of high special education teacher mobility on the achievement of students with disabilities. Achievement scores could be quantitatively compared based upon the mobility rates of special education teachers.

3. Conduct research to determine whether or not the quality of mentorship and teacher induction programs affects the influence of those programs on special education teacher retention.

4. Qualitatively identify the methods and procedures that best enable building-level administrators to create a collaborative culture and climate that is accepting of students with disabilities. Determine whether or not schools with positive morale and an inclusive environment actually have lower rates of special education teacher mobility and attrition.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify specific factors that have influenced special education teachers to remain in their current teaching positions for at least five years. As of 2005, more than 40,000 special education teaching positions were left vacant or were filled by teachers without adequate qualifications (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Students with disabilities have been found to achieve more when they are educated by experienced and highly qualified special education teachers (Feng & Sass, 2009).

Following a survey of 35 experienced special education teachers and interviews with five of those surveyed, both quantitative and qualitative statistical analysis were performed on the data. The results of the quantitative portion of the study indicated the null hypothesis (H_{1_0}) was not rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_{1_a}) was not supported. The nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test was performed to determine no significant difference existed between the response data modes for relational support factors versus the response data modes for organizational factors that have influenced surveyed special education teachers to remain in their teaching positions for at least five years.

Subsequently, analysis of the data obtained from the survey of 35 veteran special education teachers indicated that the four most influential retention factors included the following: enjoyment gained from job, ability to make a difference in the lives of students, support of district-level special education administrators, and support of fellow special education teachers. Another 10 retention factors were most frequently rated by participants as extremely influential. Of the 14 total factors that had a response mode of

extremely influential, 10 were categorized as relational support factors and four were categorized as organizational factors.

Five interviews were conducted to determine the attitudes expressed by experienced special education teachers regarding the relative influence of relational support factors and organizational factors on their decisions to remain in their current teaching positions for five years or longer. Making a difference in the lives of students and gaining enjoyment from the profession were the attitudes most frequently shared by the interview respondents, which would both be categorized as relational support factors according to Billingsley's (2004) work. The interview participants also offered suggestions for building-level principals, district-level non-special education administrators, and district-level special education administrators concerning retention factors that should be addressed in order to retain experienced and quality special educators for years to come.

Lastly, conclusions were reached following quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data collected during the survey and interviews. The three research questions were answered, the null hypothesis was not rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was not supported. Implications for administrative practices and approaches that would likely increase the retention of special education teachers and recommendations for future research in the area of special education teacher retention were enumerated. The quantitative and qualitative data collected in this study facilitates the opportunity for building-level and district-level administrators to address influential teacher retention factors within their control in order to increase the chances of retaining experienced and qualified special education teachers. Instruction delivered by competent and experienced

special educators typically leads to increased academic and social achievement for special education students (Feng & Sass, 2009).

Appendix A

Survey

Please rate the following factors in terms of how much each has influenced your decision to remain a special education teacher for five years or longer.

1. Clearly-defined teaching roles
 - Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
 - Not influential
 - Neutral
 - Somewhat influential
 - Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

2. Access to quality teaching materials
 - Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
 - Not influential
 - Neutral
 - Somewhat influential
 - Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

3. Access to technology
 - Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
 - Not influential
 - Neutral
 - Somewhat influential
 - Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

4. Professional development opportunities (in-district, out-of-district, tuition reimbursement, etc.)
 - Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
 - Not influential
 - Neutral
 - Somewhat influential
 - Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

5. Special education-related training provided by the district
 - Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
 - Not influential
 - Neutral
 - Somewhat influential
 - Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

6. Manageable caseloads
 - Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
 - Not influential
 - Neutral
 - Somewhat influential
 - Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

7. Manageable paperwork demands (volume and complexity)
 - Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
 - Not influential
 - Neutral
 - Somewhat influential
 - Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

8. Salary and benefits

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

9. District process for handling special education meetings and evaluations

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

10. Class size

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

11. Adequate planning time

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

12. Professional Learning Communities

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

13. Opportunity to advance professionally within the district

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

14. Student behavioral climate within the district

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

15. Classroom budget

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

16. Opportunity to teach in varied contexts (co-teaching, resource, self-contained)

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

17. Quality of education in district

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

18. School district reputation

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

19. Job security/tenure

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

20. Scheduling of students/services

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

21. Location of school

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

22. School size

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

23. Personal connection to school/area

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

24. District demographics

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

25. Classroom space

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

26. Time for paperwork

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

27. Enjoyment gained from job

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

28. Classroom autonomy

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

29. Ability to make a difference in the lives of students

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

30. Personal influence over building and district policies and procedures

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

31. Proof of student achievement gains

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

32. Support of building-level administrators

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

33. Support of district-level non-special education administrators

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

34. Support of district-level special education administrators

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

35. Support of regular education colleagues

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

36. Support of fellow special education teachers

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

37. Parental support

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

38. Community support

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

39. Building climate supportive of inclusion and collaboration

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

40. Mentoring programs

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

41. New teacher induction programs

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

42. Staff morale, culture, and climate of building

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

43. Staff morale, culture, and climate of district

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

44. How student discipline is handled

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

45. Relationships with colleagues

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

46. Paraprofessional support

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

47. Related services availability and personnel

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

48. Respect and appreciation of others

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

49. Support with paperwork

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

50. Climate of shared responsibility for all students

- Opposite of influential (this factor has caused me to consider leaving special education)
- Not influential
- Neutral
- Somewhat influential
- Extremely influential (this factor has been a major influence on my decision to remain a special educator)

51. What other additional factors have influenced you to stay in your current position as a special education teacher?

Appendix B



DATE: September 16, 2013

TO: Samantha Henderson
FROM: Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board

STUDY TITLE: [505921-1] Factors that Influence Special Education Teacher Retention
IRB REFERENCE #:
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: September 16, 2013
EXPIRATION DATE: September 16, 2014
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research project. Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the completion/amendment form for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of September 16, 2014.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

If you have any questions, please contact Tameka Tammy Moore at (618) 616-7027 or tmoore@lindenwood.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

If you have any questions, please send them to IRB@lindenwood.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board's records.

Appendix C

LINDENWOOD

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Factors that Influence Special Education Teacher Retention
<survey>

Principal Investigator: Samantha Henderson

Telephone: (417) [REDACTED]

E-mail: hendersonsa@branson.k12.mo.us

Participant _____ Contact info _____

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Samantha Henderson under the guidance of Advisor, Dr. Cherita Graber. The purpose of this research is to determine the specific factors that encourage special education teachers to remain in the field of special education for more than five years. Previous research has focused primarily on ways to attract special educators and on the reasons they leave the field. This study will further the research available concerning the positive factors that influence teachers to stay in their special education teaching positions for an extended period of time. In order to keep experienced special educators in the field of education and in their current special education teaching positions, school administrators must take action and address the retention factors that are within their control.
2. a) Your participation will involve:

Completing an electronic survey of 50 questions that requires you to rate the influence of specific factors on your decision to stay in the field of special education. These items will ask you to rate the influence of factors on a five-point Likert rating scale. A final open-ended item will allow you to provide your own reasons for remaining in your special education teaching position.

b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be approximately 10 minutes.

Approximately 30-100 special education teachers will be involved in this research.
3. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.
4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about the positive factors that influence

- teachers to stay in their special education teaching positions for an extended period of time. In order to keep experienced special educators in the field of education and in their current special education teaching positions, school administrators must take action and address the retention factors that are within their control.
5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.
 6. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location.
 7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Samantha Henderson, at (417) [REDACTED], or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Sherry DeVore, at 417-881-0009. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs, at 636-949-4846.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I may retain a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

By completing the survey, I acknowledge my consent to participate in the research study.

<https://docs.google.com/a/branson.k12.mo.us/forms/d/1FimRq61TmD0YiTbGAEtHmAczswuQf4qjZgYS3C-F6hI/viewform>

Appendix D

Phone Script for Contacting Participants

<Interview>

Hello, this is Samantha Henderson. I am contacting you regarding research I am conducting as part of the doctoral requirement for Lindenwood University. My study is entitled *Factors that Influence Special Education Teacher Retention*, and the purpose of the research is to identify the specific factors that encourage special education teachers to remain in their current teaching positions for more than five years.

As the primary investigator, I am requesting your participation, in the form of a personal interview, to garner perceptions about the factors that have influenced you to remain in your special education teaching position for an extended period of time. If you are interested in participating in the study, I will send you, via electronic mail, the informed consent form and list of interview questions. Then, we can establish the time and location for the interview. Thank you for your time and support.

Appendix E

LINDENWOOD

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Factors that Influence Special Education Teacher Retention
<interview>

Principal Investigator: Samantha Henderson

Telephone: (417) [REDACTED]

E-mail: hendersonsa@branson.k12.mo.us

Participant _____ Contact info _____

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by the principal investigator, Samantha Henderson, under the guidance of the advisor, Dr. Cherita Graber. The purpose of this research is to determine the specific factors that encourage special education teachers to remain in the field of special education for more than five years. Previous research has focused primarily on ways to attract special educators and on the reasons they leave the field. This study will further the research available concerning the positive factors that influence teachers to stay in their special education teaching positions for an extended period of time. In order to keep experienced special educators in the field of education and in their current special education teaching positions, school administrators must take action and address the retention factors that are within their control.

2. a) Your participation will involve:

Participating in an interview. The interview will be conducted face-to-face and will be audio taped for accuracy.

I give my permission to audio tape the interview.

Participant's initials: _____

b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be approximately 30 minutes.

Approximately six special education teachers will be involved in this research.

5. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.

4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about the positive factors that influence teachers to stay in their special education teaching positions for an extended period of time. In order to keep experienced special educators in the field of education and in their current special education teaching positions, school administrators must take action and address the retention factors that are within their control.
5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.
6. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location.
7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Samantha Henderson, at (417) [REDACTED], or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Sherry DeVore at 417-881-0009. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs, at 636-949-4846.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I may retain a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

Participant's Signature

Date

Primary Investigator's Signature

Date

Appendix F

Interview Questions

1. What retention factors have most influenced you to remain in your current special education teaching position for more than five years?
2. What is the single factor that has most influenced your decision to remain in your current special education teaching position for more than five years? Why?
3. Has that most influential factor changed over time throughout the course of your career? Why or why not?
4. Do you think you possess personality traits that have kept you in your profession for five years or longer despite the presence or absence of the retention factors you have mentioned? Why or why not? If so, what are those personality traits?
5. As a whole, to what extent have relational support factors influenced your decision to remain in your profession? [Provide definition and examples of factors].
6. As a whole, to what extent have organizational factors influenced your decision to remain in your profession? [Provide definition and examples of factors].
7. What factors do you think building-level administrators should address in order to retain special education teachers? Please explain why you feel this way.
8. What factors do you think district-level administrators should address in order to retain special education teachers? Please explain why you feel this way.

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Vita

Samantha Lou Henderson was born in Cordell, Oklahoma, on February 1, 1976. After graduating from Branson High School in 1994, Ms. Henderson graduated from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 1998 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Special Education. She then completed a Master of Science degree in Special Education with an emphasis in Gifted Education from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2007. In 2011, Ms. Henderson graduated with her second Master's degree, a Master of Arts in Educational Administration, from Lindenwood University.

Since 1998, Ms. Henderson has served in various positions related to special education. She began her professional experience working as a special education teacher in service to third through twelfth grade students with disabilities. She taught special education for 11 years in three different public school districts. She then worked as a special education process coordinator for five years. Ms. Henderson currently serves as the lead special education process coordinator for Branson Public Schools in Branson, Missouri.

Ms. Henderson is committed to serving students with disabilities through her work with parents, teachers, and administrators. She currently serves as a member of the Tri-Lakes Sertoma Club and as an adjunct instructor for College of the Ozarks in Point Lookout, Missouri. Ms. Henderson and her husband, Bradley Gore, are members of Harvest Evangelical Free Church. In her free time, she enjoys reading, singing, traveling, watching University of Missouri sports contests, and spending time with family and friends.