

**Special Education Teacher Shortage:
Reducing Attrition and Increasing Retention of Special Education Teachers**

by
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Dedication

It is with genuine gratitude and warm regard that I dedicate this work to my daughters, Caylee Janelle Wheaton and Charlie Jazelle Wheaton.

Acknowledgments

I would like to give acknowledgment to my faith and prayers to God. I am thankful for the perseverance and the many answered prayers during this journey. My gratitude extends to Dr. Nwagu for his invaluable motivational speeches, support, and guidance during my EdD degree. Additionally, I would like to express gratitude to Dr. Hawkins for her treasured provision, which was influential in shaping my experience of the program. I also thank Dr. Collins, Dr. Cobb, and Dr. Johnson-Pearson for their mentorship and guidance. I am thankful for my friends, classmates, colleagues and my newly added support system for a cherished time spent together in the program and in social settings. My appreciation also goes to my family and especially my daughters for their encouragement and support throughout my studies. As well as my special friend Isaiah.

Abstract

Background: The special education teachers' retention is a crucial concern as shortages are noted in states across the nation. This mixed-method study determines the causes of the increasing attrition rates in special education by special education teachers and possible intervention practices, deriving perspectives from special education teachers and campus administrators. **Purpose:** This study examined the association between retention and attrition in the special education sector today. The research examined the high special education teachers attrition and sought to establish the extent specific factors can enhance their retention rates. The research examined special education teachers' working conditions to maintain their current positions and the practical measures to improve the Working conditions of special education teachers and increase the level of support from campus administrators, ultimately leading to reduced attrition in the special education sector.

Methodology: Data was collected from campus administrators in Houston district and special education teachers teaching in schools within. The research utilized surveys in collecting data. A convenience sample of teachers and campus administrators at the target school district was surveyed to determine the next steps in moving forward to support teachers, reduce future attrition rates, and improve retention levels. The survey respondents answered on a Likert scale. Descriptive statistics by item were used to demonstrate outcomes for both teachers and administrators. Comparisons were made by teachers' roles. The survey was completed by 50 participants. **Results:** This study compared and contrasted the causes of and intervention practices to reduce attrition and increase retention rates as noted by special education teachers and campus administrators. From the results gathered from the two sub-groups. It was established that special education teachers and campus administrators share perspectives of the causes of high attrition rates among special education teachers and intervention practices to reduce attrition. **Conclusion:** It was concluded that high caseload, paperwork, poor level of support, and stress were primary to increasing attrition rates by special education teachers. Thematic analysis from the in-depth survey revealed the following themes for improvement: Training, Preparation Plans, Incentives, Mentorship, and Administrative support. In addition, addressing the special education teachers' needs motivated them to continue teaching. It was noted that stress management (mental health) programs,

increased incentives, increased support, and redesigning of teacher preparation programs would increase retention. Recommendations to reduce attrition rates are provided alongside implications for future research.

Keywords: Special education teachers, campus administrators, attrition, retention

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I. Introduction

An increased interest in research related to the shortage of special education teachers has emerged in recent years (American Institutes for Research [AIR], 2016; Boe, 2006; Dray, 2008; García & Weiss, 2019; National Coalition on Personnel Shortages in Special Education and Related Services [NCPSSERS], 2019; Williams & Dikes, 2015) because retaining special education teachers now has been a recognized problem for years. In the special education field, developing a sustainable work environment is a critical challenge. A severe special education teachers shortage has grown worse over the last decade (Robinson et al., 2019). School districts face difficulties in retaining employed special education teachers. The coupling of an inadequate special education teachers supply with worrisome attrition has led districts to fill many teaching positions with uncertified or substitute teachers.

Vital to teacher retention is the school culture. This concept is gaining more attention because it reflects the values and needs of special education teachers. More special instructional staff leave the field than enter through hiring, despite enough teachers trained nationally. In addition, cultural elements enhancing attrition include low administrative support and lack of mentoring programs alongside high workloads.

Characteristics of the Sample

Special education teachers are trained to influence students' attitudes toward school, their academic achievements, their views on their abilities, and others' worth (Nichols et al., 2008). The school culture and the school's condition impact special education teachers' decision to stay in the classrooms. Working in a climate with a high turnover and attrition rate is frustrating for instructional staff and administrators. Since teacher retention rates are low, it is necessary to assess how they can be improved.

Status of a Facet of the Issues

Over the years, special education teachers have been experiencing challenges in performing their teaching and nonteaching duties in line with their profession. Despite many trained teachers being willing to teach, they are burdened with duties and roles that make them leave the classroom. Many professionals teaching in the special education sector agree that different challenges take various forms (Etikan et al., 2016). These

factors include conducting assessments, processing extensive paperwork, attending required meetings, carrying high student caseloads, persevering despite a lack of support, tolerating the ambiguity of their role on campus, and struggling because of their lack of preparation for their changing role (Billingsley, 2004b). Of all the consequences of these pressures, the most challenging one is attrition among the special education teachers' ranks. However, the attrition and inadequate supply of qualified special education teachers have slowed student learning, overwhelmed special education staff, and stressed campus administration staff. For example, between 2005 and 2012, special education teachers supply has declined by 17% in U.S. schools (Dewey et al., 2017; Riser-Kositsky, 2019). School districts are now faced with a challenge not only to retain certified special education teachers but also to retain them for a long period.

National Context

The sole purpose of special education and offering free appropriate public education (FAPE) is to allow students with disabilities attain their academic potential. According to the National Coalition of Personnel Shortages in Special Education and Related Services (NCPSSERS, 2019), 49 of the 50 states have grappled with a chronic special education teachers' shortage. This deficiency became an issue to district and campus administrators who facilitated special education programs because they have not had adequate resources for this student demographic (Hong et al., 2018) (Figure 1).

State Context

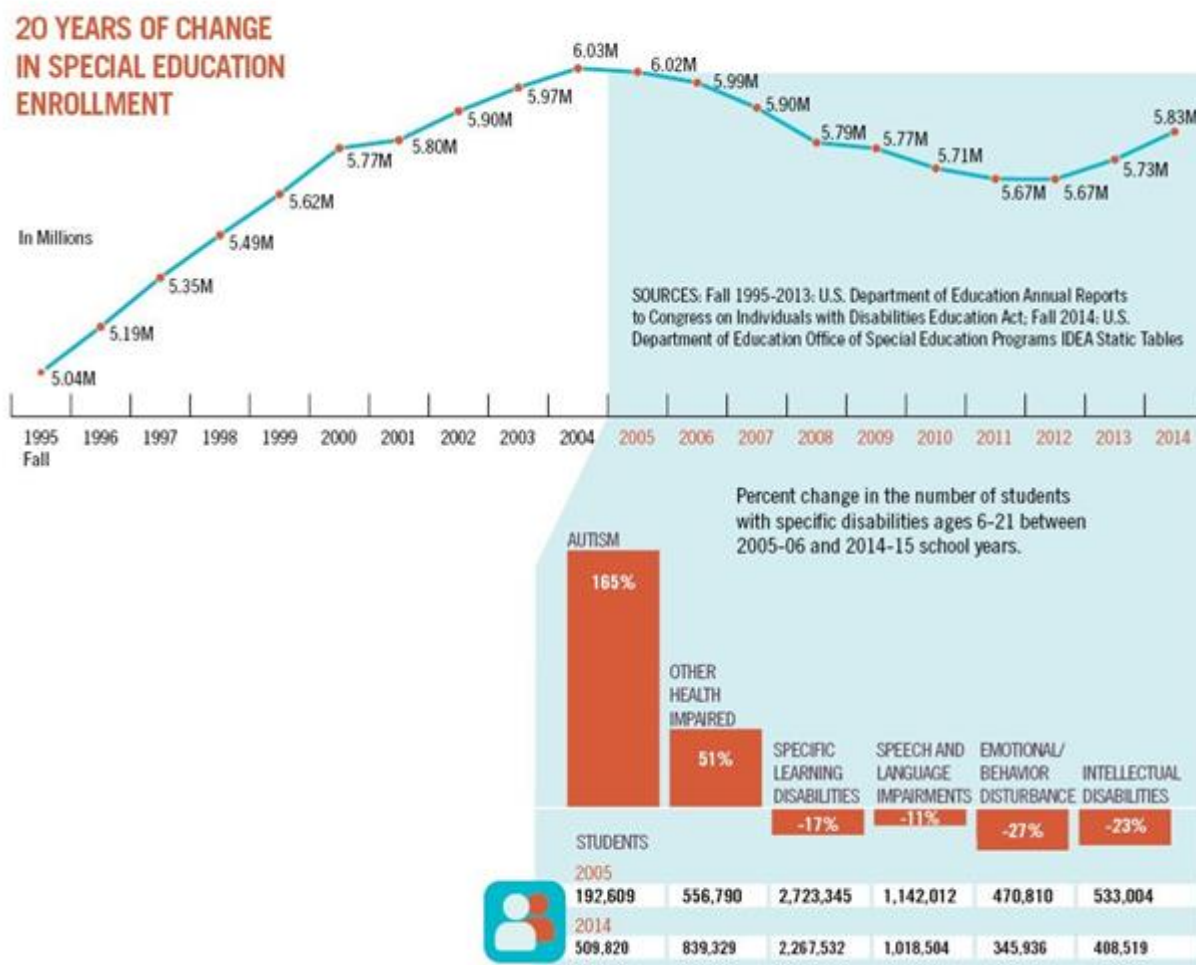
The special education teachers' annual attrition rate is at 16.6% in Texas, twice the national average. By 2016, the lack of district and state policy enforcement led to Texas servicing the ninth-lowest special education student population. Only 3,274 of the 8,470 recruited special education teachers, during the 2017-2018 school year were fully certified (Peyton et al., 2020). An estimated 61.3% of the hired special education teachers were unqualified. About 38.7% of the not fully qualified special education teachers were from rural school districts. There is an increasing need to appropriately equip special education teachers, and be trained with relevant skills.

Regional Context

The special education teacher shortage in about every region is correlated with attrition and turnover. The South recorded the highest special education teacher turnover rate of 16% in suburbs and cities, whereas rural areas and towns were 14%. Across the districts, the Northeast averaged the lowest attrition rate of 10%, with at most 8% being in rural areas and towns. The annual shortage varies greatly between states, from over 7% in Utah to 23% in Arizona. While every state other than New Jersey and Oregon relates attrition to the shortage, other states attribute the

Figure 1

Special Education Enrollment: Twenty Years of Change



Note. Special education enrollment rose from 5.04 million to 6.03 million (*top*) 1995–2004. Then, despite falling for some years (*see the shaded area on top*), enrollment in 2014 was 5.83 million. Characterizing the

period between the 2005–2006 and 2014–2015 school years most dramatically (*bottom*) was the rise in students, 6–21 years of age, diagnosed with autism (up 165%) and with other health impairments (51%). Enrollment in selected other specific disabilities had declined. Reprinted from *The Number of U.S. Students in Special Education Ticks Upward*, by C. A. Samuels, 2016 (<https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/number-of-u-s-students-in-special-education-ticks-upward/2016/04>). Reprinted with permission.

shortage to turnover. Several issues impacting special education teachers' attrition, include compensation, working conditions, administrative support, and workload.

District Context

There is a critical shortage of qualified special education teachers in Texas districts despite orders by the federal government to increase services for special needs students. According to the *Texas Tribune*, 71% of districts across Texas face challenges in filling up special education teacher positions (Lopez, 2021). There were more than 700 open positions in Houston ISD, while Killeen ISD had 270 vacancies. Waco ISD had 200 vacancies and employed a sum of 1000 special education teachers. The retirement and turnover rates are increasing across the districts, a problem that administrators have been challenged with. The shortage has spilt over to substitute teachers due to inadequate qualified special education teachers. The high attrition rates are attributed to job stress, ineffective in-service programs, and unreasonable caseloads (Texas Teachers of Tomorrow, 2020).

Problem of Practice

The current research will expand on system adjustments to provide a work environment and school culture to retain special education teachers. Special education teachers seem to be assigned many responsibilities resulting in work overload, explaining why teachers are not returning to the profession year after year (Garwood et al., 2018). The workload consists of supporting students who have multiple needs, teaching with inadequate planning time, and facing an onslaught of exhaustive paperwork, which are several factors that heighten stress, lower job satisfaction, and ultimately result in high turnover rates (Plash & Piotrowski, 2006). Within the past two decades, special education teacher shortage has been among the most significant public education problems (Dewey et al., 2017).

In addition to attrition by special education teachers, their high turnover rate hurts students and the district as a whole (García & Weiss, 2019; Vittek, 2015). The high teacher turnover rate results in expending economic resources that could be utilized in other significant special education projects. Students with special needs require professionals trained to attend to their educational needs and special education teachers are trained to implement an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for each student and collaborate strongly with other teachers, parents, and administrators to foster special needs student's education and learning (Etikan et al., 2016).

Given the above, special education and its staff are faced with many different kinds of challenges. In this research, various matters of concern are part of the findings. Dealing with different types of disabilities is one of the major problems of practice. According to a survey, administrative support was rated by special education teachers as the primary cause of retention (Duesbery & Werblow, 2008). Some academics argue that increased salary, better preparation programs, decreased workload/paperwork, increased support, clearer job design/role dissonance, and mentoring programs are the solutions to retaining special education teachers (Billingsley, 2004b; Bozonelos, 2008; Cancio et al., 2018; Conley & You, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2002; Duesbery & Werblow, 2008; García & Weiss, 2019; Grant, 2017; Herzberg, 2008).

Conditions Causing Attrition in Special Education

Further research is needed to enquire about realistic actions that can be taken to retain special education teachers. However, important questions regarding the type of support teachers needs remain unanswered. Available data regarding administrators' campus support are contradictory based on the teacher's years of teaching experience and the campus demographics. Most researchers seem to agree that adequate support is best to maintain special education teachers in their positions but fail to consider other critical aspects. Special education teachers' responsibilities consist of a lot of paperwork because the IEPs require a lot of data, and all information must be documented. Parent meetings are often held to discuss many things, including the progress of, or lack of it among the exceptional students, classroom needs, any special problems that may come up, instruction, and behavioral management. Meeting with administrators entails discussing grading, lesson planning, upgrading lessons frequently, cost of supporting the classroom, and a shortage of needed staff

(Brownell & Smith, 1993; Hagaman & Casey, 2018). Other regular meetings, including those to consider a student's IEP or Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD), must be held. Special education teachers are accountable for meeting expectations for students with disabilities to perform to predetermined standards (e.g., those laid out in the No Child Left Behind [NCLB] Act and IDEA).

Creating more favorable working conditions and higher levels of support are critical to current teacher retention. Some special education teachers transfer from special education teaching to general education sector (Billingsley & Cross, 1991) in search for desirable working environment. The following are factors that lead to the shortage:

Paperwork

Most teachers in special education sector leave because the paperwork is too much for them to handle. It influences their ability to complete other tasks required in their field (Grant, 2017).

Workload

Huge workloads lead to new teachers having less energy to perform their tasks, participating less in fulfilling their responsibilities, experiencing burnout, and feeling less devoted to their careers (Cancio et al., 2018; Grant, 2017). Burnout happens when a person undergoes stress related to work, which usually affects physical health, mental well-being, and emotional welfare (Grant, 2017).

Lack of Support

Teachers in the special education field want administration support to focus on their emotional and professional requirements to reduce attrition, especially if human resources policies were generated. Conley and You (2017) demonstrated that administration support or lack of it, directly and indirectly, affected special education teachers' intentions to leave.

Role Dissonance

Role issues include role dissonance, role overload, role conflict, and role ambiguity. Role dissonance creates a gap between what special education teachers know about the effective operations of students with special needs and what they are capable of doing (Billingsley, 2004a).

Poor Working Conditions

Negative school culture programs lead to working conditions that are not conducive to teacher success. Such workplace conditions cause special education teachers to be unsatisfied and unmotivated, which reduces the quality of their work (Hatchett, 2010; Schussler, 2018).

Salaries and Wages

The increased salary incentives and wages help keep experienced special education teachers from leaving schools and leaving the special education field. Salary increases ensured teachers could confront the economic downturn (Duesbery & Werblow, 2008).

Research Questions

Nichols et al. (2008) established that the shortage of special needs teachers since 1983 has been persistent. The ever-increasing special education teachers' shortage provides critical evidence that further investigation regarding the increasing shortage of special education teachers needs to be conducted. These research questions (RQs) were the focus of this investigation:

RQ1. What are the main factors leading to high attrition rates among special needs teachers within the district?

RQ2. What are intervention plans intended by administrators to enhance retention rates among special needs teachers in the district?

RQ3. What is the current knowledge of the available intervention plans by campus administrators to improve special education teachers' retention rates?

Conclusion

According to Brownell et al. (2004), special education teachers have a high level of commitment because fulfilling obligations and responsible behavior align with their profession. As a result, they remain resilient, persistent, and patient. Special education services are not "nice to have" for students in need. Instead, they are the ethical and professional obligations of those who are charged with providing these services. Providing support and resources to highly qualified special education teachers to carry out their instructional duties should

be paramount. The failure to do so by districts and schools is, at its core, a civil rights issue that is a matter of meeting the standards of law and fulfilling their social contract with the community and the infrastructure in our public schools.

II. Literature Review

This chapter introduces the research's objective in seeking answers to the proposed research questions, presents the history of special education, the qualification and responsibilities of campus administrators, the preparations and responsibilities of special education teachers, explains the shortage, and summarizes the implications. It reports a comprehensive literature review research about special education teacher attrition and teacher retention. Currently, special education teachers are leaving the profession at 8% every year. School districts are having difficulty filling positions vacant due to attrition by special education teachers and the challenges of finding qualified and experienced replacements. These have been recognized problems for decades (Garwood et al., 2018).

A review of theoretical and research frameworks will provide a detailed view of the necessity and background of the current research. The current research will evaluate special education history, preparation, responsibilities, shortage, the school culture, working conditions, lack of support, retaining special education, professional development, salary and wages, problem of practice, and definition of critical terms to provide more understanding of special education teachers' retention crisis. Many reasons have been identified for attrition, including job design/role dissonance, school culture, workload, paperwork, low salaries, working conditions, and lack of support.

More improvements need to be made in retaining special education teachers. The research gathered supports the argument that to retain these teachers, working conditions need improvement. As Brownell et al. (2004) proposed, special education systemic reforms are needed. First, policy makers can execute practical policies with potential to enhance the special education teachers supply, avoiding those that could exacerbate or do little to resolve teacher shortages. Next, state administrators, district administrators, and researchers, must collaborate to gather and interpret data identifying special education teachers' needs, contributing factors, and practical remedies. Last, academic institutions, state education agencies, and local districts should strategically develop comprehensive improvement efforts during special education teacher preparation, to increase their supply and retention (Brownell et al., 2004).

Problem of Practice

Teachers in the special education sector seem to be assigned many roles resulting in work overload, explaining why teachers are not returning to the profession year after year (Garwood et al., 2018). The workload consists of supporting students who have multiple needs, teaching with inadequate planning time, and facing an onslaught of exhaustive paperwork, which are several factors that heighten stress, lower job satisfaction, and ultimately result in high turnover rates (Plash & Piotrowski, 2006).

Definition of Attrition and Retention

Binding key terms for the study are *attrition* and *retention*. These two terms will frequently establish factors causing special education teachers' decision to leave or stay in the profession. Attrition reduces teacher numbers, specifically, teachers leaving the education field (Berry, 2012). Attrition is significant in the special education teacher shortage issue, and understanding the attrition factors inform efforts to improve retention (Billingsley, 2004a). Conservation is a special education teacher shortage minimizing approach because attrition is the primary cause of the shortage (Boe, 1990). In this study, attrition is defined as factors that negatively influence special education teachers' intention to stay within the classroom. In this study, retention is defined as teachers that return to their same position year after year within special education. This means that these teachers either adapt to or become innovative in meeting their job responsibilities and work within the same environment over an expanded amount of time (Grant, 2017).

Retention refers to professionals who carry on with the educating assignments as they did the previous year and remain in the same school. The second category of retention is the special education teachers transferred to a different position in the special education sector. The third category of retention refers to the teachers transferring to general education from special education sector. Besides, attrition is the most concerning turnover element since it reduces the teaching force, requiring replacing teachers who exit. The fourth category encompasses professional development that provides conditions to grow and thrive professionally.

History of Special Education

Previously, people with disabilities were isolated and shut out before special education classes were instituted in public schools because they were seen as abnormal. In the past, the public education system did not provide equal treatment to students with disabilities. Special education was accepted as a part of the education landscape in the 18th century (Winzer, 1993). Nevertheless, most early special education programs were private or residential and closed to most students with a disability. The United States government enacted a sequence of federal laws in the 1970s to improve services provided to students with disabilities. The country made programs for special education to be compulsory from the year 1975. This was after Congress passed and President Gerald Ford signed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Yell, 1998). As Dray (2008) mentioned, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) changed how every student has been treated because of education law and policy adjustments, but what may be underappreciated is that *Brown v. Board of Education* also influenced how students with disabilities were educated.

Special education reforms during the 1990s and 2000s called for an increase in achievement for all students, regardless of ability, and escalated teacher accountability (Every Student Succeed Act, 2015; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004; No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). State-mandated tests were a requirement for students with disabilities like their peers in general education. The results from the state-mandated tests impacted schools' ratings according to students' performance on the test. The NCLB campaign placed an even higher level of accountability on all teachers to ensure students with or without a disability did well on the state test. This is important because this ramped up the pressure on special education teachers.

FAPE under IDEA (1990) ensures that students receive the assistance needed to succeed academically in the educational environment. FAPE is mandated to ensure a free education is provided to all students with or without disabilities. IDEA describes *special education* to be instruction specifically designed to cater for the needs of students with disability. These students are free to receive these services from any educational institution that receives federal funding. Teachers must meet the needs of students with disabilities including home instruction, classroom instruction, instruction during hospitalization, physical education, and institutional

instruction. IDEA expects the vacant positions within classrooms are filled by highly qualified teachers. However, with a special education teachers' shortage, it is quite difficult to comply with IDEA. The shortage threatens the education quality received by students with disabilities (Billingsley, 2004b). Campus administrators are tasked with identifying and hiring teachers qualified to support students with disabilities. The hiring approach includes determining their ability to identify and support teachers instrumental to students with disabilities' success.

Following the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act enactment (IDEA, 2004), authorized by the federal government to make certain that all children with special needs were given an equal chance for academics, full involvement, independent lifestyle, and economic self-reliance, all public schools were required to fulfill the federal law guidelines to continue receiving funding from the federal government. Unfortunately, the special education teachers' shortage negatively impacts the schools' ability to meet these requirements and provide essential services to students. According to Billingsley (2004b), who published about teacher retention and attrition, 13% of special education teachers leave classrooms annually to pursue other teaching positions or exiting the teaching profession. Their departure has often resulted in classrooms filled with teachers with minimal qualifications and can jeopardize the learning that students with disabilities are supposed to accomplish. Therefore, the inadequate supply of qualified special education teachers could have terrible consequences for students with disabilities.

The impact of the inadequate supply of special education teachers is not an issue that can be ignored. The problem is squarely at the forefront of the minds of parents, students, policymakers, campus administrators, and many more individuals who demand change. Texas reported a 8,005 special education teachers' shortage in 2018 (NCPSSERS, 2019). This shortage left many students without a qualified teacher to assist with decision-making and, most importantly, provide instructional accommodations and modifications within the educational environment.

From the data collected in the past, it is evident that a national increase of students in the special education field has been an ongoing trend with no sign of decreasing, which requires more qualified teachers to

work within special education support systems in schools. Despite the rising number of special education students, inadequate funding from the government continues to cause problems. Students can suffer from minor to significant disabilities and depend on special education teachers to implement their IEPs to help them achieve their academic goals.

Qualifications and Responsibilities of Campus Administrators

Campus administrators are important because they make sure that all school departments run efficiently. Academic administration is considered the total campus operation and involves all responsibilities and rules essential for its smooth functioning (TEA, 2007): (a) having a master's degree from an accredited university by a Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board recognized accrediting agency, (b) possessing a valid teaching certificate, (c) accumulating 2 years of teaching experience as a teacher, (d) completing an approved principal teacher preparation program, and (e) passing the required test with a score of 268 or higher. Usually, special education teachers with extensive teaching and leadership skills progress into administrative positions (Special Education Guide, 2014).

Campus administrators are responsible for school/organizational improvement; instructional management; student management; school/ organizational climate; personnel management; management of fiscal, administrative, and facility functions; professional growth and development; and supervisory responsibilities, including supervising and evaluating the performance of staff assigned to campus— instructional aides, counselors, teachers, clerical support staff, librarians, custodians, and assistant principals. Such administrators have responsibilities to special education efforts. They are responsible for supporting teachers who deliver instructions to students with disabilities, ensuring that classroom premises are accessible and appropriate support is provided to special education personnel, irrespective of their training and experiences. Campus administrators' first step is determining the needs of their teachers.

Preparation and Responsibilities of Special Education Teachers

Ensuring a sufficient number of teachers in special education field is important because disabled learners require teachers prepared to help them achieve their academic goals and acquire general life skills.

Requirements for being a special education teacher vary from one state to another. Texas requires a bachelor's degree in education and certification in special education or a bachelor's degree in any major and completion of an alternative teaching program within the desired teaching area. Texas is among the states that expects teachers in the special education field to complete a coursework in special education or a major for certification.

Teachers who complete and pass a bachelor's in education are considered certified in special education. After completing and passing the exam, teachers are considered ready to assume instructing students with disabilities.

Below are six primary responsibilities of special education teachers:

1. Special education teachers design IEPs for learners who are struggling academically and generally. As mentioned by the American Academy of Special Education Professionals (AASEP, 2006), the teacher in special education identifies both the strengths and weaknesses in the IEP, which is a record of goals, requirements, and objectives needed for every learner with special needs.
2. Teachers in special education are responsible for assessing students' special needs to decide the learner's educational needs.
3. A special education teacher intervenes with educational and other aid for students who have special needs.
4. Special education teachers also plan lessons and update case files of learners who are getting special aid. The curriculum is adjusted to meet the learning techniques and requirements of the learner with special needs (AASEP, 2006).
5. Special education teachers oversee instructional assistants, supervise their day-to-day tasks, and coach them on dealing with learners allocated to them.
6. Another special education teachers' responsibility is to communicate with parents, colleagues, and administrators about the learner's progress, classroom requirements, and special issues that may come up, such as planning student-specific activities depending on their abilities. It is critical to know all the responsibilities that teachers in special education face.

Students lacking the ability to regulate their behavior are asked to sit where they prefer and self-monitor their behavior (Etikan et al., 2016). Assignment modifications and instructional accommodations ensure that districts meet the Texas Education Agency (TEA) academic standard of learning. Teachers, particularly special education teachers, are tasked with creating those modified assignments and delivering instructional accommodations. However, there are a small number of teachers with these skills.

Shortage of Special Education Teachers

Current Economic Conditions

Special education is driven by economic factors, political factors, and social factors. For the economic factors, they include tax rates, wages, laws and policies, borrowing rates, and government activities (García & Weiss, 2019). Economic conditions have to do with the present state of the country's economy and are deemed to be positive when an economy is growing. Such economic factors are viewed as negative when an economy is in recession or depression. Shortages come about when finding teachers who are qualified is hard or when some vacancies are not filled. According to García and Weiss (2019), schools in the United States face challenges to recruit and retain special education teachers, especially in high-poverty schools. The schools' administrators cannot hire because they struggle to find teachers willing to hire at the low salaries offered to provide specialized services.

Many states have panicked with this national crisis and attempted several strategies to mitigate the shortage of special education teachers. The tactics as such as, incentives to draw more teachers into special education by offering loan forgiveness, offering an extra stipend for special education teachers, creating intensive alternative preparation programs, supplying mentoring, and offering signing bonuses (AIR, 2016). Although these strategies were implemented, there remains reasonable doubt whether the incentives will be enough to retain these teachers after entering special education programs.

Special Education Teacher Attrition

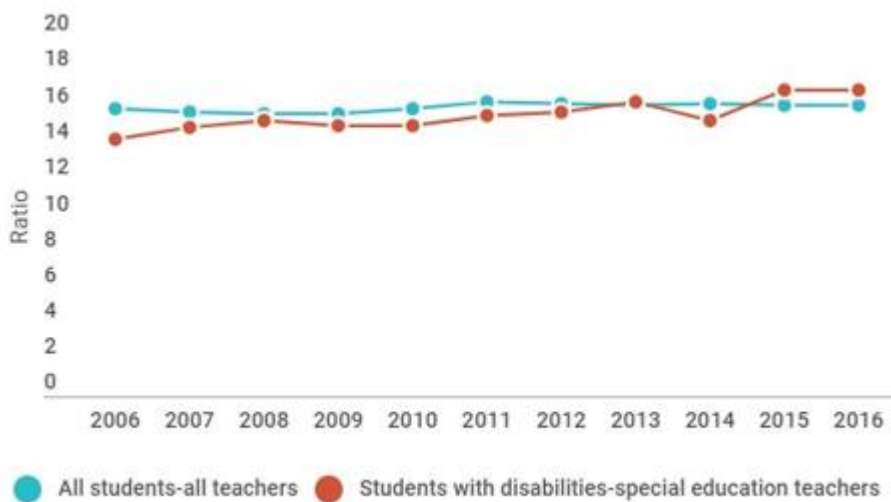
Billingsley (2004b) stated that special education teachers' attrition makes a crucial contribution to the shortage problem. The teachers have to be replaced after leaving, which they do after educating for a few years.

Many reasons have been identified for attrition, including low salaries, workload, school culture, job design/role dissonance, working conditions, paperwork, and lack of support.

This decrease in available special education teachers resulted in the classroom student-teacher ratio within special education programs shifting from 2 teachers per 19 students in 2005 to 3 teachers per 43 students by 2012. This is illustrated in Figure 1 (Riser-Kositsky, 2019). From 1995-2013, the number of children with disabilities increased. Figure 2 indicates that the student-teacher ratio from 2006 to 2016 for special needs students-to-teacher reached 15.9 in 2016, greater than the ratio for all students and teachers.

Figure 2

Students-to-Teacher Ratio for All and for Special Education—2006–2016



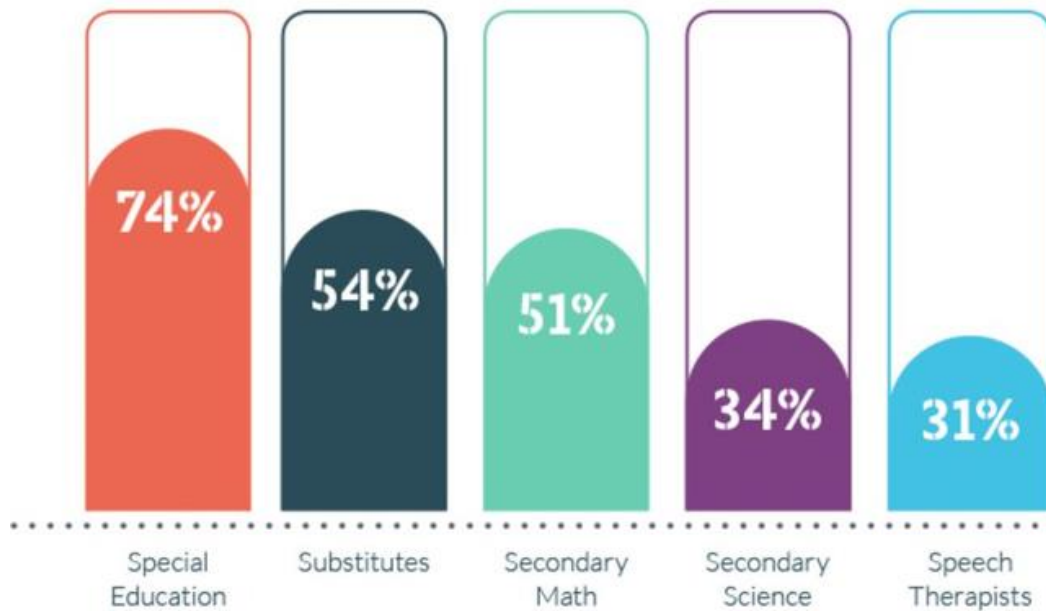
Note. U.S. Department of Education statistics show that special education teachers' student-teacher ratio rose to 15.9 in 2016 when it outstripped the overall student-teacher ratio nationally. Students with special needs have grown from 13.4% in 2006 to 13.8 percent in 2016. The 10-year period indicates an appreciable effect on student/teacher ratios. Over the past ten years, special education teachers have decreased by 17% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Reprinted from Special education: Definition, statistics, and trends

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Figure 3 (Buttner, 2021) compares the teachers in special education shortage to shortages in other disciplines and shortages in substitute teachers. Special education teachers are still leaving their profession at a rate double their general education counterparts (NCPSSERS, 2019). A conclusion drawn from the special education teachers' shortage is that other disciplines provide better working conditions to help retain teachers or increase campus administrators' support (NCPSSERS, 2019).

Figure 3

Most Common District-Reported Shortages of Teachers in 2016



Note. The special education teacher turnover rate is 74%. That is nearly twice that of other disciplines (Buttner, 2021). From *Special education and the teacher shortage*, by A. Buttner, 2021, Frontline Education (<https://www.frontlineeducation.com/blog/special-education-teacher-shortage/>). Copyright 2018 Frontline Education. Reprinted with permission.

High attrition rates is an issue facing many academic institutions nationwide in supporting only highly qualified teachers in the special education field who provide for students with special needs. However, all public schools need to have special education teachers available and ready to work in special education programs to meet federal laws' expectations and continue receiving funding from the federal government. According to Boe (2006), experience and professionalism are integral to special education teachers' job descriptions and qualifications.

IDEA (2004) further requires schools to provide a FAPE; unfortunately, the special education teacher shortage adds to the strain of maintaining compliance with federal policies. Therefore, schools are close to not

meeting federal mandates, causing further strain on the public education system. Historically, special education teachers were concerned about the impact of the severe teacher shortages on the capacity of schools and districts (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Brownell & Smith, 1993) to ensure FAPE for all students. It was reported that 90% of high-poverty schools and 50% of all schools struggle to find special education teachers and retain them (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Low Salaries

Remuneration of staff or salary increases promotes staff loyalty, improves employee job performance, and motivates the teaching position. Mura et al. (2019) stated that financial reward is the key motivator of workers because it allows them to satisfy their basic needs. Having more cash is perceived as an indication of achievement. Conversely, having a low salary influences the intention of a special education teacher. If the salary is low, the teacher will not be motivated to continue working and leave the field.

Job Design/Role Dissonance

There is confusion about the roles of teachers in the special education sector. Some teachers in this field struggle to manage the changing roles and the inadequate support as a result of increased responsibilities (Billingsley, 2004a). Too many roles make it hard for special education teachers to operate successfully or virtually. According to Billingsley (2004a), evidence shows that teachers in special education schools encounter remarkably greater role issues than general education teachers. Role concerns include role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, and role dissonance. Role dissonance creates a gap between what special education teachers know about the effective operations of students with disabilities and what their capabilities. Poor job designs inhibit special education teachers' efforts, which prevents them from utilizing their expertise and skills. Therefore, special education teachers who encounter extreme role problems for a prolonged period are much

more likely to have a lot of stress, be less committed to their job, be unsatisfied with their job, and intend to leave.

Workload

The workload is the amount of work that a person must do. As Cancio et al. (2018) mentioned, the workload impacts special education teachers' intentions and emotional fatigue, which showed a relationship between work commitment and stress or pressure. Huge workloads lead to new teachers having less energy to perform their tasks, participating less in fulfilling their responsibilities, experiencing burnout, and feeling less devoted to their careers. Burnout happens when a person undergoes stress related to work, which usually affects physical health, mental well-being, and emotional welfare (Grant, 2017). Stress influences the quality of teaching and the engagement of learners. Therefore, special education teachers' burnout is why they leave their field, which causes a special education teacher shortage in the lecture rooms.

The workload and paperwork have been considerable for special education teachers. Additionally, the enormous workload is impacted because of short staffing levels. In addition to workload apprehensions, teachers are concerned about classroom expenses, low salaries, and poor benefits (Baran, 2016). One special education teacher admitted a lack of experience in the field explaining that they often considered leaving the job because their role is not structured. There are limited supports for strong teamwork.

Additionally, campus administrators and special education teachers often show limited support to each other. According to Hong et al. (2018), they do not engage in a collegial relationship that promotes teamwork or share the inspiration to continue collaborating toward a specific objective. It is not easy for students with disabilities to study in inclusive classrooms, and consequently, they perform more poorly in class. As a result, special education teachers handle many responsibilities outside of teaching, limiting teaching and hindering students from attaining more education.

Paperwork

Paperwork is routine work involving tasks that include written documents, such as reports. When it comes to special education, documentation of services is required due to the federal and state laws, which govern the

students with special needs education program. According to Grant (2017), the number of pages of an Individualized Education Program (IEP). It depends on the learner, but the average IEP is usually between 10-14 pages long. The quantity of data needed may be overwhelming. Therefore, most special education teachers leave because the paperwork is too much for them to handle. It influences their ability to complete other tasks required in their field.

School Culture

The factors such as the belief, values, attitudes, expected behaviors, and relationships influencing how a school operates entail a school culture. According to the Great Schools Partnership (2013), learners, teachers, parents, administrators, and other staff members promote school culture. In the school's community, the policies that govern how the school functions also impact a school's culture. All school cultures are unique and vary from one school to another and could either be positive or negative. School culture sets the tone for the environment or working conditions.

Unlike general education teachers who focus on the content, special education teachers focus on skills. Special education teachers focus on skills because they are responsive to students' needs and complex behavioral and learning difficulties. Exceptional students may have reasoning, attention, physical, memory, behavioral, and communication needs that can interfere with their potential to succeed in schools and working environments. Additionally, students with disabilities who have diverse needs may present with varying levels of severity in their range of needs. Regular classrooms mainly lack the necessary teaching aids and materials.

Working Conditions

Hatchett (2010) stated that the relationship between the special education teachers' satisfaction and school culture gives a deeper understanding of burnout factors in teachers' and learners' academic accomplishments. Negative school culture programs lead to working conditions that are not conducive to teacher success. Such workplace conditions cause special education teachers to be unsatisfied and unmotivated, which reduces the quality of their work. The dissatisfaction of the teacher relates to the commitment of other teachers and attrition. A school culture marked by an absence of trust causes the special education teacher to be

stressed, which leads to burnout (Schussler, 2018). Therefore, negative working conditions cause special education teachers to quit their jobs and teach in general education. Common causes for the decline in numbers and subsequent ratio shift were challenging work conditions, exacerbated attrition rates, lack of adequate preparation courses, and a lack of support for special education teachers from campus administrators (Conley & You, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2002; Dewey et al., 2017; Grant, 2017; Hatchet, 2010; Richtsmeier, 2018; Schussler, 2018).

Indeed, campus administrators responsible for filling classrooms with qualified special education teachers have discovered that the shortage of these teachers willing to perform in the new environment impacts their ability to fill vacancies with qualified and experienced personnel. There is a need to solve the teacher shortage; a major challenge in the special education sector (Thornton et al., 2007).

The lack of teachers to sufficiently meet the needs in the special education sector threatens special needs students' capacity to learn due to the reduced quality of work done by special education teachers since most are stressed, unsatisfied, and unmotivated (Billingsley, 2004a; Darling-Hammond 1999; Sorensen & Ladd 2018). Special education teachers are dissatisfied with their working conditions and therefore decide to transition to a general education field or leave the education field altogether (Gehrke & McCoy, 2007).

More research should attend to the need to improve special education teachers' working conditions. It is worth noting that work environments can profoundly affect teachers' career decisions and job satisfaction. Factors directly influencing job satisfaction are support from administrators, salaries and wages, paperwork, working conditions, professional growth, stress, and workload. Consider three of these; The absence of adequate administrative support catalyzes attrition. Teachers staying in their profession have a different perception of administrative support because it improves their job satisfaction levels and work commitment; stayers are special education teachers with high-paying jobs than are counterparts in low-paying jobs. Thus, compensation is typically important to teachers weighing whether to remain in or leave their field; A significant contributor to attrition rates, workload substantially affects the job manageability by special education teachers.

Lack of Support

Teachers in the special education field need support, especially from the administration, which helps them choose whether to continue working as a special education teacher or leave the field of work (Grant, 2017). Conley and You (2017) demonstrated that administration support to special education teachers or lack of it, directly and indirectly, affected intentions to leave. Administration support focused on their emotional and professional requirements to reduce leaving, especially if human resources policies were generated. However, special education teachers failed to receive feedback or the support they needed tended to turnover to other professional roles, causing a special education teachers' shortage. Teachers who stayed reported high administrative support for problem-solving, inclusion, and program enhancement—showing appreciation, maintaining open communication, helping teachers with work tasks, taking an interest in teachers' work, providing needed resources and materials, and ensuring adequate time for all duties associated with school commitment and high job satisfaction.

Apart from getting administrative support, support from parents and colleagues is significant to special education teachers. Special education students require constant checkups to review their progress; unfortunately, parents do not support their children or special education teachers. Among several reasons, busy schedules affect both students and special education teachers, making learning inconsistent, slow, and complicated. Consequently, teachers have become less motivated, jeopardizing learning through inadequate education experience for students, insufficient graduate competence in the workplace, and low student achievement levels (Grant, 2017). Therefore, the absence of general support changes the intentions to stay to leave.

Retaining Special Education Teachers

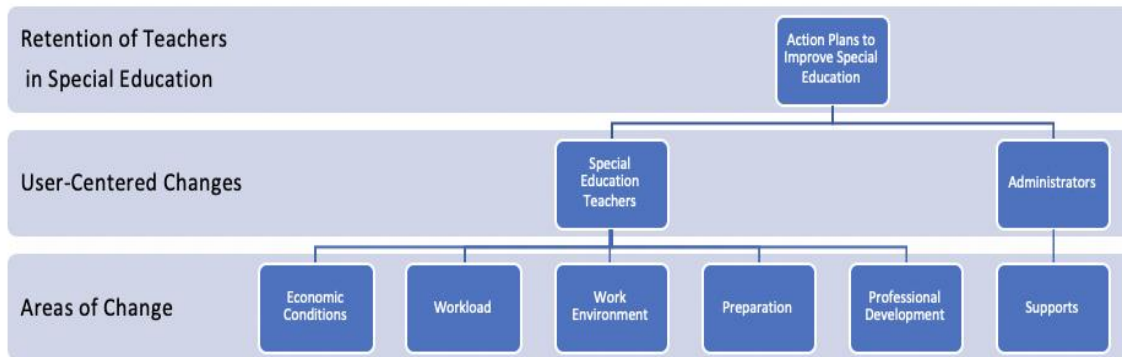
A high attrition rate by special education teachers has been reported, yet their retention is crucial for students with disabilities. Retaining experienced special education teachers positively impacts the accomplishments of learners with special needs. According to Billingsley (2004b), retaining special education teachers is important because they are hard to replace (Schussler, 2018).

Organizations can deal with the issues by reducing the cost of attrition. This cost directly relates to the organization's ability to reallocate the work and recruit people to replace the staff who have been lost, which usually happens at a greater cost. According to Richtsmeier (2018), recruiting people to replace employees is a costly investment for organizations because the organization needs to spend money and time searching for top performers in various ways. The attrition cost usually ranges depending on the staff's responsibilities and salary level. Some of the consequences of employee attrition include loss of knowledge, loss of productivity, cost of the time taken to recruit and train, decreased morale of staff, distracted management, dissatisfied customers, and a domino effect whereby the employee who has left informs other employees about unfavorable working conditions and prompts others to reconsider their career decisions and leave.

Based on the available evidence, high attrition rates significantly affect the number of special education teachers. Therefore, it is paramount to fully comprehend what can motivate special needs learners and tutors to meet set goals and standards (see changes promoting retention in Figure 4). The following text discusses key decision makers' approaches to reducing high attrition rates and increasing the teachers retained.

Contrary to other studies on retaining special education teachers, this study identified long-lasting solutions on campuses. Better working relationships and understanding among the special education teachers and campus administrators can foster partnerships for a higher purpose and become catalysts to help special education departments with similar problems. Reducing special education teachers' attrition rates is expected to influence higher students' academic achievements with special needs, increasing their chances of getting employed. Besides, once students are motivated, their self-esteem increases, and they become more confident.

Figure 4



Changes Promoting Retention of Special Education Teachers

Offering Professional Growth After Teacher Preparation

Teacher Preparation Programs

It is noteworthy that preparation programs for teachers are aimed at preparing undergraduate learners and graduate learners to be licensed teachers or teachers. According to Darling-Hammond (2002), teacher education programs vary in preparation quality. Schools should hire special education teachers who are prepared because it ensures that the teachers are qualified. Therefore, having teacher preparation programs ensures that teachers are ready, which directly impacts special education teachers' commitment to their work and indirectly impacts their intention to leave.

New Special Education Teacher Mentor Programs

Mentorship programs assist experienced and new special education teachers. Mentoring supports schools, enhances the quality of education, and encourages new teachers to stay in the field and educate students with disabilities. It provides coaching and modeling alongside promising practices and access to resources. Also, the programs ensure a collaborative and supportive environment for new special education teachers. According to White & Mason (2006), one objective of the mentorship program should be to combine the beginning teachers of special education and mentors who have usually experienced teaching adequately to obtain the most outstanding support. As Whitaker (2000) mentioned, the recognized success of mentoring was remarkably

correlated with the teachers' intentions to stay. New and appropriately mentored special education teachers, are highly likely to stay.

Professional Development

Professional growth or development is when employees obtain new skills and job experience, which helps them attain their career goals. Billingsley (2004a) reported that professional growth is significant support for all teachers and is necessary for all learners' growth and accomplishment. Special education teachers want new challenges that can help them learn, advance their skills and knowledge in their careers. Therefore, chances of professional growth directly impact commitment to their work. Professional growth impacts special education teacher retention. It indirectly influences the intention of the special education teacher to leave.

Increased Support

Support from all stakeholders of the learners with special needs is important because it keeps the special education teacher motivated and increases work quality. According to Duesbery and Werblow (2008), survey results showed that administrative support is the most important factor contributing to retention. Administrators can support four classifications: informational support, appraisal support, emotional support, and instrumental support (Bozonelos, 2008). The administration should remind special education teachers of the value they bring and reassure them by motivating them and encouraging them. Special education teachers should constantly be reminded that their work matters very much to learners with special needs and the community in general. Their effort should be acknowledged. Additionally, the administration should also ensure that they communicate clearly to the special education teachers so that conflict does not occur.

Increased Salary Incentives

Salaries and wages cover the basic needs of special education teachers. Duesbery and Werblow (2008) reported that teachers ranked salaries and wages as an essential retention factor, second only to support. Special education teachers should be paid a fair salary because they go out of their way to ensure that students with special needs are comfortable accomplishing their academic goals. Often, teachers are attracted to other districts because of higher pay. Therefore, increased salary incentives help keep experienced special education teachers

from leaving schools and leaving the special education field (Mura et al., 2019). Salary increases ensured teachers could confront the economic downturn.

Promotion of Teacher Resilience

Resilience results from environmental and individual protective factors, which vary depending on the individual special education teacher. Schussler (2018) stated that resilience is when a teacher is undergoing stress but keeps going. Efficacy and distress forbearance are elements of the resilience construct. Resilience requires teachers to see the positive side of things and adapt to situations. It results in achieving goals and motivates special education teachers who are inspired by their potential and influence. Therefore, special education teachers' resilience motivates them, meaning they do not leave but instead stay.

Contradictory Findings

Some are pessimistic about change improving conditions for special education teachers. According to McCoy (2019), there is a shortage of teachers because salaries have not increased, conditions have not gotten any better, and the recruitment of people in teacher education is decreasing instead of increasing. Resources and tests cannot solve equity concerns in education; instead, they make the inequalities in education visible. Both ESSA and NCLB blame the way individuals hold on to accountability, yet it does not work and will not fill the achievement gap. Professional development is not as important because it questions teachers' ability and their way of doing things.

There is a shortage of teachers. Since people have been talking about the shortage of teachers for years, administrators and others in power do not seem to be doing anything about it (Bailey, 2017). There is a teacher shortage, but many note there has been little action. Many teachers retire earlier than they should because of the distressing reforms placed in their schools. Another reason why teachers retire early is that they lose their teaching appointments due to school closures. Little to no effort is made to recruit teachers to fill in for those who have left. Finally, many are discouraged by inadequate support from busy parents. It appears technology has taken over in the 21st century, even when it comes to education, and teachers are being replaced with computers because parents will not even question that decision.

Summary and Implications

Special education teachers are required to be highly committed as part of their contribution to work. Consequently, this makes special education teachers' patient, persistent, and diligent in their work. Special education services are not simply "nice to have" for students with disabilities. Instead, they are services to which students have legal rights and the ethical and professional obligations of those charged for providing the agreed-upon services. It is paramount to provide highly qualified teachers in the special education field with the support and resources to carry out their instructional duties. The failure by districts and schools to provide those services appropriately is, at its core, a civil rights issue.

The research on resolving problems in the special education sector is detailed, and more improvements should be realized to ensure special education teachers are retained. The research gathered supports the argument that special education teachers' working conditions need improvement to retain teachers. The consequences of a good and improved working environment include adequate education experiences for students, sufficient graduate competence in the workplace, and increased student achievement levels. As Brownell et al. (2004) proposed, special education systemic reform is needed. First, policy makers can execute mandates with high potential to increase the special education teachers' supply and avoid executing policies that are likely to exacerbate teacher shortages (Brownell et al., 2004). Next, state administrators, district administrators, and researchers must collaborate to gather and interpret data identifying personnel needs, the contributing factors, and practical remedies. Last, local districts, academic institutions, and state education agencies must develop strategic and comprehensive teacher preparation improvement efforts to increase their supply and retention.

This study will be a key contribution to solving an inadequate supply of special needs teachers. It covers the causal factors and offers a practical solution to the problem at hand. A special education teacher shortage harms student with disabilities, the public education system, and teachers. Inadequate numbers of quality teachers and staff instability reduce teachers' effectiveness, threaten exceptional students' learning capability, and result in high attrition that consumes resources. Professionalizing and building a solid reputation is more

difficult with the prevailing teacher shortage. These problems challenge achieving education systems' objectives, particularly ensuring an effective and equitable education to all students. Therefore, restructuring the working conditions alongside other significant factors that perpetuate attrition while persuading competent, experienced teachers to train to join the discipline is a priority. Extra support and funding must be provided to meet the dual demands of reducing special education teacher attrition while adequately serving students' needs.

III. Method

The research objective was to assess campus administrators' and special education teachers' perspectives of the increased attrition rates by education professionals in the special education field. A mixed-methods descriptive design incorporating quantitative and qualitative techniques was used. The study encompassed campus administrators and special education teachers in a school in suburban southeastern Texas north of Houston. This section presents the research method, including the rationale for mixed-methods descriptive design use; the selection and sampling procedure; data collection, reliability, and credibility; data analysis; ethical considerations.

Research Approach

This research used a mixed-methods research approach to gather and analyze data from campus administrators and teachers in the special education sector about their perspectives of shortages in the special education teachers supply, changes in those shortages over time, retention rates, and attrition in a school district in suburban southeastern Texas. The design incorporated examining the context of the issue and including qualitative and quantitative methods (Hong et al., 2018). Quantitative methods included surveying teachers and administrators.

According to Hong et al. (2018), the rationale for selecting a mixed-methods approach in a research exploration is to establish a comprehensive understanding of how teachers in the special education sector and administrators perceive given factors to substantially impact special education teachers' attrition rates. By carrying out quantitative research, the researcher made assumptions about why respondents provided particular responses (McKim, 2017). The researcher developed email messages to introduce the researcher, the research purpose, survey access, and online informed consent materials. Participants from the two subgroups who consented to participate were contacted via work-related email addresses and requested to participate by completing and submitting the survey.

The school district where the administrators and teachers worked granted permission to perform the research in the district, and the researcher obtained the Institutional Review Board approval through the

University of Houston–Main Campus. The informed consent, emailed with a link to the survey, allowed participants to click on the first page to approve the informed consent and move on to the survey page. Those who refused to grant consent received a thank you notification, and no other contact was made.

The data were collected for analysis and reviewed for any trends explaining why special education teachers left their profession (Baran, 2016). All responding data generated from surveys were coded using SPSS coding software. The independent variables were participants, identified as special education teachers or as campus administrators. Completing all four phases of the study, which are named below, took 4 weeks, as each phase took one and a half weeks.

Phase 1

After IRB approval was received, the first week was spent on electronically distributing informed consent forms and surveys to the sample. The data was collected from open-ended questions on the generated survey about special education teachers' opinions on the attrition rates and turnover. The survey participants remained anonymous, and no connection was made between respondents utilizing google forms and any survey responses. Collected data were recategorized into new themes and reanalyzed. Theoretical sampling was applied to the collected data samples. The research question that guided the secondary data retrieval was RQ1: What are the main factors leading to high rates of attrition among special needs teachers within the district?

This included collecting information on attrition rates in the district in the past five years. Collected quantitative information included special education teachers' average age and gender.

Phase 2

The next seven days included analyzing newly completed quantitative survey data from the primary survey (Appendix A). Quantitative data collected included the tenure of campus administrators and special education teachers; courses taken by each; and ratings of their level of support, collegial relationships, salary satisfaction level, level of mentor support, and workloads. The Likert scale was 1 to 5, where 1 was the lowest rating. Reminder emails were sent to participants who did not complete surveys within the data collection week. The quantitative data were presented descriptively using charts.

Phase 3

Qualitative surveys provided comprehensive information meant to facilitate understanding how teachers' experience influenced their decisions to stay, transfer, or completely leave the teaching profession. Included in the survey samples were school personnel who were undecided about staying or leaving.

Design

Three separate methods combinations are presented for this study, and each combination, or design, aligns with a research question. This mixed-methods descriptive research exploration aimed to respond to below research questions:

1. What are the main factors leading to high attrition rates among special needs teachers within the district?
2. What intervention is plans intended by administrators to enhance retention rates among special needs teachers in the district?
3. What is the current knowledge of the available intervention plans by campus administrators to improve special education teachers' retention rates?

Research Question 1

The sample for this question included respondents to the survey on administrative support perception, teacher burnout, and workloads (see Appendix A). A qualitative case study method was employed to collect descriptions of the special education teachers' and campus administrators' experiences. The searched themes helped develop additional themes that revealed novel factors contributing to attrition rates in the special education field. Once all data were collected and analyzed, a suitable intervention was recommended for execution at the campus level so that administrators and teachers could observe the retention rate changes attributable to the intervention in place.

Research Question 2

The sample for this question included special education teachers who still held their position. In this thematic review, responses to open-ended survey questions detailed the special education and campus administrator characteristics and affective reactions to work and work environment factors. The research

examined whether campus administrators' perceived cause of attrition impacted retention or if special education teachers' cause and intervention would significantly impact retaining teachers. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were used.

Research Question 3

The sample population for answering this question included school personnel who stay employed (stayers), those who left district employment (leavers), and those undecided about staying or leaving. Participants were contacted via email after agreeing to the consent form and responding to the survey. The collection method was a school and staffing survey. The data regarded was descriptively analyzed and quantitatively analyzed with regression analyses. The aim was to determine if the described intervention strategies would significantly impact teachers' retention.

The mixed-methods descriptive method proposed identifying common factors from the perceptions of campus administrators and special education teachers contributing to the increased attrition rates. Mixed methods designs are predominant in education research because they support robust implications (García & Weiss, 2019).

Quantitative data was collected from surveys data from the study. The quantitative data demonstrated the research numerically using graphs and charts (McKim, 2017). It also examined common trends of attrition in special education teachers in Suburban Southeastern Texas (ISD). The quantitative data highlighted the trends to explain the relationship between different work-related and personal factors of attrition (Baran, 2016).

The researcher conducted a qualitative study to comprehend special education teachers' opinions (Etikan et al., 2016). The teachers' viewpoints provided in-depth information to understand how their experience influenced their decisions to stay, transfer, or completely leave the teaching profession. In the quantitative phase, the researcher collected data for a numerical research demonstration.

A survey was created and distributed. The survey was created relying on a scoping review linked to high teacher attrition rates. The survey consisted of an informed consent response, qualitative dichotomous and open-ended questions, and quantitative data collected using Likert-scale questions (Baran, 2016). The survey

questionnaire, which allowed responses on a Likert scale, required the special education teacher and campus administrators to describe the perceived typical reasons for high attrition and the perceived main interventions. Open-ended questions sought identification of any significant impact of the selected cause and intervention on attrition rates.

Population

The study population involved two groups from a suburban southeastern Texas district, campus administrators and special education teachers. All responses were confidential (Baran, 2016). Informed consent was provided in the first section of the email.

Sampling

Participants were recruited from the Houston suburbs in southeastern Texas. Through convenience sampling, which Etikan et al. (2016) described as a method for assembling a group of available persons for a study, was used to collect responses for a survey. This study's target population consisted of certified campus administrators and certified special education teachers and records of those who left. The researcher sent an email to human resources personnel and special education directors requesting email addresses for administrators and teachers in the special education district schools. After a week, a follow-up email request was sent following the email address list's initial email. The participants were invited to participate electronically through their work-related email as a method of verifying and confirming the participating person's affiliation with the district.

All participants in the study met the criteria for public education within the district with the following credentials and meet Texas Education Agency (TEA) requirements. According to TEA, to be a highly qualified special education teacher, one must have a general bachelor's degree or a bachelor's degree in education and receive an alternate teacher certificate, pass the Special Education EC-Grade 12 (161) assessment, and pass a test in a teaching subject within K–12 grade level (Baran, 2016). According to TEA, to be a campus administrator, one must obtain a master's degree, complete an approved principal teacher preparation program, have a valid teacher certificate and a minimum of two years experience in teaching, and pass the principal

assessment (268). The study was limited to a single district in Texas. Schools in the district are located north of Houston, Texas, the state's largest city (population, 2.3 million). The district is governed by one superintendent with nine middle schools, 26 elementary academic institutions, and five high schools. From the five high schools, two of the schools are academies.

Sample

The research exploration encompassed secondary special education teachers and secondary campus administrators currently working within the studied district. Participants had different ages, sex, and ethnicity; years of experience; and educational positions held, but all still met TEA and district requirements for their current positions. All participants consented to participate, and their information was kept confidential through IRB-endorsed methods.

Analysis

This research addressed three research questions. The researcher applied a triangulation analysis approach to assess the collected data (Noble & Heale, 2019). Qualitative and quantitative responses were intertwined to identify rising themes associated with the perceived factors causing the high attrition rates and the needed intervention practices to reduce. Respondents were required to rate the level of perceived impact of multiple factors causing attrition and shortages of special education teachers, to establish typical causes of attrition, and explain why they selected a given cause. Comparing campus administrators' responses to the special education teachers' responses was expected to identify common trends, patterns, and attrition factors and to help ascertain interventions to decrease the critical special education teachers' shortage and ensure that students with disabilities receive adequate educational services, according to their individualized education plan and meet the federal FAPE mandate. The collected and analyzed data described the perceptions of campus administrators and teachers in the education field related to the factors resulting to the high attrition.

Research Question 1

What are the main factors leading to high attrition rates among special needs teachers within the district?

The sample for this question included the survey on administrative support perception, teacher burnout, and workloads. A qualitative case study method helped detail the special education teachers and campus administrators' experiences.

Research Question 2

What are the main factors leading to high attrition rates among special needs teachers within the district?

No current research identified what special education teachers and campus administrators perceive as specific interventions greatly impacting special education teachers' retention rates (DODEA, 2019; García & Weiss, 2019; Hagaman & Casey, 2018). The research examined whether campus administrators' perceived cause impacted retention or if special education teachers' cause and intervention significantly impacted retaining teachers.

Research Question 3

What is the current knowledge of the available intervention plans by campus administrators to improve special education teachers' retention rates?

Data was expected to help determine if any identified intervention significantly impacted special education teachers' retention rates.

Validity

Hong et al. (2019) describes validity as the degree of support, correctness, and truth of an inference. Content validity depends on instrument format and content (Taherdoost, 2016). The survey was reviewed by three special education teachers and three campus administrators, and feedback was incorporated to increase its validity before it was finalized.

Criterion-related validity refers to the connection between the instrument scores and those attained using other measures or instruments (Mohajan, 2017). The researcher reviewed the responses to determine responses outside the current research scope. Pilot participants with divergent responses were contacted to establish why they responded and correct any misunderstanding.

Study Limitations

The participants were assured that their responses were confidential. Thus, participants were not followed up for clarification of responses; however, confidentiality was a means of obtaining accurate responses, thereby increasing participation in the research and preventing hesitation in agreeing to participate from fear of being identified by a supervisor or punished in retribution.

IV. Results

Introduction

The special education teacher attrition rate in middle and high schools is higher than that in elementary (Dewey et al., 2017). While some middle school and some high school special education teachers leave their schools within three years after employment, others leave the education profession and seek another profession. The objective of this exploratory mixed methods research was assessing factors influencing special education teachers' attrition and efforts that could increase retention rates. This section reports the quantitative and qualitative outcomes of special education teachers' and campus administrators' perceptions about the factors causing special education teachers' high attrition rates and practical intervention practices to increase retention. The data are aligned with the research questions, and the outcomes are categorized into five parts: descriptive findings, research question 1, research question 2, research question 3, and summary of results. Survey questions are provided in Appendix A and Appendix B.

General Descriptive Statistics

This research section had two phases, the first phase is for special education teachers, while the second phase is for campus administrators. Phase 1 entailed an online Qualtrics survey. The survey was presented as one instrument with three sections; demographic information, causes of attrition, and intervention measures. The survey consisted of a variety of questions including, open-ended questions, with one feedback for respondents to answers regarding special education teachers' attrition and practical measures to mitigate the crisis. Data collection began with an online survey after respondents consented to an email invitation and proceeded to google forms to respond to the questions. The graphs below highlight the demography of the 50 participants.

Job Role and Secondary School Setting

Of the 50 participants, 18 were campus administrators, while 32 were special education teachers (Table 1). Fifty-eight percent of respondents were from the high school level; 42% were from the middle school level. The intermediate level had zero respondents and was thus excluded.

Table 1*Participants' Job Roles and Second School Settings*

Personnel and level	Survey participants	
	<i>n</i>	%
Personnel		
Campus administrators	18	36.0
Special education teachers	32	64.0
Total	50	100.0
Level	32	64.0
Middle school	21	42.0
High school	29	58.0
Total	50	100.0

These roles and levels are illustrated in Figures 5 and 6. The bulk of respondents (64%) were special education teachers, while the remainder (36%) were campus administrators. Most participants were special education teachers, which was helpful to the work, since they were the most personally affected by the attrition rate. The results also indicate that most participants were high school teachers: 57% taught high school and 43% taught middle school.

Figure 5

Percentage of Participants by Job Role

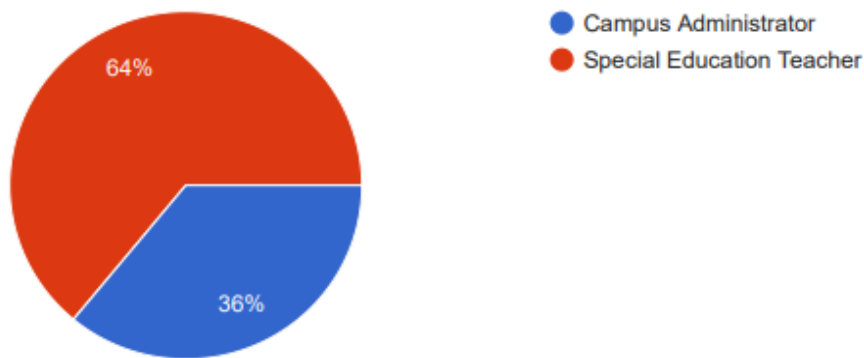
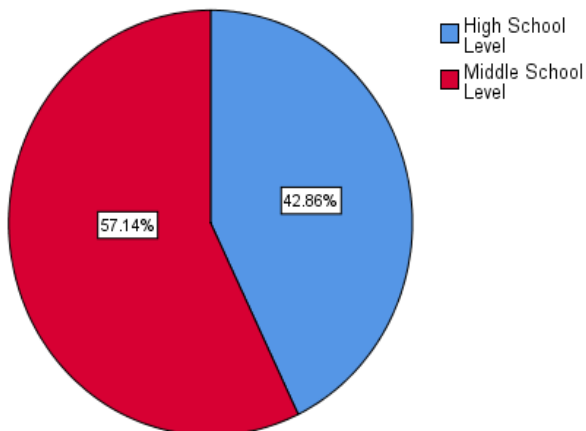


Figure 6

Percentage of Participants by Special Education Teacher/Campus Administrator Roles



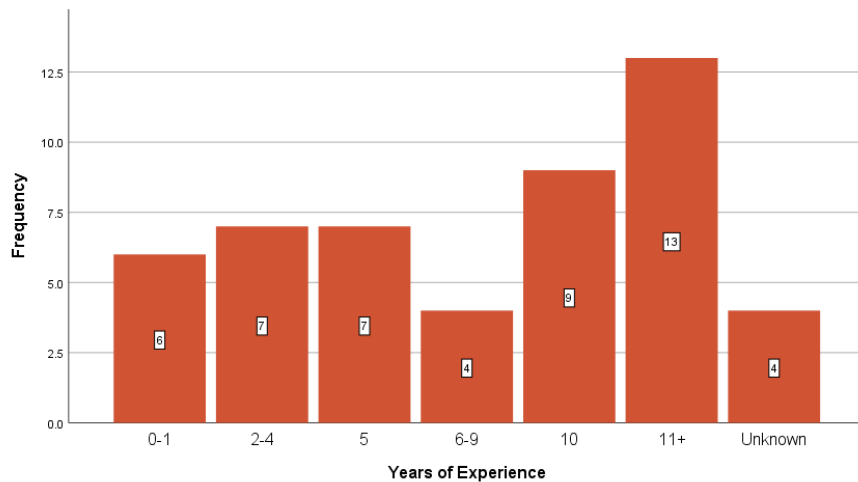
Years of Experience

Of the 50 participants, six had at least 1 year of experience, seven had between 2 and 4 years of experience, seven had five years of experience in teaching, and four had teaching experience between six and 9 years (Figure 7). While nine participants had 10 years of experience and 13 had 11 years of experience, four did not indicate

their years of experience. The results indicate that both special education teachers and campus administrators were moderately experienced.

Figure 7

Participants' Years of Experience in Position



Research Question 1

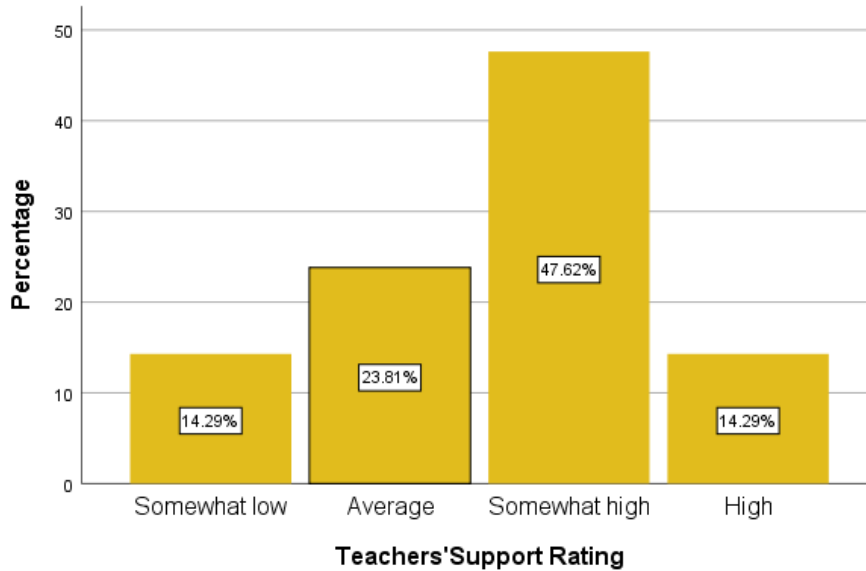
This research question addressed attrition: What main factors lead to high attrition rates among special needs teachers within the district? Respondents for this question were special education teachers.

Support from Campus Administrators

Special education teacher participants indicated that administrative support was moderately high (Figure 8). In particular, 47.62% said that support from campus administrators was somewhat high, 23.81% revealed average support, while 14.29% had high support. However, 14.29% of the participants revealed that the support was somehow low.

Figure 8

Teachers' Rating of Support from Campus Administrators

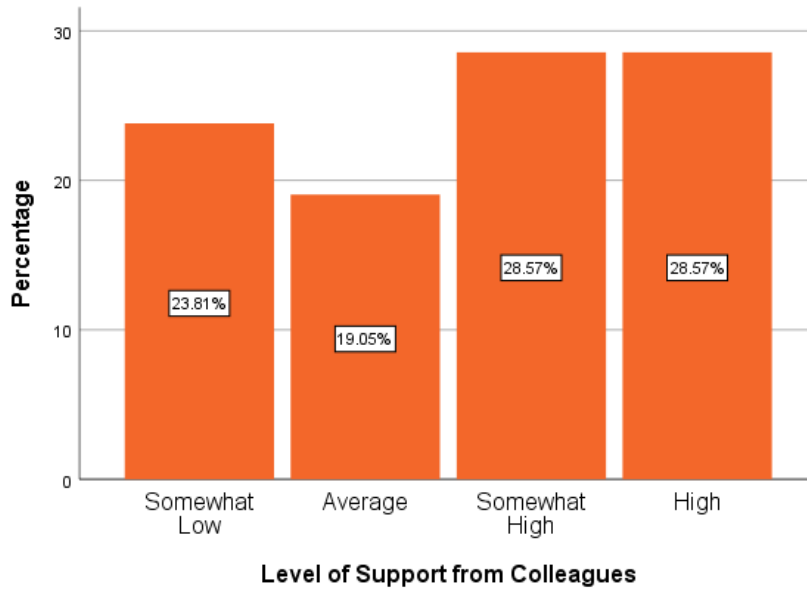


Support from Colleagues

Healthy and strong collegial relationships among special education teachers are critical in providing good morale, teamwork, and overall school efficacy (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Most participants agree that they receive support from other teachers (Figure 9). The results indicate that 28.57% received high support from colleagues, while 57.14% admitted receiving above-average support. On the other hand, 23.81% of special education teacher participants were dissatisfied by the support received from fellow special education teachers. 19.05% of special education teachers said they received average support from fellow teachers.

Figure 9

Teachers' Rating of Collegial Support

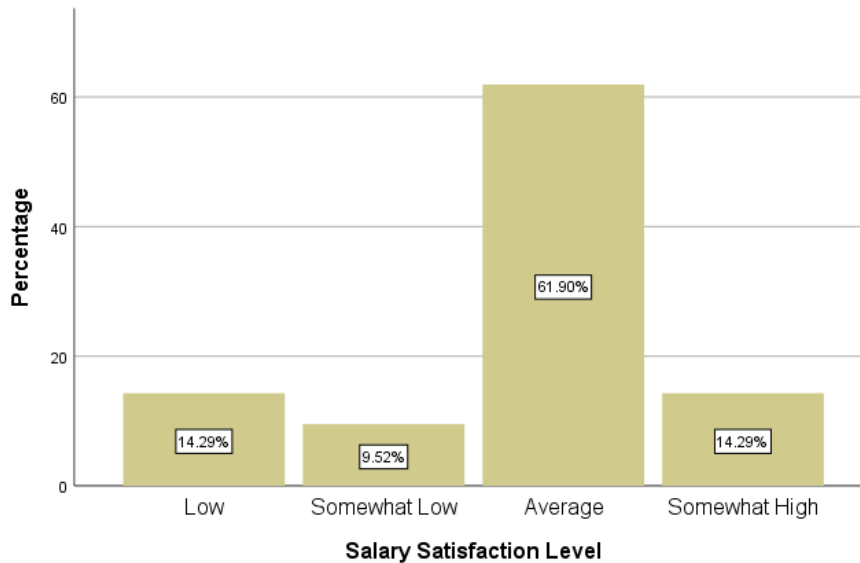


Salary Satisfaction

Figure 10 reveals that most teachers in the special education profession are dissatisfied with their salaries. More than half of participants rated their salary as average compared to their education and experience level, while 23.81% said their salaries are below average. 14.29% of special education teacher respondents agreed that they received somewhat high salaries.

Figure 10

Teachers' Rating of Salary Satisfaction

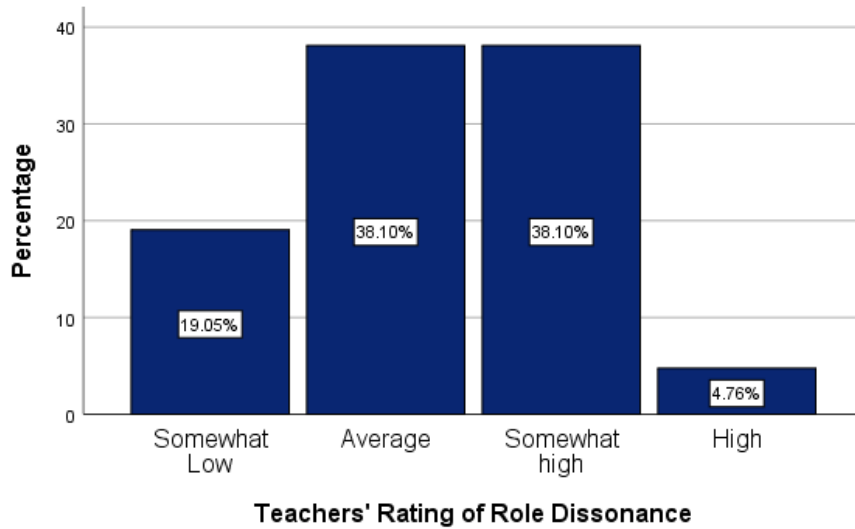


Role Dissonance

Most special education teacher participants agreed that there was a disparity between their professional requirements and the roles assigned in special education (Figure 11). Overall, 19.05% of participants identified the dissonance as low, and 38.10% reported the dissonance as average; however, 38.10% stated that the assigned roles were more than their professional requirement and expectations (dissonance was somewhat high). Dissonance was high for 4.76%. Thus, they concentrate more on roles than helping special needs students

Figure 11

Teachers' Rating of Role Dissonance

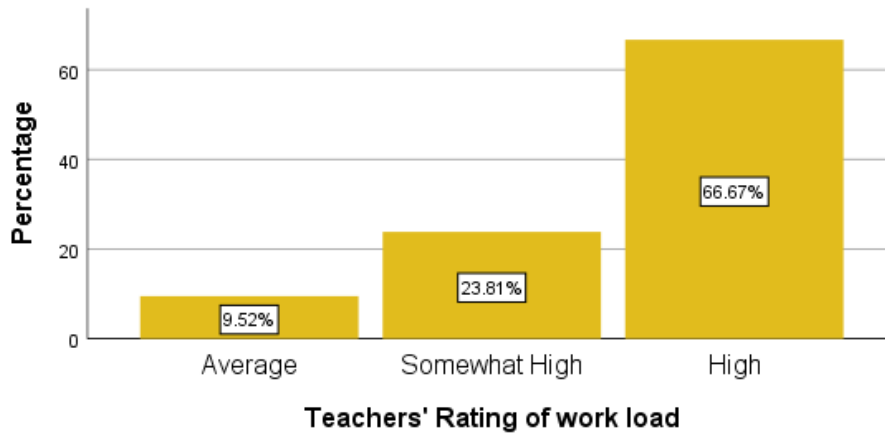


Workload

Generally, it can be observed that workload significantly impact attrition in the special education sector (Figure 12). Of the 21 special education teacher participants, 66.67% claimed a high workload. 23.81% agreed that the workload was somehow high, while 9.52% said that the workload was average.

Figure 12

Teachers' Rating of Workload

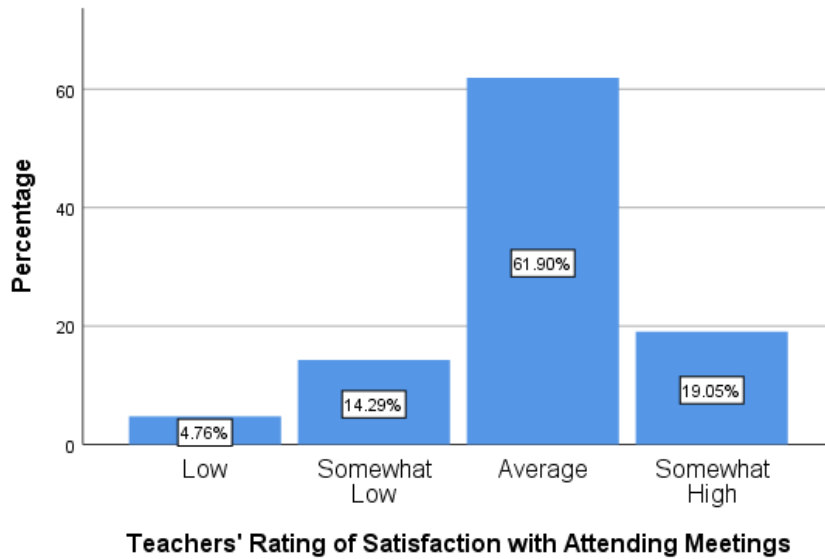


Meeting Attendance

Sixty-two percent of teachers rated their satisfaction with attending meetings as average (Figure 13). Of the 21 special education teacher teaching participants, 14.29% claimed their satisfaction was somewhat low, while only 19.05% rated their satisfaction as somewhat high.

Figure 13

Teachers' Rating of Satisfaction with Attending Meetings

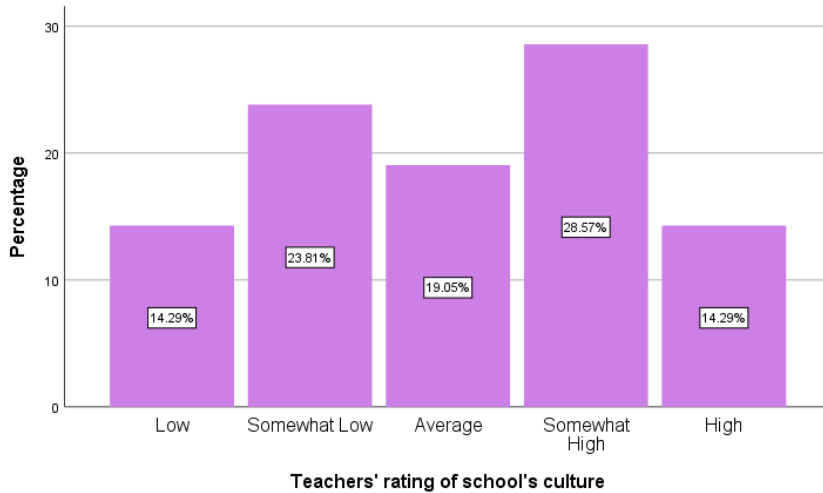


School Culture

Overall, about 42.86% of special education teaching participants rated school culture in the special education department as somewhat high or high, while 38.1% claimed the school culture was somewhat low or low (Figure 14). In between was the 19.05% who thought it was average.

Figure 14

Teachers' Rating of School Culture

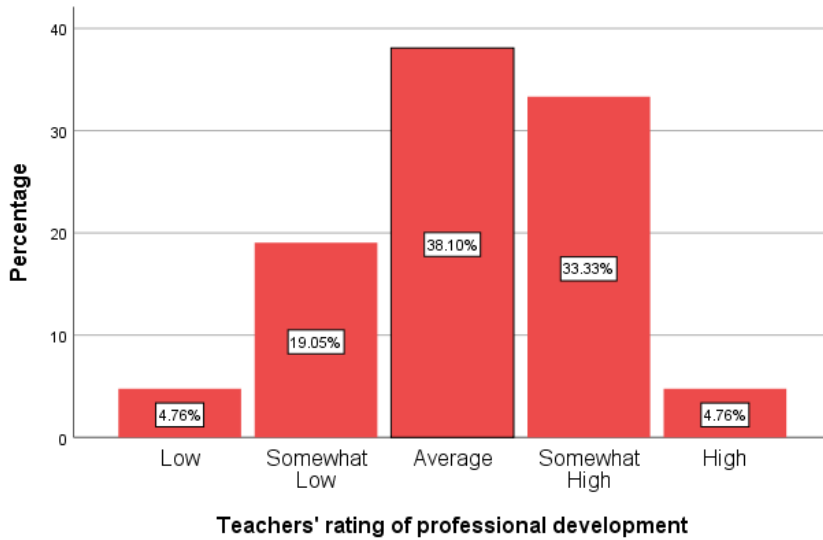


Professional Development/Preparation Level

Overall, 33.33% of special education teachers agreed that professional preparation was somewhat high or high, while an almost equal percentage (38.10%) said that the professional preparation levels were average (Figure 15). About a quarter of respondents (23.81%) claimed it was somewhat low or low.

Figure 15

Teachers' Rating of Professional Preparation Level



Descriptive Statistics for Special Education Teachers

Table 2 indicates that special education teachers rate campus administrators' support as average. Similarly, participants stated that collegial support was currently average, with salary satisfaction level being somewhat low, role dissonance average or somewhat high, workload was somewhat high, and satisfaction with meeting attendance was very low.

However, an insignificant difference was observed between the mean of high school and middle school teachers. (See Appendix C). According to the t test, special education teachers in both categories agreed on average support from campus administrators (mean difference [MD] = .472; $t = 1.174$; $p = .255$), average collegial support (MD = -.306; $t = -.586$; $p = .662$), low salary satisfaction (MD = .806; $t = 2.255$; $p = .008$), high role dissonance (MD = .083; $t = .218$; $p = .007$), high workload (MD = -.611; $t = -2.248$; $p = .037$), and school culture (MD = -.861; $t = -1.525$; $p = .144$).

Table 2*Teachers' Responses—Descriptive Statistics*

Survey questions	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
How would you rate the level of support from campus administrators?	3.62	.921	2	5
How would you rate the level of support from other teachers?	3.62	1.161	2	5
How would you rate your relationship with fellow teachers?	3.86	1.153	1	5
How would you rate your level of satisfaction with the salary?	2.76**	.889	1	4
How would you rate the level of role dissonance: disparities between teachers' perception of the profession and professional requirement?	3.29**	.845	2	5
How would you rate the level of the workload?	4.57*	.676	3	5
How would you rate your satisfaction level for attending meetings?	2.95	.740	1	4
How would you rate your school's culture (SPED department)?	3.05	1.322	1	5
How would you rate preparation/professional development for the occupation?	3.14	.964	1	5

Note. $N = 21$. Min = minimum; Max = maximum; SPED = special education.

* $p \leq .05$.

** $p \leq .01$.

In summary, special education teachers perceived poor collegial relationships as having the second most significant influence on special education teachers' attrition rate after choosing high workload as the primary cause.

Research Question 2

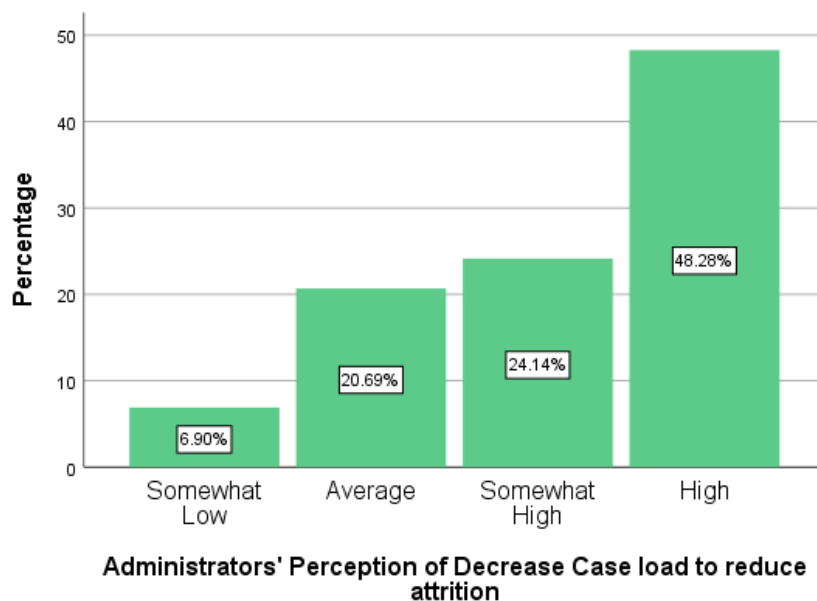
This research addressed interventions: What are intervention plans intended by administrators to enhance retention rates among special needs teachers in the district?

Decreasing Workload

Almost half of the campus administrators said that decreasing special education teachers' caseload/work responsibilities had a high likelihood of reducing attrition, and 24.14% of participants said it had a somewhat high likelihood of reducing attrition (Figure 16). Overall, 20.69% viewed the strategy as having an average effect on attrition, but 6.90% said the intervention had a somewhat low prospect of reducing special education teacher attrition.

Figure 16

Administrators' Perception of Decreasing Workload to Reduce Attrition

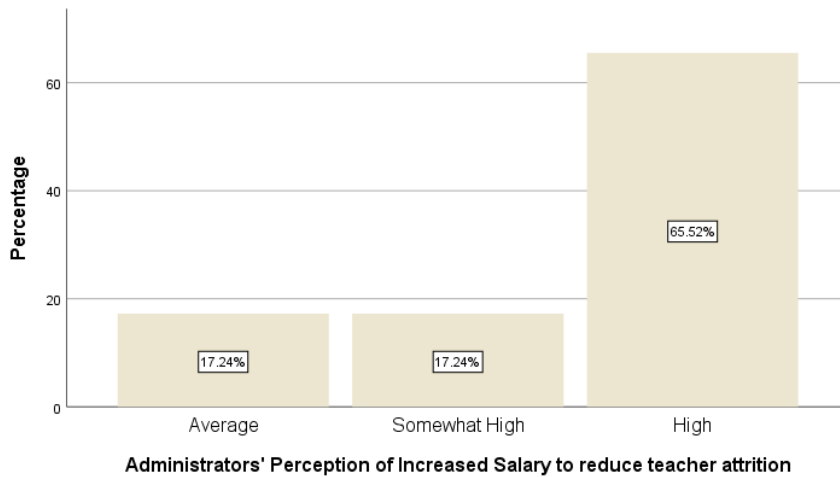


Increasing Salary

According to the results reported in Figure 17, 65.52% of campus administrators agreed that increasing special education salaries had a high likelihood of reducing attrition, and 17.24% agreed the likelihood was somewhat high. An identical percentage—17.24%—said the decision would have an average impact on attrition.

Figure 17

Administrators' Perception of Increasing Salary to Reduce Teacher Attrition

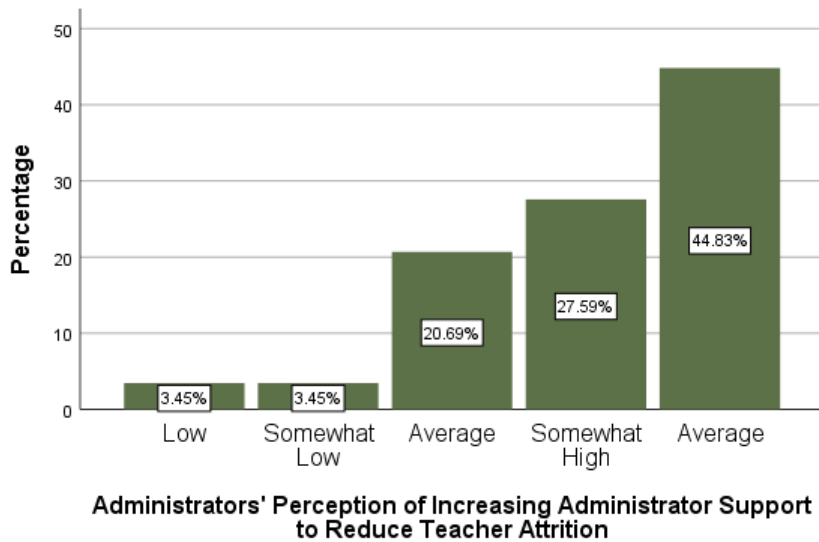


Increasing Campus Administrator Support

Campus administrators' support of special education teachers is vital in the teachers' decision to stay: Regarding whether increased support would help improve retention rates, 44.83% of them thought the probability was high and 27.59% thought the probability was somewhat high (total, 72.42%) (Figure 18). These findings were closely followed by 27.59% of participants who said that the probability was average that increasing support would improve retention rates.

Figure 18

Administrators' Perception of Increasing Administrator Support to Reduce Teacher Attrition

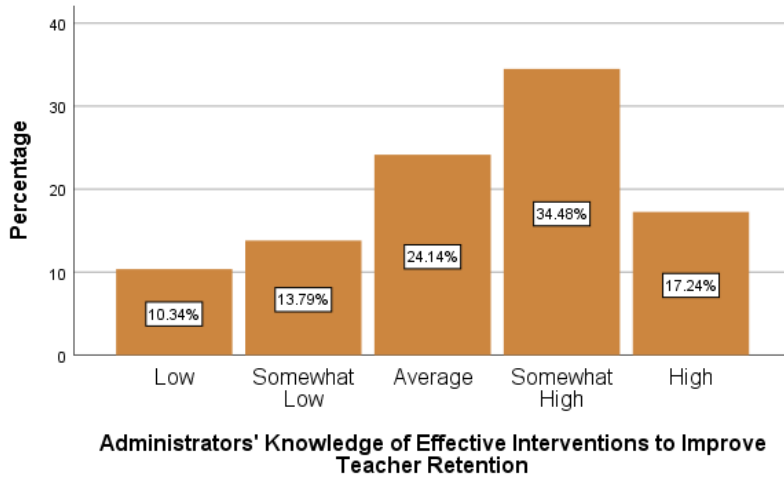


Intervening to Reduce Attrition: Knowledge of Effective Approaches

Of the 29 administrators, 17.24% thought they were highly knowledgeable, 34.48% said they had a somewhat high level of knowledge, while 24.14% thought they had an average level of knowledge about containing attrition rates among special education teachers (Figure 19). That left 24.13% of campus administrators who said their attrition intervention skills were below average.

Figure 19

Administrators' Knowledge of Effective Interventions to Improve Teacher Retention

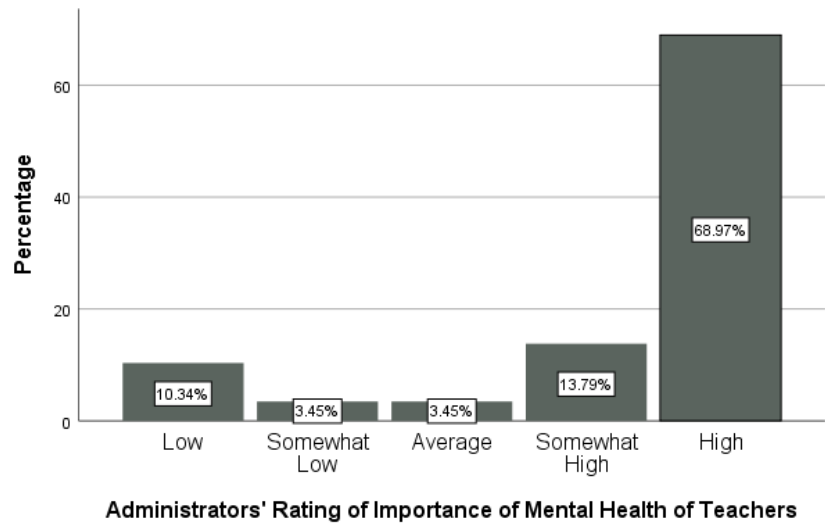


Valuing Mental Health

Figure 20 shows that 82.76% of campus administrators agreed that the special education teachers' mental health is of somewhat high (13.79%) or high importance. Overall, the remaining participants (17.24%) rated mental health issues as being of average to low importance.

Figure 20

Administrators' Rating of Importance of Mental Health of Teachers



Campus Administrators—Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 indicates that most campus administrators highly agree (scale, 1–5) that decreasing caseload, increasing salary, and increasing administrative support, are highly significant on retention. The administrative respondents revealed that their retention practice implementation level was above average, and their current knowledge and skills of the most effective strategies were above average.

Table 3

Campus Administrators Responses—Descriptive Statistics

Survey questions	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
------------------	----------	-----------	-----	-----

Rate current knowledge of the listed intervention to improve special education teachers' retention rates:				
• Decrease caseload/work responsibilities	4.14	.990	2	5
• Increase salary	4.48	.785	3	5
• Increase campus administrators' support	4.07	1.067	1	5
How would you rate your current knowledge level of effective intervention practices to improve retaining level of special education teachers?	3.34	1.233	1	5
What is your current skill level of effectively implementing intervention techniques to improve retaining special education teachers?	3.10	1.145	1	5
On a scale of 1 being low and 5 being high, how would you rate the importance of the mental health of teachers and campus administrators in the special education field?	4.28	1.334	1	5

Note. $N = 18$. Min = minimum; Max = maximum.

Intervention Practices: Administrators' and Teachers' Perceptions

Table 4 represents the mean rating differences between campus administrators and teachers in the special education sector for the perceived intervention practices to enhance retention rates. The two subgroup respondents rated the preparation programs/developments lower to benefit teachers in special education as the perceived interventions with the most significant impact on reducing teacher attrition ($M = 2.49$, $M = 3.00$, respectively). On the other hand, campus administrators rated increased administrative support as an intervention with the highest impact to increase special

Table 4

Perceptions of Intervention Practices: Administrators and Teachers in Special Education

Role	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>
Decreasing caseload/work responsibilities			
Campus administrator	3.89	1.023	.241

Special education Teacher	4.22	1.070	.189
Increasing salary			
Campus administrator	3.89	.832	.196
Special education Teacher	4.41	1.132	.200
Increasing support of campus administrators			
Campus administrator	4.06	.873	.206
Special education Teacher	4.03	1.282	.227
Knowledge level of effective interventions			
Campus administrator	2.72	1.074	.253
Special education Teacher	3.69	1.281	.226
Preparation program and professional development training			
Campus administrator	3.00	.907	.214
Special education Teacher	2.94	1.243	.220

Note. Campus administrators, $N = 18$; special education teachers, $N = 32$. Ranking range was 1 (low) to 5 (high). SEM = standard error of the mean.

education ($M = 4.06$ and $M = 4.03$, respectively). Teachers rated salary to increase as the most impactful intervention to ensure teacher retention ($M = 4.41$). Interestingly, campus administrators and special education teachers persisted to rate a decrease in workload as the main intervention practice to improve special education teachers' retention ($M = 3.89$ and $M = 4.22$, respectively). Therefore, when reviewing the intervention ratings to reduce attrition rates potentially, the supportive environment was regarded to be the most influential intervention practice.

The t test indicated insignificant mean difference between campus administrators' perceptions regarding decreasing workload ($MD = -.330$; $I = -1.063$; $p = .293$), high salary ($MD = -.517$; $t = -1.695$; $p = .096$), increased administrative support ($MD = .024$; $t = 1.174$; $p = .255$), and redesigning of preparation programs ($MD = .472$; t

= 0.071; $p = .943$) (Appendix C). However, the t test indicated a significant difference between campus administrators perceived interventions in their knowledge level concerning appropriate intervention practices ($MD = -.975$; $t = -2.704$; $p = .009$).

In summary, campus administrators opined that salary to increase has the most influence on special education teachers' attrition rate, followed by workload as the main causes. In the same realm, the two sub-groups rated the preparation programs/developments lower to benefit teachers in the special education field as the opined primary interventions that greatly impact teacher attrition rates.

Research Question 3

The third research question was investigated in this study: What is the current knowledge of the available intervention plans by campus administrators to improve special education teachers' retention rates?

Qualitative Analysis

This qualitative descriptive research objective was to explore the current intervention practices proposed by campus administrators and special education teachers to be implemented by campus administrators and improve retention. The section presents the feedback findings on how participants described their perceived retention practices. The exploration was qualitative to align with the research question. Therefore, this section presents the findings, followed by the chapter summary. The research gap that was aimed to be addressed in the research was that it was unknown how campus administrators and special education teachers described their retention practices. The data analysis procedure is comprehensively described and structured in order of occurrence. In addition, the reported results are per the research question, and the findings are presented using themes as described. Data from open-ended questions were gathered from 50 participants, conducted using online survey. Because of the COVID-19 restrictions, there were no face-to-face interviews or interactions.

No interviews were audio-recorded; however, respondents did provide consent. The transcribed feedback from open-ended questions was coded and labeled, depending on the potential meaning in describing respondents' retention practices. In addition, one code was assigned to statements with similar meanings. The

codes for qualitative assessment were assigned to the responses concerning the current interventions that the institutions are using to reduce attrition rates by special education teachers.

This results presentation is structured by theme. The themes are phrases revealing the data's relevance to addressing the research question. The five themes established during the data analysis were selected from current interventions:

- Training
- Preparation plans
- Incentives
- Mentorship
- Administrative help/basic acknowledgment

Worth noting are some qualitative responses that were assigned singular codes while others received multiple codes. For the qualitative responses for data not collected in Research Question 1 and Research Question 2, there was a follow-up open-ended interview question to collect any other volunteered information from respondents: If yes to the previous question, what mental health intervention would you suggest and why?

The direct responses are recoded with a number and a pseudonym—SPED, which represented respondents for the special education teachers, and CA, which represented campus administrators. The responses are actual statements collected from the six teachers and four campus administrators, all from the special education field.

Feedback from Special Education Teachers

Asking special education teachers whether professional training and development opportunities significantly influenced their decision to stay was a question of great interest. The qualitative responses (Figure 21) showed that further training and development opportunities would reduce attrition rates in the special education sector.

Figure 21*Teachers' View of Professional Training and Development as Motivational Factor*

Question 1 Is professional training and development opportunity a motivation factor to retain special education teachers in classrooms?	
Respondents	Direct responses
SPED-1	Because I have considered the pros and cons of leaving the special education profession, or at least this campus numerous times. In 10 years, I have seen the entire staff rotate out 3 times except for me. I fully understand the desire not to be retained in these positions, and I have not left because although I am unsatisfied, I hope changes will eventually come to make this a more positive career. Also, it is about the kids; in the end, I will put up with any stressor to help these kids.
SPED-2	In reality, the expectations contradict the real issues in the special education field due to increasing paperwork, unhelpful parents, student discipline, and the poor teacher-student relationship.
SPED-3	Yes. It provides better coping skills. Being a special education teacher, I understand our frustration, hopes, and desires. As special education teachers, we are expected to teach and be case managers with little to no time to prep like our general education counterparts do. We are used as subs a lot of the time, pre-COVID, which is understandable.
SPED-4	I think the specialized professional development would convince more teachers to stay. It is a motivation to continue learning and grow professionally.
SPED-5	The training is helpful. It touches on regulations associated with special education filed and basic pedagogy
SPED-6	I learned classroom management and how to conduct procedures and routines in class. It somehow lends to retention.

Note. SPED = special education.

Question 2 was critical in this research. It is in this question that mental health issues emerged and were made obvious. Most special education teachers wanted the mental health challenge to be the primary aspect to be addressed to increase retention.

Figure 22

Teachers' Suggested Changes for Increasing Career Satisfaction

Question 2	
Can you propose changes of any form to help increase your satisfaction in the field?	
Respondents	Direct responses
SPED-1	More personal counseling.
SPED-2	Weekly chats with the teachers to express their feelings in a safe environment
SPED-3	Yes. It provides better coping skills.
SPED-4	More frequent wellness checks
SPED-5	I would suggest that SPED teachers and administrators receive mental health interventions on an annual basis.
SPED-6	More awareness and focus on the importance of personal mental health

Note. SPED = special education.

Asking special education teachers about a single focus was interesting in that they had the chance to articulate their opinions regarding the best strategy for retention (Figure 23). The participants were specific in their responses as most argued for mental health programs. It is a fair assumption from the responses that special education causes stress to teachers and handling the condition can result in positive learning in the special education community.

Figure 23*Teachers' Suggested Focus of Change in Special Education*

Question 3	
When given the chance to bring change in the special education sector, what single thing would you mostly focus on?	
Respondents	Direct responses
SPED-1	Mainly depression and anxiety
SPED-2	More awareness and focus on the importance of personal mental health
SPED-3	By Implementing mandatory mental health days, so that teachers can reset.
SPED-4	Self-care days and stress relief workshops. They'll help teachers and staff refresh and be even more focused on teaching, helping students learn, and ensuring that they achieve success.
SPED-5	I would suggest after-school groups or clubs for teachers as a support group to offer positive feedback and some counseling strategies to help lower mental health.
SPED-6	Social emotional learning

Note. SPED = special education.

Administrative and collegial support topped the list for attracting and keeping faculty, although data was entered randomly (Figure 24). Support from colleagues and campus administrators is essential, primarily when changes are brought in the sector. More incentives were the only response of personal benefit to special education teachers. Looking at these responses, it is obvious that incentives motivate staying in the profession. Even though all participants appreciate a salary increase, they stated that it is not the primary reason they accept the challenge to teach special needs students. However, it is among the defining elements for them to stay.

Figure 24*Teachers' Suggested Ways to Attract and Keep Teachers*

Question 3

What is your opinion on factors that attract special education teachers and make them stay in the field?	
Respondents	Direct responses
SPED-1	Talking more to each other
SPED-2	Support from colleagues and administrators
SPED-3	If salaries are competitive, and incentives are put in place to retain teachers and paraprofessionals who are aspiring special education teachers, the retention rate would improve. However, if special education teachers are perceived as second-rate teachers, the retention rate will continue to decline
SPED-4	Just need more support and for them to hear us out
SPED-5	Co-teach models, accommodations support, incentives
SPED-6	Goal-oriented communication with clearer information to improve the school's climate and culture.

Note. SPED = special education.

Feedback from Campus Administrators

Interestingly, Question 1 for campus administrators and special education teachers have similarities (Figure 25). Both respondents described similar approaches to increase teacher retention. Therefore, as recommended in Chapter 5, a redesign in training to align with the specific criteria and expectations in the school environment would enable special education teachers to cope with such stressors. This would facilitate reduced attrition rates and improved teaching experience by special education teachers.

Figure 25

Administrators' View of Professional Training and Development as Motivational Factor

Question 1	
Is professional training and development opportunity a motivating factor for SPED teachers to stay in classrooms?	
Respondents	Direct Responses

CA-1	If we can provide training programs to help the teaching staff on how to respond to negative situations and prevail, then we will be able to help retain good teachers
CA-2	The training programs on a Collaborative setting for instructional practices yielded positive growth and teachers were motivated to stay.
CA-3	It helps teachers to understand what is needed and what is expected to be done.
CA-4	It provides teachers with access to more strategies to manage paperwork

Note. CA = campus administrator.

The common responses to Question 2 entailed the need for mentors to help alleviate mental issues and stress that special education teachers face (Figure 26). It is apparent that most campus administrators see support and mentorship programs as critically essential in teacher retention.

Figure 26

Administrators' Suggested Changes for Increasing Career Satisfaction

Question 2	
Can you propose changes of any form to help increase your satisfaction in the field?	
Respondents	Direct responses
CA-1	Added supports to be able to debrief or decompress after an incident. District personnel meeting with campus staff to discuss workload/responsibilities. To provide teachers with resources to seek assistance when needed. Lastly, a complete overhaul of the district special education process since too much rests on the teachers.

	Responsibilities must be shifted since there is a huge burden on special education teachers.
CA-2	Practical mental health improvement activities and services, free mental health services, less paperwork, salary increase
CA-3	Dealing with stress, many teachers are stressed with the caseload they are given, as we still expect them to teach so that our students gain the knowledge needed to pass state assessments. If many things were taking off your teachers, they may focus on what matters the students.
CA-4	Mental health day. Weekly or monthly spa treatments, and memberships to a gym. All the aforementioned will help with decreasing stress levels.

Note. CA = campus administrator.

All administrators who participated supported mental health support, choosing "trauma-informed training and supports," rest ("more days off"), "free mental health services," and "mental health intervention" in support of change (Figure 27). These were suggestions offered when asked to choose a single focus for change. No respondent said nothing could be done.

Figure 27*Administrators' Suggested Focus of Change in Special Education*

Question 3 When given the chance to bring change in the special education sector, what single thing would you mostly focus on?	
Respondents	Direct responses
CA-1	Trauma-informed training and supports
CA-2	Incentives, better stipend, more days off
CA-3	More money for teachers, more days off for teachers, less ineffective trainings and meetings, more common-sense strategies for student and staff engagement, on-site mental health improvement activities and services, free mental health services through the insurance plan specifically for teachers and staff, health food truck options and snacks on site all for free once per month, free bottled water for staff and teachers, free district calendars (wall calendars) for holiday gift
CA-4	Mental health intervention, incentives, and provide special education teachers with adequate support

Note. CA = campus administrator; SPED = special education.

Interestingly, responses to Question 4 for campus administrators and special education teachers have similarities (Figure 28). Both groups of respondents described similar approaches to increasing teacher retention. The campus administrators suggested the need to tackle mental health issues affecting teachers. They perceived stress as the main aspect causing teacher turnover. In addition, campus administrators mentioned more incentives, such as insurance plans and gifts, to motivate special education teachers to stay.

Figure 28

Administrators' Suggested Ways to Attract and Keep Teachers

Question 4 What is your opinion on factors that attract special education teachers and compel them to stay in the field?	
Respondents	Direct responses
CA-1	Intervention through T-TESS
CA-2	Giving various incentives for special education teachers and programs that will promote mental health care would greatly impact them positively.
CA-3	Mental health support programs. Having experienced people around to talk to.
CA-4	Training, support, feedback

Note. CA = campus administrator; T-TESS = Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System.

Similarly, campus administrators provided same ideas to special education teachers on the factors that would increase the retention of special education teachers. Therefore, it seems reasonable that mental support programs, training, more incentives, and support should be systematically integrated in the education program to help resolve the attrition issue.

The qualitative analysis indicates that special education teachers possess practical ideas that are not solicited to reduce attrition rates. In rating, the two sub-groups rated decreased caseloads as the primary intervention practice to increase retention. The qualitative responses revealed that most campus administrators suggested increased instructions and incentives increase special education teachers' retention rates. Special education teachers frequently indicated that decreased caseloads and increased support would influence high retention in the same realm. The administration can implement the changes recommended by participants in this brief list of responses. It is in their capacity to provide special education teachers with adequate preparation and planning period, be a supportive advocate, and provide a modified schedule for handling workload and paperwork.

Special education teachers were specific during the survey in stating what they felt was necessary to reduce attrition. It is a fair assumption that the responses suggest a change that will help provide a positive teaching environment and quality teaching service to students with special needs.

Summary

This research applied a mixed research design by employing quantitative and qualitative analysis of potential factors resulting in high attrition rates among special education teachers. On the other hand, the quantitative section presented the factors causing attrition, while the qualitative section presented responses to suggested interventions by respondents. Caseload and paperwork were the frequent factors identified during the analysis of quantitative and qualitative responses, as the primary in influencing special education teachers' retention rates and attrition rates. The impact of high caseload and poor collegial support was overwhelming. Campus administrators identified the necessity of increased instructional time to impact high special education teachers' retention rates.

V. Discussion

Introduction

The impact of special education teacher turnover has been associated with decreased student progress and achievement. Special education teacher attrition leads to institutional memory loss and loss of capital resources due to the recruitment and hiring process, yet it can improve working conditions and programs. This chapter presents discussion of key research findings. Attrition rates have been more frequent in high and middle schools, revealing the necessity to establish factors motivating special education teachers to be retained in classrooms. Therefore, this section offers a summary and discussion of key results, recommendations, study limitations, applications to practice, and recommendations for future research. The conducted analyses are discussed alongside recommendations for campus administrators, special education teacher preparation programs, and school district leaders.

Summary of Key Findings

This research was structured to establish whether special education teachers and campus administrators differed regarding their opinions of factors causing high attrition by special education teachers and intervention strategies to improve retention. This research focused on establishing special education teachers' and campus administrators' perceptions regarding the causes of attrition in special education professionals and practical intervention strategies to increase their retention. It was observed that for the most part, the two sub-groups identified similar factors causing high attrition and turnover rates and presented the same intervention strategies to help improve retention of special education teachers.

Perceived Cause of High Attrition

Campus administrators perceived workload as having the most impact on special education teachers' attrition rate, followed by poor collegial relationships as the main causes. In the same realm, special education teachers perceived poor collegial relationships to have the second significant influence on special education teachers' attrition rate after choosing high workload as the primary cause. It is worth noting that both sub-groups

rated high caseloads as the primary influential cause of attrition. Subsequently, the high workload and paperwork caused mental health problems that contributed to most good teachers leaving the profession.

The survey findings indicated that mental health was among the most significant factors that caused attrition. Special education teachers' mental health must be given the deserved attention because it directly impacts the quality of their lives and special education they provide. The mental health problems affect students, and teachers lack the skills to remedy the situation. According to the responses, factors causing high-stress levels among special education teachers are inadequate emotional autonomy, poor work environment due to lack of adequate support, increasing workload demands and economic challenges resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, it is critical to improvise strategies to manage teachers' mental health because high-stress levels could lead to attrition. Mental health programs will help alleviate the situation.

Reviewing the perceived causes of attrition ratings by teachers in special education, it was established that non-instructional roles (workload, poor support level, too much paperwork, and poor professional development programs) significantly influence attrition. Further review of the qualitative responses showed that most participants identified job responsibilities as impactful in attrition rates. Its impact ranged from preventing teachers in special education from possessing adequate time to teach special needs students to limited time to work together with colleague teachers and enhance their relationships.

The implications of the research results are that special education teachers' workload, level of support, job responsibilities, and paperwork are significant in identifying strategies of special education teachers' retention. These results replicate previous research outcomes about special education teacher attrition rates and retention strategies (Billingsley, 2004). Based on this research's results, it could be established that workload, level of support, paperwork, and collegial relationships impact attrition rates. Therefore, the factors must be considered in devising practical intervention practices to reduce attrition in the special education sector.

Perceived Intervention to Decrease Attrition

The two sub-groups participating in this study endorsed the necessity to lower workload assigned to special education teachers. In their qualitative opinions, campus administrators identified the need to increase special

education teacher incentives, level of support, and instructional redesign in training. In contrast, special education teachers persisted in reducing workload, mentorship, and basic acknowledgment. Although campus administrators identified improved preparation plans would highly impact retention rates, they suggested that reduced paperwork and workload would increase instructional time. Despite a difference in the qualitative responses about the perceived intervention as identified by the campus administrators and special education teachers, there was an underlying reference to reduced non-instructional responsibilities noted by campus administrators as a strategy to reduce attrition rates. Reducing noninstructional responsibilities and workload dominated the suggested interventions to reduce attrition. In particular, special education teachers required reduced noninstructional roles to help provide more instructional time with special needs students.

Implications of Key Findings

The perceived factors causing high attrition rates and suggested intervention practices to improve special education teachers' retention seem to revolve around non-instructional responsibilities like paperwork, level of support, and high workload. For instance, a high workload might result in higher non-instructional responsibilities, which leads to less time in desirable education activities and instructing special needs students. According to research results, it was concluded that teachers and campus administrators in special education believe that minimized workload would result in more professional activities and retention.

When considering special education teachers' workload and paperwork tasks, campus administrators often emphasize paperwork completion and compliance. However, during this research, it was noted that special education teachers desire more instructional time, support, increase in incentives and mentorship programs. Often, professional development opportunities designed for teachers in special education entail training programs about writing IEPs and calendar activities that are at per with state and district standards. As a result, the focus on workload and paperwork compliance imply that paperwork is preferred to implement instructional strategies for special needs students. Such might increase frustration and stress levels to special education teachers.

Participants indicated that the mentorship should include plans to attend to special education teachers' mental health. Mental health is a wave right now that should get a lot of attention. It is very common for students

and staff struggling with mental health issues and getting no support from the school or home. If special education staff can be taught how to respond to negative situations and prevail, then it would help retain good teachers. The institutional goal should reflect collaborative interaction with special education teachers to attend to their mental health issues due to increasing stress levels. The stress is caused by high caseloads and a lot of paperwork. Therefore, attending to these factors would reduce special education teachers turnover.

Lack of administrative and collegial support was established as key in special education's decision to leave. The lack of sufficient support included failure by campus administrators to provide required resources and professional development needed by special education teachers to perform their jobs. This is a concern necessitating a need to improve their satisfaction because it can result in a turnover. The importance of a harmonious working environment and support towards special was instrumental. Therefore, more strategies are needed to ensure teachers interact and support each other, eventually reducing the dissatisfaction rate and increasing retention. In addition, high salaries act as motivation factors for teacher retention (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Thus, there needs to be a plan to either increase teacher salaries or provide allowances and bonuses to motivate them to stay.

Special education teachers and campus administrators depended heavily on communication and support based on survey responses. This being a clear priority among teachers and administrators, campus administrators have put practices allowing for communication and support opportunities with teachers. Special education teachers should access opportunities to engage their campus administrators when they need their support. According to the study results, for special education teachers to feel supported, they need to communicate with their campus administrators and develop relationships. In addition to direct efforts and actions of campus administrators to support special education teachers' needs, when a good collegial relationship among teachers is established, problems can be easily solved because expectations are clear. According to Rinke & Mawhinney (2017), teachers attrite because of emotional stress and physical exhaustion. Therefore, they need a supportive culture that supports their professional and personal wellbeing. When feel supported, special education teachers increase morale and they are likely to stay.

Campus administrators can support the familial environment by encouraging and providing time for collaboration among special education teachers. This will reinforce a respectful and caring environment that can increase retention because teachers can grow as a unit and recognize the support of one another. The developed work family can make teachers feel cared for and be motivated to return to work each day. As reflected in this research, special education teachers' positive collegial relationship was established to impact retention decisions (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). Positive relationship with colleagues, students, and the school administration was identified as influential in teacher retention. The survey showed that a supportive workplace allowing special education teachers to develop professional relationships was critical and identified as an intrinsic and extrinsic factor. In addition, support, interaction, and respect from campus administrators provided an extrinsic experience.

The researcher observed significant rating differences between special education teachers and campus administrators regarding the intervention practices and special education teachers' retention rates. In particular, the two sub-groups differed in how special education teachers and campus administrators perceived the appropriate intervention skills to lower the attrition rate. However, the researcher observed insignificant difference regarding the two sub-groups' perceptions of decreasing caseload, increasing special education teacher salary, increasing administrative support, and redesigning professional preparation programs as effective retention practices (see Figure 22).

Recommendations

District Leaders

District leaders must ensure they have adequate insights of the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers extensively. To help achieve this, leaders should interview and observe special education teachers about their workload to obtain in-depth insight into their daily tasks. In that event, district educational leaders may undertake a comparative assessment of workload duties in the general and special education sectors. Often, district administrators concentrate more on the student population served by a teacher than assign positional roles. A greater job responsibilities analysis could indicate myriad roles exceeding the instructional day even though special education teachers do not teach for a full 8-hour day.

Special Education Leaders

The sectorial leaders should review the school's and district's workload and responsibilities to special education teachers. Based on the findings, special education leaders need to identify strategies to reduce workloads and minimize non-instructional responsibilities, including paperwork and too many meetings. Therefore, special education leaders should compare the staffing formula with that in the general education sector and use to establish equitable staffing. Workloads increase for teachers in special education is inverse to school budgets, which are getting tighter. Based on this study outcomes, the additional workload and paperwork negatively implicate on the desire by special education teachers to remain in classrooms. In the long run, this costs the district more because more funds are sourced to train new staff, and students lack progress. When there is no additional capital to reduce non-instructional roles and lower workloads, special education leaders need to review training and knowledge advancement opportunities to help teachers in special education organize their responsibilities. In addition, leaders in the special education sector need to collaborate with other district administrators to establish duties that can be reassigned to colleagues or redundancies in work expectations. Special education leaders must regard designing and providing targeted professional development opportunities to teachers in special education. The development opportunities should directly relate to workloads and workplace difficulties such as collegial relationships and support. In addition, special education teachers may also need to ensure the training relates to instructional practice and equal numbers of IEP compliance training.

Campus administrators need to strategize to provide adequate support to special education teachers' personal and professional needs because working in a school environment where attrition is a challenge is a concern. They should expect and promote teachers' wellbeing while focusing on instructional practice. Such may include creative plans to support team-building opportunities, mental health, and stress management. In particular, special education leaders should create awareness to destigmatize mental health and change the conversation around the condition. School leaders can organize team-buildings or C-suites for teachers to open up and share their mental health issues and managing tips. This will create a psychologically safe place for special education teachers and encourage them to stay. The human resources department can be expanded to take a proactive role

in preventing burnout resulting in stress. In this case, the human resources department can organize interpersonal connection opportunities among teachers in special education, improving collegial relationships and willingness to support each other.

Teacher Preparation Programs

The programs must integrate approaches to support new special education teachers in managing multiple responsibilities in the profession. Program instructors need to consider shadowing several special education teachers to establish the responsibilities allocated to their roles. As a result, this research recommend a redesign of the teacher preparation program to help address the profession's complexities, such as paperwork management, time management, mental health management, and meeting facilitation.

Collegial Relationships: Key to Improving Instruction

Interpersonal relationships are significant in building collegial relationships and success. When campus administrators avail themselves of needed support, teachers benefit from these relationships and become willing to foster a positive climate. When campus administrators prioritize interpersonal relationships, communication is likely respectful and free, even though communication can sometimes be challenging. Campus administrators must facilitate scheduled and organic opportunities for needed communication with and between teachers. It helps to foster special education teacher retention.

Positive relationships among teachers often influence the mandated collaboration. Collaborating opportunities facilitate special education teachers to be more purposeful, resourceful, and improve instruction and collegial relationships. To sustain teachers beyond supporting school programs, the school environment must be growth oriented, caring, and have natural collegial relationships (Mullen et al., 2022). Through collaboration, teachers can offer emotional and instructional support to each other. Special education teachers can complete peer observations that provide sound constructive feedback to grow collegial relationships, primarily within the same subject area.

Limitations

This exploration has several limitations. The leading limitation is attributed to the qualitative data trustworthiness. It is challenging to generalize the survey study results to the general population because the sample was very small, with 50 participants. Another limitation was that the study was performed in one school district. The researcher and an impartial assessor conducted the coding process, which may have limited perspective. With additional raters, more themes could have been established and coded differently. In addition, former special education teachers could not participate due to difficulties in contacting them. The total sample size was small, limiting the results' objectivity, validity, and reliability. Nevertheless, the findings were similar to peer-reviewed educational research in the field.

It was challenging to recruit survey participants. Since all respondents were anonymous, district administrators had to be depended on for survey distribution. School websites were not accessible for recruiting participants. During this study, the inability to follow up with survey respondents made it difficult to clarify their responses, which was a concern.

Applications to Practice

The study findings show that administrative support, teacher incentives, teacher workload, and mental health support need improvement. The campus administration must improve the teaching environment by playing an active role in supporting them with resources and other aspects such as clear communication lines, mental health programs, structured collaboration and teamwork.

To execute the new practices in the special education working culture, the administration can capitalize on the faculty senate. The senate can provide a communication platform to open and strengthen communication lines between campus administration and teachers through the faculty. The communication should be objective and goal-oriented. The senate can meet once per month to enhance collaboration and structure ways to support special education teachers to meet the teaching environment demands.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies must investigate caseload, its impact, and the appropriate caseload for teachers in special education. In the qualitative information collected, it was mentioned that paperwork was a concern leading to attrition. Future research should be conducted to determine the amount of paperwork manageable and reasonable given special education teachers' responsibilities.

The future study needs to evaluate the influence of special education teachers' unions on attrition. Extensive studies should be performed to determine the implications of combining attrition causes and intervention practices to reduce attrition rates. The findings will help understand whether retention rates are improved when a single intervention is implemented or a combination of several practices. Future investigation should assess the association between culture and school climate in retaining on attrition. Future research should focus on campus administrators and special education teacher trust in the current environment.

VI. Action Plan

Education is facing a crisis with so many special education teachers opting to leave the professional position at such rapid rates and the population of special education students steadily rising. The action plan proposed here will attempt to show a positive change within the first year of implementation to retain special education teachers. The retention rates will increase, meaning that teachers in special education will continue to work within current positions to support such a fragile student population, including implementing students' Individual Education Plans (IEP). The action plan will start with meeting schools where they are using the resources that are currently on campus and within the district.

A great benefit to help implement the action plan will be the campus counselors who can help bring awareness to the mental health needs of the adults in a school – teachers, teachers, and support personnel—who constitute the school's staff. These counselors already have the needed education to help support staff with mental health issues due to their educational requirements to be a counselor. Furthermore, if we suppose that individual campus counselors are strained with their current workload, then district-level Mental Health Behavior Specialists or support teams can assist. Counselors or teams could assist campuses with initiating the action plan to bring awareness to mental health at the campus level. In addition, they could help implement initiatives to support staff members' mental health, help decrease workload-related fatigue and decrease burnout by introducing coping skills and strategies.

This exploration was objected to determine the causes and possible intervention strategies to counter the high special education teacher attrition. The participants were campus administrators and teachers in special education. The research shows a gap in the perceptions of support between campus administrators, who are the leaders of the campus, and teachers in special education, who are the individuals that are rapidly leaving the profession of special education. Campus administrators need to assist and support teachers in special education to work with them to create up-to-date methods to help improve retention rates. Part of campus administrators' roles is supporting special education teachers to cope with the stressors of their job. The proposed action plan

will address how special education teachers can manage and respond to the stressors from the job. It is hoped that this process will help build a healthy work relationship between campus administrators and special education teachers. Ultimately, the action plan could create a cohesive, productive, supportive, and healthy work environment ready to tackle the challenges that arrive daily within the job task and the job environment.

This particular action plan can make a beneficial contribution to the field of mental health and the educational work environment. According to Brennan (2021), humans spend about 90,000 hours of their lives in a work environment. The workplace is described as a place that can be a source of self-fulfillment or a place that can contribute to mental health issues. Therefore, staff members must learn to manage the stressors that come from the work environment. A poor workplace could negatively implicate employee morale, leading to weak job performance, health issues, and high turnover.

The suggested action plan will continue to need improvements using improvement science cycles. However, it will lay the foundation to start seeing noticeable change among the involved people. The driver diagram (Figure 29) is an overview of the organized thoughts of the suggested action plan. The diagram reads from left to right; the first column shows the initiative's aim. The second column contains the primary drivers. The third column contains elements that can be actionable items to help reduce attrition factors and increase special education teachers' retention. The fourth column shows the desired results from the actionable items.

Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) is an approach to test an implemented change. The PDSA method optimizes a process through small tests of change. It is significant in adapting research-based interventions and implementing them in everyday operations. The PDSA framework allows organizations to plan a change process, implement their test, observe and analyze, and decide how to react. The cycle starts with the Plan step involving identifying the purpose, theory, establishing success metrics, and implementing the plan. The plan goes to the Do step, Study step to monitor the outcomes, validate the test, and then the Action step. The Action step integrates lessons learned during the cycle, adjusting the objectives and broadening the cycle to a larger implementation plan.

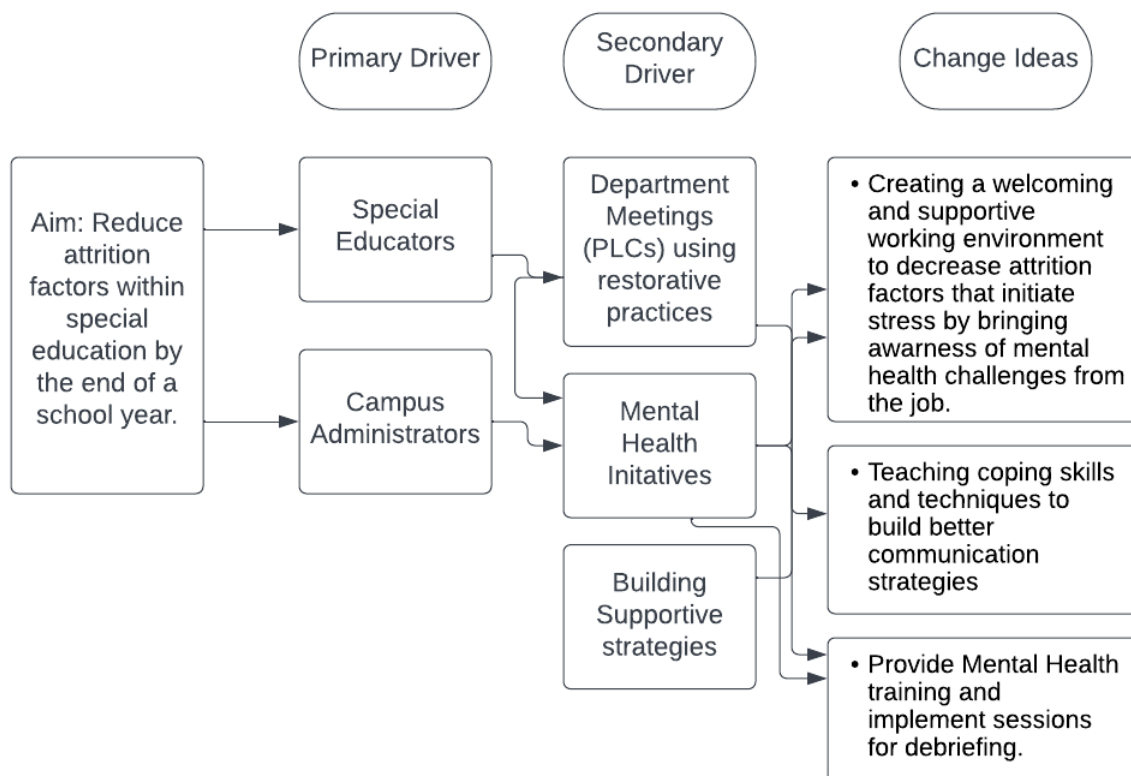
Action Plan—Plan-Do-Study-Act

Plan

The plan aims to reduce attrition by managing special education teacher stress levels (see Figure 30). Currently, there are no programs to educate teachers on coping with skills. Special education teacher stress is caused by burnout, inadequate administrative support, caseload, and paperwork. Mental health is a menace in today's society as workers struggle

Figure 29

Drivers of Attrition Reduction Within Special Education Programs



in the workplace. The PDSA will ease how employees manage challenges. Data from special education teachers concerning the stress level and management approaches will be collected. Data collected using run charts will help collect and analyze data. The special education teachers will rate themselves according to the stress levels.

In addition, the data collection will be tracked on an Excel sheet and identify self-care strategies. The objective is to respond to individual needs and ensure they have a work-life balance.

Figure 30

- Goal—decrease attrition among special education teachers.
- Objectives—creating a welcoming and supportive working environment to decrease attrition factors.
- Actions needed—active participation from all key stakeholders.
- Responsibilities—fully engage, be open and honest, willing to help themselves and improve the working environment.
- Resources needed—mental health resources.
- Time frame—1- to 3-year change, weekly meetings during PLCs.
- Monitoring and evaluation methods—campus staff satisfaction survey, decreased special education teachers' missed school days , decreased leaving the profession per campus, and improved leadership knowledge on special education work tasks and mental health.
- Campus leaders acknowledge mental health strain as a significant problem affecting teachers in special education and provide adaptive skills and strategies to help take away some stress from the job by actively listening and being

Elements of the Action Plan

Do

The test was conducted as planned. Special education teachers completed the causes of attrition and identified the stress management strategies to integrate into their life. The collected data reports indicated that teachers in special education were less productive when facing psychological distress.

Study

Special education teachers create a personalized stress management plan and are supervised reflectively. Special education teachers reported increased self-care approaches but needed help in sustaining the habit. Besides, several special education teachers reported a decrease in stress levels. They felt better equipped with healthy coping strategies to manage stress. Taking breaks reduced burnout and many special education teachers felt recharged.

Act

Who and What Is Involved. Guidance and counseling departments could support special education teachers and campus administrators. The special education department chair could head the initiatives with support from the campus administrator responsible for the special education department.

Time Frame. An ideal noticeable change can be identified within one school year by measuring the number of special education teachers who stay in their current job position and establishing a communication plan to help staff learn effective and productive communication with limited time availability. Once a week during professional learning community (PLC), staff could be participating in a mental health support circle to help manage their stressors from the job and receive feedback from other coworkers on what is working and beneficial.

Means to Monitor Activities and Assess the Success. The special education department chair and campus administrator could monitor progress.

Recommendations

Seeing a change in attrition factors will require that campus administrators become informed about how special education operates and the current systems on their campus. These administrators should be trained on how to connect with staff and promote staff well-being using mental health initiatives:

- Campus administrators could establish a Zoom-free Friday, meaning no meetings on Friday for special education teachers.
- Provide mental health training and implement sessions for debriefing.

- Promote the district Educational Assistance Program more often in school newsletters and around the school where staff members frequently visit.
- Create a culture that promotes work-life balance and increases awareness of the importance of physical and mental wellness.
- Create a wellness room ("Zen den") on campus for teachers to have a safe place to debrief from work stress. These rooms could include aromatherapy, massage chairs, and different therapeutic techniques.
- Acknowledge mental health strain as a significant problem, contributing to special education teachers and provide coping skills and strategies to help take away some stress from the job by actively listening and being available.
- Create new campus/departments traditions to help staff buy into the needed changes.

Conclusion

Campus administrators have a powerful influence on the culture and climate of their campuses. According to the 2022 Global Culture Report (O. C. Tanner Institute, n.d.), when employees feel connected to their teams, leaders, and organizations, they are 11 times more likely to stay for their organization. With compassionate leadership, employees are happier and less stressed in their workplace. They are also more invested in their work. Therefore, administrators, as the campus leaders, will find it beneficial for the mental health training to be applied to their own leadership level.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Demographics Questions

1. By selecting that you consent to take part in the survey, you are agreeing to freely participate in this survey, and have gone through the informed consent and understood.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. What is your job role?
 - a. Special Education Teacher
 - b. Campus Administrator
3. Select your administrator/special education teaching level(s)
 - a. Elementary School Level
 - b. Middle School Level
 - c. High School Level
4. Select your years of experience as an administrator/special education teacher
 - a. 0-1
 - b. 2-4
 - c. 5
 - d. 6-9
 - e. 10
 - f. 11+

Appendix B: Special Education Teacher and Campus Administrator Survey

Attrition—Rate the factor to its contribution to attrition.

How would you rate the level of support from campus administrators?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

How would you rate the level of support from other teachers?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

How would you rate your relationship with fellow teachers?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

How would you rate your level of satisfaction with the salary?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

How would you rate the level of Role dissonance: disparities between teacher's and perception of the profession and professional requirement?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

How would you rate the level of the work load?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

How would you rate your satisfaction level for attending meetings?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

How would you rate your school's culture (SPED department)?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

How would you rate preparation/professional development for the occupation?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

Retention—Rate the current knowledge of the listed intervention to improve special education teachers' retention rates.

Preparation Programs/ Professional Developments pertaining to benefiting Special Education Teachers

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

Decrease Case load/ work responsibilities

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

Increased Salary

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

Increase Campus Administrators Support

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

How would you rate your current knowledge level of effective interventions to improve the retention rates for special education teachers?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

Why did you rate yourself the number in the previous question?

What is your current skill level of effectively implementing interventions to improve the retention rates for special education teachers?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

Why did you rate yourself the number in the previous question?

What intervention plans are intended by campus administrators to enhance retention rates among special education teachers in the District?

On a scale 1 being low and 5 being high, how would you rate the importance of the mental health of special education teachers and campus administrators?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

Do you believe educational staff could improve campus's culture and climate by implementing more mental health interventions?

Yes

No

Maybe

If yes to the previous question, what mental health intervention would you suggest and why?

Appendix C: Data Output

Table C1

Independent Samples t Test for Special Education Teachers

Vari- ances	Levene's test ^a		<i>t</i> test ^b test					
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> ^c	MD	SED	95% CI
How would you rate the level of support from campus administrators?								
EVA	2.533	.128	1.174	19	.255	.472	.402	[−370, 1.314]
EVNA			1.217	18.931	.239	.472	.388	[−.340, 1.285]
How would you rate the level of support from other teachers?								
EVA	.197	.662	.587	19	.564	−.306	.520	[−1.395, .784]
EVNA			−.580	16.544	.570	−.306	.527	[−1.420, .809]
How would you rate your relationship with fellow teachers?								
EVA	.117	.736	−2.442	19	.025	−1.111	.455	[−2.063, −.159]
EVNA			−2.405	16.310	.028	−1.111	.462	[−2.089, −.133]
How would you rate your level of satisfaction with the salary?								
EVA	8.831	.008	2.255	19	.036	.806	.357	[.058, 1.553]
EVNA			2.494	15.997	.024	.806	.323	[.121, 1.490]
How would you rate the level of role dissonance: disparities between teachers and perception of the profession and professional requirement?								
EVA	9.121	.007	.218	19	.830	.083	.382	[−.716, .883]
EVNA			.240	16.534	.813	.083	.347	[−.651, .818]
How would you rate the level of the workload?								
EVA	8.380	.009	−2.248	19	.037	−.611	.272	[−1.180, −.042]
EVNA			−2.039	10.625	.067	−.611	.300	[−1.273, .051]
How would you rate your satisfaction level for attending meetings?								
EVA	.012	.915	.249	19	.806	.083	.334	[−.616, .783]
EVNA			.254	18.341	.803	.083	.329	[−.606, .773]
How would you rate your school's culture (SPED department)?								
EVA	1.408	.250	−1.525	19	.144	−.861	.565	[−2.043, .320]
EVNA			−1.605	18.954	.125	−.861	.536	[−1.984, .262]
How would you rate preparation/professional development for the occupation?								
EVA	1.084	.311	−.127	19	.900	−.056	.436	[−.968, .857]
EVNA			−.134	18.951	.895	−.056	.414	[−.922, .811]

Note. MD = Mean difference; SED, standard error of the difference; CI = confidence interval; EVA = equal variances assumed; EVNA = equal variances not assumed; SPED = special education. ^a Test of equality of variances ^b Test of equality of means. ^c Two-tailed.

Table C2

Independent t Test for Campus Administrators and Special Education Teachers

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Decrease Case load/work responsibilities	Equal variances assumed	.020	.889	-1.063	48	.293	-.330	.310	-.954	.294
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.077	36.734	.289	-.330	.306	-.951	.291
Increased Salary	Equal variances assumed	.743	.393	-1.695	48	.096	-.517	.305	-1.131	.096
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.846	44.411	.072	-.517	.280	-1.082	.047
Increase Campus Administrators Support	Equal variances assumed	1.255	.268	.071	48	.943	.024	.340	-.659	.708
	Equal variances not assumed			.079	46.089	.937	.024	.306	-.592	.640
How would you rate your	Equal variances assumed	.498	.484	-2.704	48	.009	-.965	.357	-1.683	-.247

current knowledge level of effective interventions to improve the retention rates for special education teachers?	Equal variances not assumed			-2.842	40.775	.007	-.965	.340	-1.651	-.279
Preparation Programs/ Professional Development	Equal variances assumed	3.340	.074	.187	48	.853	.063	.335	-.610	.735
nts pertaining to benefiting Special Education Teachers	Equal variances not assumed			.204	44.579	.839	.063	.307	-.555	.680

Appendix D: E-mail Recruitment Letter

My name is Cayla Wheaton. I am a doctoral student at the University of Houston. I am doing a study about reducing special education teachers' attrition and increasing retention factors. I want to determine the perception of special education teachers and campus administrators of why special education teachers leave the profession. The study will have one -survey containing 26 questions including multiple choice and open-ended questions. You are eligible for this study if you:

Have a certificate for special education

Presently teach special education in secondary

Formerly taught special education in secondary level

Presently certified campus administrator

I would like to include 50 people in this study.

25 special education teachers – secondary level

25 campus administrators – secondary level

If you have any questions or would like to take part in the research, I can be reached at Cwheaton@uh.edu or [936-524-3156](tel:936-524-3156).

Appendix E: IRB APPROVAL



DIVISION OF RESEARCH
Institutional Review Boards

APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

November 1, 2021

Cayla Wheaton

cwheaton@uh.edu

Dear Cayla Wheaton:

On November 1, 2021, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Special education teacher chronic shortage: Improving working conditions to reduce attrition and increase special education teachers' retention.
Investigator:	Cayla Wheaton
IRB ID:	STUDY00003251
Funding/ Proposed Funding:	Name: Unfunded
Award ID:	
Award Title:	
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Special Education Teachers and Campus Administrators - Google Forms.pdf, Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.);• Email Appendix ____ (1) (1).pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;• C.Wheaton HRP-503. (1) (1) (1).pdf, Category: IRB Protocol;• HRP-502a(2).pdf, Category: Consent Form;• Correspondence Corrections.docx, Category: Correspondence (sponsor, IRB, misc.);
Review Category:	Exempt
Committee Name:	Not Applicable
IRB Coordinator:	Sandra Arntz

The IRB approved the study on November 1, 2021 ; recruitment and procedures detailed within the approved protocol may now be initiated.



DIVISION OF RESEARCH
Institutional Review Boards

As this study was approved under an exempt or expedited process, recently revised regulatory requirements do not require the submission of annual continuing review documentation. However, it is critical that the following submissions are made to the IRB to ensure continued compliance:

- Modifications to the protocol prior to initiating any changes (for example, the addition of study personnel, updated recruitment materials, change in study design, requests for additional subjects)
- Reportable New Information/Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others
- Study Closure

Unless a waiver has been granted by the IRB, use the stamped consent form approved by the IRB to document consent. The approved version may be downloaded from the documents tab.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system.

Sincerely,

Research Integrity and Oversight (RIO) Office
University of Houston, Division of Research
713 743 9204
cphs@central.uh.edu
<http://www.uh.edu/research/compliance/irb-cphs/>

Appendix F: APPROVAL LETTER



16717 CELLA BLVD.
HOUSTON, TEXAS 77060

281-891-6035
www.springisd.org

Date: September 17, 2021

Cayla Wheaton
802 Autumn Point Ln
Spring, Texas 77373

Dear Ms. Wheaton,

The Spring Independent School District is pleased to approve your study, "Special education teacher chronic shortage: Improving working conditions to reduce attrition and increase special education teachers' retention." The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between retention and attrition among special education teachers. The researcher will seek to collect data via online survey from approximately 80 secondary campus administrators and 80 secondary special education teachers. Data collection will take place in the fall of 2021.

Approval to conduct the study in Spring ISD is contingent on meeting the following conditions:

- The researcher will recruit participants via email, and participants will include campus administrators and special education teachers at the secondary level.
- The total time for each staff's participation (completion of the online survey) will be approximately 30 minutes.
- No archival data will be requested from the district.
- It is at the discretion of campus principal(s) to participate in the research study. **Permission from the principal must be obtained prior to recruiting or collecting any data.**
- Collection of staff email addresses will be the sole responsibility of the researcher.
- All Spring ISD staff participating in this study must provide active informed consent before taking part in the study.
- District, schools, and staff are not identified in the study, and data remain confidential.
- The study does not infringe upon designated instructional time on a campus.
- Approval to conduct the study is granted for fulfillment of a graduate program at the University of Houston.
- The district receives copies of the completed final report within 30 days after its completion.

Any changes or modifications to the current proposal must be submitted for approval to the Spring ISD's Department of Research, Assessment, and Accountability. The district reserves the right to forego its participation in the study at any time without reason. Should you need additional information or have any questions concerning the process, please contact Dan Taylor at (281) 891-6353.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Dan Taylor'.

Dan Taylor, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Performance Analysis
Spring Independent School District

cc: Jennifer Cobb
LaQuita Carter

Miguel Perez
Natasha Watson

Michelle Starr
Rebecca Brown

Kimberly Fonteno