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2008

A View From The Field: Urban Special Education Directors' Perceptions Of Essential Competencies For Newly Appointed Special

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A VIEW FROM THE FIELD: URBAN SPECIAL EDUCATION DIRECTORS'
PERCEPTIONS OF ESSENTIAL COMPETENCIES FOR NEWLY APPOINTED SPECIAL
EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Child, Family and Community Sciences
in the College of Education
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2008

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this exploratory study was to determine what competencies urban directors of special education perceived to be essential for newly appointed urban special education administrators. Two research questions and two null hypotheses were generated to investigate the underlying factors in competencies perceived by urban special education directors to be essential for newly appointed special education administrators and to investigate the relationship between years of experience as a director of special education and these underlying factors.

A factor analysis revealed that there were three underlying factors reported to be essential for newly appointed special education administrators. A multiple regression analysis indicated that the relationship between the years of experience as a director of special education and the underlying factors (*Management, Instruction and Change; Supervision of Faculty; and Team Building Skills*) was not statistically significant. A post hoc test was conducted to further detect differences in years of experience as an urban director of special education and the underlying factors. The results were sufficient to reject the null hypotheses in both cases.

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Phillip and our children, Phillip Charles, Dwayne

Anthony and Sylvia Nicole. It is because of your support and patience that I was able to

successfully complete this study. I also dedicate this work to my parents, Cyril and Jennie Pratt

who instilled in me the value of an education and have always inspired me to pursue my dreams

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AERA   American Educational Research Association

ASCD   Association of Supervision and Curriculum

AYP   Adequate Yearly Progress

CEC   Council for Exceptional Children

FAPE   Free and Appropriate Public Education

IDEA   Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

IDEIA   Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act

LRE   Least Restricted Environment

NASSP   National Association of Secondary School Principals

NLCB   No Child Left Behind Act

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the purpose and significance of the study, the rationale for conducting the research, and the background to the study. In the latter regard, the chapter presents a synopsis of the challenges that special education administrators face in meeting the educational needs of students with disabilities. In particular, it will address some of the current issues in urban special education and how they impact and shape the role of the special education administrator. Thereafter, the chapter introduces the research questions and hypotheses for the study, provides a summary of the study's methods, and offers a list of definitions of terms used in this study.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify urban special education directors' perceptions of essential leadership competencies for newly appointed special education administrators. The study attempted to add to the body of literature by providing data on participants' perceptions of these competencies. A better understanding of essential competencies for newly appointed special education administrators will support improved leadership in urban schools. The study also sought to offer insight into relevant course work at the university level. In addition, its findings may be used to inform training and practice at the district level and allow them to incorporate authentic inservice professional development activities and assessments that would be meaningful in light of the competencies identified as essential for special education administrators in the urban school setting.

Rationale

There is little agreement about the definition of leadership among educators, researchers and theorists (see Hooper, 2006 and Levine, 2005). Moreover, over the past decades, the

definition has varied in response to educational trends. Hooper (2006) argues that it is not just

the "richness of the English language" (p. 3) that contributes to this variability, but also the

changing nature of leadership. Crockett (2007) contends that the landscape of school leadership

is changing due in part to recent mandates contained in the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and

in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004). The effects of

this transformation are evident in special education leadership, as the roles and responsibilities of

special education administrators have increased and at the same time become more ambiguous.

The special education administrator's role has evolved from "primary service provider of

children and youth with disabilities to more of a collaborator, partner, facilitator and educator of

the greater school community on issues of disability" (Martin, 2005, p. 1). The issues currently

facing urban special education administrators have shifted but remain critical, varied, and

challenging.

 In his reflections of the changing roles in special education administration, Reed (1995)

noted the following:

> The 'first wave' of administrators were advocates, promoting awareness of
> exceptional education students' needs and fighting for services. 'The second
> wave' had the benefit of research and information concerning best practices.
> They developed innovative models, promoted mainstreaming and sought effective
> programming for students with disabilities. The role of the 'third wave' of
> administrator has become increasingly more complex. The contemporary
> administrators realize schools are changing quickly and they must be key players
> in that metamorphosis. The job is a balancing act between the needs of students
> and the realities of a school district. (P. 15)

More than a decade later, many would argue that special education administrators are again

experiencing (and perhaps may even be caught up in) a new "wave." The field of special

education has undergone a series of legislative changes brought on by both advocates and critics

demanding greater access and accountability. Consequently, the role and function of the special

education administrator has changed swiftly and radically, with many of its most recent changes having the greatest impact on teaching, student learning, and accountability. A 2003 report from Division A of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), by Leithwood and Riehl state, "In these times of heightened concern for student learning, school leaders are being held accountable for how well teachers teach and how much students learn. They must respond to complex environments and serve all students well" (p. 1). Moreover, as Fullan (1999) asserts, "With change forces abounding, it is easy to experience overload, fragmentation, and incoherence. In fact, in education, this is the more typical state, policies get passed independent of each other, innovations are introduced before previous ones are adequately implemented, the sheer presence of problems and multiple unconnected solutions are overwhelming" (p. 27).

  Change is not a new phenomenon or an unwelcome event in special education. In fact, special education educators and supporters have always fought for and been driven by change. However, one major difference in the twenty-first century is that the roles and responsibilities are not as clearly defined due to the multiplicity of stakeholders who are involved in special education: "People differ by role (for example, parents, teachers, administrators, students), by discipline or grade level, counselors, special education teachers, resource teachers, by race and ethnicity, by social class and by ideology (for example, beliefs about how best to teach reading or mathematics)" (Bolman & Deal, 2002, p. 51). Stakeholders who represent diverse perspectives and who hold different and sometimes conflicting values do not all agree on the role and purpose of special education. As a result, it is difficult to identify and address the key issues in special education (Mantle, 2005) and, therefore, impossible to reach a consensus on how best to serve students with disabilities and their families. In contemplating special education's purpose and role, Hehir (2006) concluded: "If we accept the presumption that students with

disabilities have a right to participate in general education and be educated to their true potential, then a logical question that arises is the role of special education in achieving that goal. The changing role of special education will demand a change in not only in practices but in leadership as well" (p. 47).

According to Leithwood and Riehl, "Leadership is essential in promoting and sustaining change and has significant effects on student learning, second only to the effects of the quality of curriculum and teachers' instruction" (2003, p. 1). In fact, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) reported that a meta-analysis of 35 years of research on school leadership revealed that principals could have a significant impact on student achievement. Nonetheless, Boscardin (2004) argues that past and present educational reforms have focused exclusively on general education teachers and have not taken into account the "positive effects that positive administrative leadership can have on the adoption of reform efforts" (p. 263). In this era of high stakes testing, with an even greater emphasis on accountability, what do special education administrators need to know and be able to do in order to promote and sustain achievement for all students?

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) established professional standards for special education in 1922, and the organization remains the acknowledged leader in the development of standards for the field (Crutchfield, 2003). Drawing from an extensive search of the relevant literature and on the input of many members and their colleagues, the CEC (2003) created its Knowledge and Skill Standards. These standards identify 49 knowledge and skill requirements across ten domain areas as the core skills base for special education administrators.

While the acquisition of knowledge and skills is vital, it must be recognized that without the specific application of competencies, leadership will be ineffective and, at best, student

learning and achievement will be minimal. Missing from the research on the effectiveness of professional standards and of special education leadership preparation in general are current studies that represent a national sample that explore the special education leadership competencies needed in urban school environments. A goal of this study was to contribute to the filling of this gap.

Problem Statement

Recent changes in the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) and the 2001 passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) have created new roles and expectations for today's special education administrators. Newly appointed urban special education administrators will find that although their roles may vary, their actions will have an impact on students with special needs as well as on the delivery of programs (Mantle, 2005). Urban school and district administrators need to possess and utilize the knowledge and competencies that will lead to high quality performance for them and for those they lead (Martin, 2004). Indeed, the majority of the special education leadership literature is consonant on the importance of administrators possessing skills that allow them to effectively serve students with disabilities. DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2003), for example, assert that "Administrators who clearly understand the needs of students with disabilities, IDEA, and the instructional challenges that educators who work with students with disabilities face are better prepared to provide appropriate support" (p. 4). Yet Patterson, Bowling and Marshall (2000) report that principals are not properly trained for inclusion and special education leadership. Indeed, "Nowhere is the challenge of redefining the roles, strengthening the competence, and providing adequate support for leaders more crucial than in the area of urban special education" (Martin, 2005, p. 1).

Background

Urban School Districts

Of the nearly 16, 000 school districts in the United States (see Hoffman & Sable, 2006), just three percent educate almost 45% of the students in the country (Sadovnik et al., 2006). Approximately two-thirds of school districts enroll fewer than fifteen hundred students, the equivalent of the enrollment of a fair-sized urban middle school (Soppopvitz, et al., 2006). Moreover, urban school districts tend not only to be large but to be extremely diverse and to reflect the demographic characteristics of the urban environment as well.

Urban environments vary greatly and offer many economic opportunities. Their infrastructures are typically older than those of rural and suburban areas, yet they are in a constant state of flux. As large cities become increasingly poor and populated by minorities, their schools reflect the problems of 'urban poverty' (Sadovnik et al., 2006, p. 9). Cooke (2007) argues that urban school districts face a range of problems: an aging infrastructure, political issues, poverty, racial and cultural issues, English learners, rapid turnover of school administrators, and poor quality of teaching force. School districts are not only responsible for improving academic outcomes for all students, they are now held accountable for those of subgroups of traditionally underrepresented students, including those from low socio-economic backgrounds, English language learners, and those with special needs.

As of 2002, approximately 37% of all students in special education were ethnically diverse (National Center of Educational Statistics, 2002). Students from minority backgrounds, including culturally diverse students and English language learners (ELLs) are typically overrepresented across disabilities in special education programs (see Hosp & Reschly, 2004). In fact, a constant disproportionate number of minority students referred to and enrolled in

special education services has existed for more than 20 years (Meyer & Patton, 2001). In addition, students in urban schools have, on average, lower achievement in reading, writing, mathematics and science than students in suburban schools (Sadovnik at. el., 2006, p.8).

Moreover, special education teachers in high-poverty schools are particularly at risk for turnover (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004): "Of the nation's school districts, 98% report special education teacher shortages (Fideler, Foster, & Schwartz, 2000). Thus, schools in urban systems are more likely to have position vacancies in special education and have fewer fully certified teachers in this area than non-urban schools. Futhermore, Cistone and Stevenson (2000) report that the current principal shortage exists particularly in urban schools because leadership programs are out of touch with the daily demands that principals must confront. DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2003) explain that many school districts have been forced to hire uncertified personnel in administrative leadership positions due to the lack of qualified candidates.

Chapple, Beaker and Bon (2007) write: "As school districts respond to the multiple requirements and changes imposed by Individuals with IDEA and NLCB, the tendency may be found solely on the legal implications of these mandates" (p. 1). They conclude that it is not enough to possess an isolated understanding of the law and that in ignoring other competencies district administrators may neglect the interests and needs of the very children they are called to serve.

Inasmuch as schools in urban school districts may share common characteristics, each school also has its own social and cultural composition, with varying strengths and weaknesses. Thus, it is critical for newly appointed urban special education administrators to be equipped with the essential leadership competencies that enable them to appropriately support students

with disabilities in spite of the on-going challenges that are associated with school leadership, urban environments, and the administration of special education services and programs.

Special Education Leadership

Crockett (2007) notes that: "As the practice of special education administration moves from a compliance model to a locally delivered instructional model, administrators are wrestling with two questions: who is responsible for special education at different levels within a school system, and how are leadership tasks and functions accomplished to support successful learning for all students, especially those who have disabilities?" (p. 140). As a result of school reforms and recently established federal policies, the special education administrator's role as an instructional leader has become critical (Bays and Crockett, 2007). Because leadership expectations and practices in special education have changed considerably, to effectively serve students with disabilities and their families, it is important to reevaluate the specific skills and knowledge base needed for special education administrators. Effective leadership hinges on whether or not the special education administrators possess and draw upon a set of competencies that will allow them to address a myriad of responsibilities and challenges that routinely and/or unexpectedly arise during a school day. Because each administrator is unique and enters his or her new appointment with different experiences, personnel, and resources, it may be theoretically and empirically impossible to fully examine and report every skill set needed for success in a given setting. However, a review of the literature suggests that there is a core set of skills that special education administrators need to know and be able to demonstrate.

The Challenges of Special Education Leadership

The demands and challenges of special education leadership have never been greater. In an attempt to improve student achievement, the federal government, through the NCLB,

systematically targeted specific areas of concern within the public school system with the goals of improving student outcomes and closing the achievement gap. However, the mandates of NCLB have created new rules and regulations for measuring and monitoring student, teacher, and school performance. Subsequently, there has been an enormous emphasis on high stakes testing and accountability. An effective administrator today must focus on intense and informed collaboration between special and general education teachers, administrators, related service personnel, families, and community service agencies to support and sustain the learning and development of students with special needs. This calls for the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills for those responsible for the administration of special education services: "To be considered competent, principals should have fundamental knowledge of special education as well as knowledge of current issues in special education" (Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlrim-Delzell, 2006, p. 154). They must be knowledgeable about special education so that they can "adopt or change policies and practices" (Chapple, Baker, & Bon, 2007, p. 1). Possessing an understanding of job functions alone without the competencies needed will not be sufficient to successfully meet the challenges of special education urban school leadership. These challenges are addressed briefly in the following subsections.

Recruiting and Retaining Highly Qualified Teachers

Empirical and anecdotal research indicates that the use of ineffective or unqualified teachers over time results in missed learning opportunities for students that cannot be recovered (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). When novice teachers frequently replace other novice or more experienced teachers, a perpetuating cycle of weak instruction develops. Consequently, educational quality deteriorates; further widening the achievement gap: Thus, retaining highly qualified teachers is essential for the future of the profession as well as for

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improving every classroom. "Quality teaching in every classroom requires skillful leadership on the part of principals. There are no substitutes" (Sparks, 2004, p. 1).

Increased Paperwork and Administrative Demands

Along with greater accountability comes the need to document how progress is being measured and monitored for students and teachers. This translates into more paperwork and increased administrative demands as administrators seek ways to use data to drive instruction as well as to demonstrate to various stakeholders that learning is taking place: "The increase in paperwork, additional duties in relation to designing, leading, managing and implementing programs for students with disabilities, as well as being the instructional leader for non-traditional learners places a great responsibility in the hands of principals" (Praisner, 2003).

Instructional Leadership

With the 2004 reauthorization of IDEIA and Title II under NCLB, school leaders must also act as instructional leaders. In other words, principals are held accountable for the adequate yearly progress of all students, including those with disabilities. Thus: "It is critical that principals are knowledgeable about the needs of special education students as more general education teachers will need guidance and support for teaching all students" (Wakeman & colleagues, 2006, p. 154). Current trends and issues in the field of special education, such as inclusion, assistive technology, universal design, co-teaching, accommodations and high-stakes testing, demand close attention from special education administrators not only out of compliance but to also ensure student achievement.

Barriers that hinder the effectiveness of program implementation and the operation of special education services at the school and district level include slow communication,

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inadequate information, conflicting instructions, as well as multiple projects being implemented at the same time. As Fullan (2003) explains: "When so many demands are placed on the principalship, it is not just the sheer amount of work, that is the problem, but also the inconsistent and ambiguous messages. Take control, but follow central directives; make improvements, but run a smooth ship, and so on" (p. 22).

Special Education Law

Keeping abreast of complex and often contradictory legal requirements is yet another challenge for newly appointed special education administrators. Davidson and Algozzine (2002) examined principals' knowledge of special education law. Their findings indicated that the principals' application of IDEA provisions was limited and the areas of least restrictive environment, parent participation, procedural safeguards, and appropriate evaluation were difficult to apply. Additionally, the authors reported that the principals' incompetence could be harmful for students with disabilities who are already at risk for academic failure. This information is particularly troubling because the areas mentioned above are the most basic core components of special education.

Indeed, principals often feel that they lack the necessary knowledge to effectively advocate for students with disabilities (Riley, 2002). This general lack of knowledge of special education law and process is a result of both deficits in leadership preparation programs and the frequent legislative changes affecting the implementation and evaluation of special education programs: "It is not surprising that many become fearful and apprehensive of special education" (Mantle, 2005, p. 183). However, by acquiring the essential skills an individual may effectively "lead special education programs in spite of the challenges and complexities that can arise" (Mantle, 2005, p. 183). As DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2003) state: "Effective administrators

need to develop a working knowledge about disabilities and the unique learning and behavioral challenges various conditions present. They need a thorough understanding of the laws that protect the educational rights of students with disabilities. Without a solid understanding of IDEA and NCLB, principals cannot administer special education programs effectively" (p. 4).

Teacher Attrition

The impact of attrition is massive and creates great financial cost for both district and state educational agencies. In fact, the average cost of attrition is estimated at approximately 20% of every teacher's salary that leaves the field (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2003). And the problem is not an isolated one: "Thirty percent of all teachers and up to 50 percent of teachers in urban schools leave their jobs within five years" (NCES, 2004, p. 3). Moreover, the turnover rate is nearly 50% for beginning teachers in high-poverty schools (Berry & Hirsh, 2005). Indeed, teachers in urban schools or in schools with high proportions of low income or minority students are more likely to leave the profession (Markow & Martin, 2005). A 2002 survey of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative revealed that of the sixty-two special education directors from forty-seven urban school districts, the average vacancy rate reported for school districts was over 6%, with some rates as high as 21% in other urban systems (Martin, 2005). Additionally, the average percentage of urban special educators who were not fully certified ranged from 10 to 35% (Riley, 2002). As a result, special education administrators in urban schools are faced with the challenge of providing greater instructional support for a more diverse student body with fewer and/or less qualified personnel

Special Education Leadership Preparation

The U.S. Department of Education (2005) reports that there are more than 20,000 special education administrators at the state and local levels who are directly responsible for supervising

and managing the delivery of special education and related services. Thus, preparation for special education administrators is an issue of continuing concern. In many states, there is no difference in the preparation and training of special and general education administrators. Kaye (2002) reported that many states do not require course work in special education to earn a principal's license. Moreover, "Some states have recently loosened requirements for specialized licensure to increase the supply of special education administrators, and in some school districts, principals or their assistants have been hired as directors of special education" (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003, p. 5). Indeed, "Even those [administrators] with prior school experience who have little formal preparation for the role of principal rarely have adequate understanding of how to plan, coordinate, and deliver services to meet the needs of students with disabilities" (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2004, p. 7).

The disparity between preparation programs' expectations, goals and the competencies needed in the field is huge. Moreover, it is clear from the literature that there are major gaps and deficits in the acquisition of special education knowledge and skills in leadership preparation and training. It is therefore not surprising that many principals lack a firm understanding of the core principles upon which special education laws were established.

Special Education Leadership Competencies for the Twenty-first Century

Obtaining licensure does not guarantee that the license holder has the skills, knowledge, and disposition to be an effective administrator. In a recent study, Wakeman and colleagues (2006) surveyed members of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) on their knowledge of special education and the relationship between principals' level of experience and training, school performance, and their beliefs and practices. Findings from this study revealed that, of the 362 respondents, 92% indicated that they did not hold a special

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education teaching license or certification. A key finding of the study demonstrated the relationship between principals' knowledge and their practices: "Outcomes support the proposition that principals who indicated having more knowledge are involved in more aspects of special education programs. In other words, principals who reported knowing more also reported doing more" (Wakeman et al., 2006, p. 167).

In December of 2006, Martin Haberman, Distinguished Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, asked a special education leadership doctoral class at the University of Central Florida, "What does a school principal do that a cab driver wouldn't know how to do?" In this ironic and superficially absurd manner Haberman draws attention to the need to consider from fresh perspectives a very serious question: What competencies and skills do school principals need to be successful in their jobs?

Nevin (1979) was one of the first researchers to examine the required competencies of general education administrators in light of special education programs.   Later, Burello and Zadnik (1986) categorized principal competencies in special education in three areas: a basic knowledge of special education, a working knowledge of related laws and a working knowledge of best practices. As noted above, the CEC articulates in What Every Special Educator Must Know: The Ethics, Standards and Guidelines for Special Educators (2003) ten performance based-standards that form a core skill base for special education administrators. More than 100 CEC members contributed over the course of three years to the development of these standards. Moreover, thousands of CEC members as well as individuals from other organizations assisted in their validation. It should be noted that the CEC Knowledge and Skill Base for Special Education Administrators for Instructional Strategies (Standard 4); Learning Environments and Social Interactions (Standard 5) and Language (Standard 6) do not have specified sets of

advanced skills associated with them because the standards were developed under the assumption that candidates for special education administrator positions would have received previous training in special education. However, a review of the literature on leadership preparation and alternative certification programs documents that this is not the case.

Chalfant and Van Dusen Psch (2007) postulate that special education administrators in the future will need to "provide the necessary guidance and direction for making transitions to meet the needs of children with disabilities and comply with federal and state mandates" (p. 7). In addition, they emphasize that special education administrators must be able to influence policy and direction for the field.

<div align="center">Research Questions and Hypotheses</div>

This study examined two research questions in an effort to explore the competencies that urban special education directors perceive to be essential for newly appointed urban special education administrators. These research questions also allowed the researcher to examine specific competencies that have been identified in empirical and conceptual literature as being critical to effective special education leadership. The questions are as follows:

<div align="center">*Research Question 1*</div>

What are the factor(s) underlying competencies perceived by urban directors of special education to be essential to newly appointed urban special education administrators?

<div align="center">*Research Question 2*</div>

What relationship exists between the years of experience as a director of special education and the underlying factors identified through Research Question 1?

Definition of Terms

Attrition. Teachers exiting the profession, but may also include teachers who change fields (i.e., special education to general education) or schools.

Director of Special Education. For the purposes of this study, the terms director of special education will include administrators who work in central school districts offices to lead, supervise, and manage the provision of special education and related services for students with disabilities" and… "are responsible for ensuring the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), state and local statues as well as policies and procedures that stipulate a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment for all students with disabilities" (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003, p. 6) for all of the schools in their districts.

General Education. Direct participation in a general education class or activity planned and conducted by general education staff members.

Highly Qualified. Highly qualified teachers of core subjects are required to hold (1) a bachelor's degree, (2) full state certification, and (3) demonstrate subject matter competency in the academic subject they teach.

Inclusion. The practice of educating all or most children in the same classroom, including children with physical, mental, and developmental disabilities.

Least Restrictive Environment. An educational setting or program that provides a student needing special education the chance to work and learn; it also provides the student with as much contact as possible with non-disabled children, while meeting the child's learning needs and physical requirements in a regular educational environment to whatever degree is appropriate.

Newly Appointed Special Education Administrator. For the purposes of this study, a newly appointed special education administrator is one with three years or fewer in the field as an administrator of special education.

No Child Left Behind Act. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. It contains four basic education reform principles: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching methods based on scientifically-based research (Bateman & Bateman, 2006).

Special Education. Specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities, including classroom instruction, instruction in physical education, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions. The term also encompasses speech therapy and any other related service or vocational education if they consist of specially designed instruction at no cost to the parent.

Special Education Administrator. School administrators are those persons occupying various roles in the school who provide direction and exert influence (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). For the purposes of this study, the term "special education administrator" includes principals, assistant principals, supervisors, and coordinators of special education programs who provide direction for and/or exert influence over special education services and who are directly responsible for the implementation, delivery, and evaluation of services and programs for students with disabilities at the school building level.

Urban. For the purpose of this study "urban" pertains to a central geographic location within a metropolitan area (sometimes surrounded by suburbs) that is characterized by a dense

population. Social history and demographics indicate that ethnically and racially diverse people are concentrated in these areas (Obiakor & Beachum, 2005).

Delimitations

This study was delimited by the fact that only members of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative were asked to respond.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this research study. First, the sample was one of convenience and, therefore, not as strong as using random sampling procedures. Second, the study's findings were based on urban directors of special education self-reported perceptions and, as with any self-report approach, the participants may overestimate or underestimate their perceptions. Third, it could be possible that there are other unknown competencies not discussed in the literature. Fourth, the results of the study may be generalized only to those school districts with similar characteristics held by participants. Finally, validity of the study relies on participants' honest responses to the questionnaire.

Assumptions

The study was based on following assumptions: sample participants answered honestly; urban directors of special education will be knowledgeable of the specific competencies that newly appointed special education administrators will need to be effective in their school districts; the participants' responses were not influenced by work context or social pressures; the participants did not have any ulterior motive for answering, other than that their responses would contribute to the growing body of research on special education leadership.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Scope and Search Methods

This chapter presents a review of the literature pertaining to special education leadership and to the essential skills needed for newly appointed urban special education administrators. Special education leadership is discussed first, followed by the impact of legislative and reform movements on the administration of special education. The evolving role of the special education administrator is then explored, as are the competencies necessary for urban special education leaders. Finally, a description of current leadership preparation programs is presented, followed by an assessment of the literature pertaining to the school district's role and responsibility in providing support and training for newly appointed special education administrators.

An extensive search for information was conducted using a number of academic databases. These included Ebscohost, Academic Premier, ERIC, Wilson's Education Fulltext and Proquest's Dissertation Abstracts. Websites and the library card catalogues were also examined. Search terms and descriptors used to find information for the study included the following: *special education administration, special education leadership, competencies, skills, urban schools, school district administrators, principals*, and *students with disabilities*. Additional information was obtained from professional communications and from books and reports that were reviewed based on the recommendations of special education professionals. Literature on the retention of special education personnel was also reviewed due to the impact of the chronic shortage of special education teachers in urban school districts. In some cases, older research is reported alongside more recent studies in order to present a historical perspective on the role of the special education administrator or because these particular works were deemed to

be especially relevant to the present study. In general, information was included only if it was considered to provide a valuable contribution toward understanding the competencies needed for newly appointed urban special education administrators.

Special Education Leadership

Little empirical data has been collected on the education of students with disabilities and the role and impact of principals therein. Burello et al. (1992) studied the role of the principal as instructional leader, Black and Downs (1993) examined effective school administration and discipline, and Sires and Tonnen (1993) reviewed principals' ability to help special education teachers be successful by streamlining paperwork and providing opportunities for special and general education teachers to interact. O'Connor (1996) explored the characteristics of effective leaders and Goor, Schwenn, and Boyer (1997) discussed a comprehensive training approach to preparing principals for leadership in special education. Prior research on special education leadership indicated a need for principals to receive additional training in order to successfully administrate special education programs and services (Burello, Schrup, & Barnett, 1988; DeClue, 1990; Van Horn, Burello, & DeClue, 1992). More recently, however, as issues related to achievement and accountability for students with disabilities have come to the fore, the literature on special education administration has grown (see Crockett, 2007).

Lashley (2007), a former special education director, states that although principals in the past were encouraged to be "involved" in the education of students with disabilities, they generally played a limited role and, by and large, "liked it that way" (p. 179). Today, however, limited involvement of principals in the education of students with disabilities is no longer an option:

> The advent of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) has changed the
> leadership landscape in schools across the United States. The accountability

provisions in the Act focus on school improvement and the performance of all students. Principals have seen their roles shift toward emphasizing instructional leadership, monitoring the achievement for all students, and using data to make decisions. (Lashley, 2002, p. 177)

Indeed, a series of landmark cases as well as past and present legislative reforms and initiatives have steered the field of special education in a new direction—requiring principals to demonstrate their efforts and their effectiveness in meeting the academic needs of students with special needs.

<div align="center">Significant Legislative and Reform Movements</div>

Compulsory education laws have been in place since 1918; however, children with disabilities were once rarely included in public schools. Those children who were denied access to a formal education had two options: to remain at home or to be institutionalized. The Civil Rights Movement and the monumental 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision led to subsequent victories for children with disabilities. These two events laid the foundation for the philosophy that children with disabilities are entitled to equal access to a free and appropriate education along with their typically developed peers.

Additionally, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 provided a comprehensive plan to address the inequality of educational opportunity for children from economically underprivileged backgrounds. Between the 1950s and the 1970s, the role of school administrators was re-framed with a focus on school law, equity, political unrest, and school improvement (Hessel & Holloway, 2002). Also, during this time parent groups challenged the notion that individuals with disabilities could not and/or should not receive assistance.

Wolfensberger's (1972) original concept of the Normalization principle helped to change the perception of how people with disabilities should be included in society. Wolfensberger held that people with disabilities, particularly those individuals with mental retardation who were

routinely placed in mental institutions, had the right to lead "normal" lives, including being part

of a family, attending a local school, and holding a job in the community. This notion developed

into the concept of inclusive education. Instead of providing two separate systems, regular and

special education, schools could offer an array of services that allowed special education students

to participate in the same programs as non-disabled children. Two seminal cases, *Pennsylvania*

Association for Retarded Children (PARC) *v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972) and *Mills*

v. Board of Education (1972), would later serve as the legal basis for guaranteeing and entitling

students with disabilities access to the public school system and the right to be educated in more

inclusive environments. PARC ensured each student up until the age of 21 a free and

appropriate education (hereafter FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (hereafter LRE), and

the historical *Mills* case settled the fact that students with disabilities could not be denied access

to schools.

The Rehabilitation Act, P.L. 93-112 was passed in 1973. A major component of this Act

was Section 504, which granted the right for individuals with disabilities to be free from

discrimination. As a result, any agency that received federal funds, such as public schools, had

to adhere to this law and its regulations.

In 1975, Congress passed Public Law 94-142, also known as the Education for All

Handicapped Children Act. This landmark legislation required schools to provide FAPE to

students with a broad range of disabilities. Further, schools were charged with the responsibility

of providing educational services in the LRE to the maximum extent possible.

The report entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983) is

considered to be a major turning point in modern U.S. educational history.   The National

Commission on Excellence in Education surveyed national and international studies that

examined academic underachievement. The Commission concluded that the U.S. education

system was failing and that the end result would be the lack of a competitive national workforce.

Several recommendations were made that addressed changes that should be made in the areas of

content, standards and expectations, time, teaching and leadership, and fiscal reporting. Also of

central importance was the commitment of public support for education:

> All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and
> to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the
> utmost. This promise means that *all* children by virtue of heir own efforts,
> competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed
> to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not
> only their own interests but also the progress of society itself. (U.S. Dept. of Ed.,
> 198b[1983])

The slogan "All children means all children" became the mantra for educators and for private

citizens—mostly families of disabled children—who advocated for students with disabilities.

This saying aptly expressed the point of view that every child was entitled to the same access and

opportunities as their non-disabled peers.

In 1986, Madeline Will, the U. S. Department of Education's Assistant Secretary for

Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, proposed strategies for students who were having

difficulty learning. Known as the Regular Education Initiative (REI), this proposal provided

recommendations regarding how special and general education teachers might partner to

improve the education of students who were not academically successful. REI resulted in

several states piloting programs that linked general education teachers with special education

teachers to combine their expertise in order to provide effective teaching strategies to students

with disabilities, students considered to be at risk, and typically developing students. This

initiative placed a major emphasis on standards and led to the school restructuring movement in

the 1990's.

In 1990 and 1997 the law was reauthorized and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which resulted in providing many students with access to an education that they had been previously denied. As a result, students with disabilities were educated in small classes in which special education teachers provided instruction based on each student's Individualized Educational Program (IEP). In addition, schools were required to provide services, such as interpreters for the deaf or computer-assisted technology for the physically impaired, that would allow students to be successful. Eventually, students receiving special education services began to spend more time in general education classroom settings with their typically developed peers.

The standards based movement of the 1990s required greater accountability for student performance. However, students with disabilities were not expected to participate in statewide assessments. The movement focused on high academic standards, more rigorous assessments, and incentives for educators and schools that met the set standards. Previously, Thurlow, Elliott, and Ysseldyke (1988) had investigated educational outcomes for students with disabilities and explained why students with disabilities should be included in the standards-based assessments and accountability measurements. The six reasons given by the researchers for inclusion in the standards reform were as follows: 1) to have an accurate picture of education; 2) to allow students with disabilities to benefit from reforms; 3) to make accurate comparisons; 4) to avoid unintended consequences of exclusion; 5) to meet legal requirements; and 6) to promote high expectations (see Thurlow, 2002, p. 196). The researchers worked with activists, policymakers and other special education researchers to make sure that students with disabilities were included in standardized state testing.

In 1997, the passage of the reauthorization of IDEA ensured that children with disabilities were given a quality education. Yet according to Lashley (2007), the 1997 Amendments to IDEA failed because they did not "provide incentives or sanctions to ensure that principals accepted the responsibility for the education of students who have disabilities" (p. 178). In fact, Lashley contends that 30 years later, education by and large was still separate for students with disabilities and that, administratively, this was "business as usual" (p. 178).

In 2001 Congress added benchmarks, measurements, and sanctions to the ESEA of 1965 and called it the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The primary goal of NCLB was to raise every child to proficiency in reading and math by the 2013-2014 school year. The Act was intended to assure student achievement and to increase the level of accountability for those responsible for educating the nation's children. Students with disabilities are recognized as a subgroup under No Child Left Behind policy. To meet the NCLB standard, all subgroups (i.e., immigrant students, English language learners, and children from low-income families) as well as students with disabilities must make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). AYP is determined by the extent to which schools meet the specific goals set by states for each subgroup. According to U.S. Department of Education statistics for the 2000-2001 school year, 6.3 million children aged 3 to 21 received some form of special education. NCLB mandates that students with disabilities receive reasonable adaptations and accommodations that are necessary to measure the academic achievement of the student relative to state academic content and standards (20 U.S.C.1414(d)(1)(A)(v)). Furthermore, NCLB sanctions schools that fail to make acceptable progress on students' reading and math proficiency tests.

In an attempt to improve student achievement, an additional mandate of NCLB focuses on teacher quality. There is general consensus among researchers that teacher quality is a

powerful predictor of student achievement (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; O'Shea, 2000; Sanders & Horn, 1998). A substantial body of research reveals that quality teaching has a dramatic impact on student achievement and, in fact, is one of the most important school determinants of student achievement (Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004).

The Evolving Role of the Special Education Leader

A New Era

Jones (2002) reported in the July 2002 President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education that we had entered a new era for special education. Since then, the 2004 reauthorization of IDEIA, along with other state and district educational initiatives, has resulted in increased demands and higher expectations for schools to demonstrate effectiveness and achievement for all students. More specifically, the current reforms and policies require evidence of academic achievement for students with disabilities and impose upon them the same high stakes standardized testing as their non-disabled peers, thus changing the practice of special education. Consequently, all school administrators are equally responsible for the education of students with varying abilities—i.e., those with and without disabilities.

As DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, and Walther-Thomas (2004) explain, "Providing appropriate educational opportunities for all students is a lofty goal. Neither legislative mandates, such as NCLB, nor noble intentions can guarantee better educational outcomes for all students. To fulfill the goal of leaving no child left behind in today's school reform, capable and caring leaders are needed in every school" (p. 8). These authors also point out that the need for positive educational outcomes for students with disabilities can no longer be ignored and that the role of the principal is critical in reaching this goal and in ensuring that students receive special education services.

Traditionally, the notion of special education administrators' requisite knowledge and skills has centered on legal issues relevant to special education. However, in light of new mandates and its impact on the field of special education, it is critical to the effectiveness and overall quality of service and delivery that researchers explore more broadly what competencies may be needed for newly appointed special education administrators to be successful in this new era of accountability. Thus, following Wakeman et al. (2006), the present study examined special education leadership competencies from the perspective of two knowledge domains: fundamental issues and current issues.

Knowledge of Fundamental Issues

"Although principals do not need to be disability experts, they must have fundamental knowledge and skills that will enable them to perform essential special education leadership tasks" (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003, p. 11). Fundamental knowledge is "that knowledge that is core to the basic understanding of the functioning and history of special education and the students it serves" (Wakeman et al., 2006, p. 155). Studies on special education leadership that have focused on what principals know and what they need to know about special education *law* include Cline (1981), Davidson and Algozinne (2002), Davidson and Gooden (2001), Hirth and Valesky (1989), and Olson (1982). Indeed, knowledge of special education law, as it relates to students' and parents' rights as well as to the school's responsibilities, is not only important, it is vital in order to provide high quality services to students with disabilities and their families.

Formerly, prevailing practices for administrators of special education were driven by the nature of their role, which commonly focused on one major goal: to avoid litigation. Undeniably, the foundations and principles of special education law are the fundamental underpinnings of any special education preparation program, however, it should not be the only

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focus of preparation and training because it is not the only aspect needed to be a successful

special education administrator. Recent mandates and current issues, indeed, have changed that

practice, expanding the role of the principal from what DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2003)

described as "narrowly defined" (p. 7) to one that Lashley and Boscardin (2003) assert must

now integrate the principles of special education, general education, and educational

administration. Likewise, Lupi and Martin (2005) assert that to be effective, special education

administrators must know what skills and dispositions are needed as well as understanding how

to bring human and other resources to the table to get the job defined clearly and done well.

Knowledge of Current Issues and Trends

In their book *What Every Principal Needs to Know about Special Education,* McLaughlin

and Nolet (2004) state: "We have deliberately not focused on legal procedures because we

believe that today's principal needs much more than a set of rules in order to be an effective

leader for special education" (p. 91). Indeed, to make informed decisions and to complete tasks

efficiently and effectively, administrators must possess an understanding not only of fundamental

but also of current issues in special education. Wakeman et al. (2006) define "Current issues [as]

those that drive the development of research, the writing of policy, and the practices in special

education" (p. 155). Knowledge of such issues is crucial because

> …educational leaders perform a multitude of professional tasks. They plan, they
> network, they organize, they make budgets, they represent their institutions to a
> larger environment, they hire and fire, they try to improve and plan change.
> Regardless of the school in question, it is possible to observe educational leaders
> carrying out these organizational functions. Most importantly, educational
> leaders constantly make decisions about the lives of other human beings….
> (Bryant & Morrow, 2007, p. 3)

In this context, Lashley and Boscardin challenge (2003) "educators responsible for

preparing school leaders to address the needs of all students…. [These leaders] should develop

approaches that integrate knowledge, skills, and dispositions from special education, general education, and educational administration. Prospective administrators must be equipped to forge new designs for inclusive, diverse, unified schools" (p. 11). These authors further contend that special education leaders should be grounded in the principles of "leadership, organizational dynamics, and general education" (p. 11) as well, so that they may unite two systems that have for decades operated separately but must now work collaboratively to educate all children in all schools. School administrators cannot accomplish this formidable task without first possessing a working knowledge of current issues in special education.

One example of a current issue in special education is universal design for learning (UDL), a framework for designing the curriculum or materials in educational settings. Universal design originated from a movement in which architects, engineers, environmental design researchers and product designers sought to accommodate a broader range of users, in particular, individuals with disabilities. From their work, products such as automatic doors, video captioning, cut curbs and speakerphones became accessible to all. Such alternative structures and designs have proven beneficial and used by the general population (Rose, 2000). Emphasizing the same philosophy, UDL recognizes that there is a continuum of learning differences and that instruction and materials need to be diverse to meet the needs of all learners.

First cited in the 1998 Assistive Technology Act (section 3(17)), UDL was again addressed in IDEIA 2004. IDEIA 2004 uses the same definition that was used in 1998; however, it does not exclude the use of assistive technology. UDL proposes that information be presented in various forms and media, that multiple ways be provided for students to participate and express themselves, and that various ways are used to engage and sustain students' interests and motivation (Rose & Meyer, 2002). One central idea is that UDL should be incorporated from the

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beginning, when teachers are designing their lessons, and should be flexible enough to accommodate individual learning styles. By incorporating universal design strategies, teachers can tailor or customize the curriculum to meet the unique learning needs of their students. Surprisingly, in a national study, Wakeman et al. (2006) discovered that only 28% of the principals surveyed had a comprehensive understanding of universal design—an instructional strategy that would be of great benefit to all students.

Some of the "current" issues that administrators grapple with are not at all new but continue to present major challenges and to cause great concern; these include the overidentification of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Dunn (1968) first expressed concern about the overrepresentation of minorities in special education and in certain placement subgroups. In this context, an alternative is available in Response to Intervention (RtI), an initiative that provides intervention to children who may be at risk for academic failure and that may assist in the identification of children with disabilities (CEC, 2007). RtI may also serve as a way to prevent students who are experiencing difficulty learning from being hastily referred to special education prior to receiving research-based interventions. DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2003) stress how critical principal leadership is in ensuring that students with disabilities have access to effective learning programs. Clearly, the success of any RtI model will rest heavily on the knowledge, support, and ability of the special education administrator to lead and unite a team of individuals who traditionally have worked separately.

Recruitment and retention of special educators are additional issues and areas of concern for urban special education administrators. Each year teachers leave the profession in record numbers, further exasperating the existing chronic teacher shortage. The mass exodus of special education teachers has been well documented in several studies (Berry & Hirsh, 2005; Billingsly,

2005; Boe et al., 1993; Brownell et al., 2002, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2000a; Ingersol, 2001;

McClesky et al., 2003; Rosenberg et al., 2005; Whitaker, 2001; Council for Exceptional

Children, 2000). The current literature on the role of the principal in special education reveals

that administrative support is crucial in the retention of special educators (Billingsley, 2005).

With a basic understanding of the role of the special educator, school administrators can offer

administrative support and address the specific needs that may influence a teacher's decision to

leave the field.

　　All in all, special education administrators require knowledge of both fundamental and

current issues to be able to address the complexities of the legal and contemporary components

associated with special education leadership. An understanding of educational content must not

trump the need to understand the current issues related to special education. Further, newly

appointed special education administrators must possess the knowledge and skills that will

enable them to be well informed and directly involved in the educational planning and decision-

making process for students with disabilities.

Identifying Essential Competencies for Urban Special Education Administrators

What Special Education Administrators Should Know

　　Recognizing that "The quality of educational services for children and youth with

exceptionalities resides in the abilities, qualifications, and competencies of the personnel who

provide the services" (Council for Exceptional Children, 1998, p. iii), the Council for

Exceptional Children (CEC) has published standards for educators in special education since

1996. The seven standards identified in *What Every Special Educator Must Know: Ethics,*

Standards, and Guidelines for Special Educators (CEC, 2003) include foundations, development

and characteristics of learners, individual learning differences, instructional planning,

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assessment, professional and ethical practice, and collaboration. These standards represent the basic foundation that both teachers and administrators in special education should possess in order to "practice safely and effectively" (p. xii).

McLaughlin and Nolet (2004) argue that every principal needs to understand the legal foundations underlying special education entitlements in order to create school wide conditions that support effective special education. These authors define special education as a set of services and supports that matches instruction to the learning characteristics of individual students with disabilities to give them access to curriculum and to ensure that they continually learn and progress in that curriculum. To provide effective special education, principals need to understand how to include students with disabilities in assessments and new accountability systems (p. 3). In a review of early studies Lashley and Boscardin (2003) found that, "Early competencies identified for the successful practice of special education administration included knowledge of the following areas: disabilities in children, school law, general education, vocational education, curriculum and instruction, effective interventions, budgeting, finance, negotiation and conflict resolution, due process, professional development, personnel and program evaluation and supervision, administrative duties, supervisory/consultative duties, service delivery, planning, organization, management, coordination, teacher assistance teams, and family issues around disabilities" (p. 2).

Similarly, Chalfant and Van Dusen Pysh (2007) identified five critical standards for special education administrators. First, they argue that administrators must be familiar with evidence-based practices for the identification, assessment, and delivery of special education services. Second, administrators must possess leadership and management skills and the communication skills needed to collaborate effectively with school faculty, community groups,

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and families when making decisions and mediating conflicts. They must have a basic understanding of the legal foundations of special education, policy development and analysis, and personnel development and of the skills needed to provide culturally responsive education to culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Finally, they must be proficient in the use of technology that collects and analyzes data and information for determining student and program outcomes.

While these lists of special education standards disagree in some details, they are generally in agreement with the five key components listed by Wakeman et al. (2006). All of the researchers agree that special education teachers and administrators should be familiar with the characteristics of disabilities and the legislation concerning special education services. Like administrators in special education, general education administrators must put professional practices into play, recognize learning differences among their students, and employ the principle that all teachers must teach all students. In this respect, Wakeman et al. reflect Lashley and Boscardin's (2003) observation that "Special education administration is located where special education, general education, and educational administration come together" (p. 3). In fact, virtually all of the standards listed above could apply equally to each of these three groups. Thus, more than ever before, special education programs cannot, as they once did, operate independently or in isolation. The effectiveness of services and programs will depend on collaboration and interaction with general education personnel.

<div align="center">Research Studies on Special Education Competencies</div>

Recent studies on special education administration have been relatively scarce and have focused primarily on competencies in legal or compliance issues. A few of the studies in this review included a relatively large number of participants. The smallest study contained 30

participants (Balt, 2000) and the largest had 408 participants (Praisner, 2003). A majority of the studies (Burton, 2004; Davidson & Algozzine, 2002; Lasky & Karge, 2006; Stevenson-Jacobson, Jacobson & Hilton, 2006; and Wakeman et al., 2006) used quantitative surveys disseminated by mail or a combination of personal interviews and surveys. Several studies (Balt, 2000; Burton, 2004; Davidson & Algozzine, 2002; Farley, 2002; Lasky & Karge, 2006; and Praisner, 2003) were restricted to a particular geographic region. However, Wakeman et al. (2006) and Riley (2002) included national perspectives.

Stevenson-Jacobson, Jacobson and Hilton (2006) surveyed principals of both elementary and secondary schools to determine what competencies were needed for a principal to operate successful special education programs. Given the chronic and persistent teacher shortage, it is not surprising that recruitment was identified as a critical area. The principals also suggested that, given the increasing numbers of students with disabilities being educated in co-taught general education classrooms, teachers and administrators should be familiar with collaborative teaching strategies. In addition, both the elementary and secondary school principals noted that teachers and administrators needed to be familiar with special education law and regulations, specifically, general/special education procedures, parent rights, state and federal statutes and requirements, and the need to provide an education to children with disabilities in the LRE (p. 44). Chapple, Baker and Bon (2007) observe that these findings are compatible with the competency standards identified in *What Every Special Educator Needs to Know* (CEC, 2003).

In 2002, the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative, a national network of urban central office special and general education administrators, surveyed its members on a variety of special education topics, including leadership training, retention, and critical competencies for newly appointed special education administrators. When asked what

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competencies were essential to the success of special education administrators, the most frequent

responses were knowledge of special education laws and regulations, the ability to collaborate

with general education colleagues and to work with parents and community agencies,

interpersonal and communication skills, resource and management skills, crisis resolution skills

and the ability to navigate organizational change, and the ability to develop and realize a shared

vision of a special education program within the general education environment. Essential

competency areas related to special education leadership in the Stevenson-Jacobson, Jacobson

and Hilton (2006) study and in Chalfant and Van Dusen Pysh's (2007) work support what

members of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative (2002) perceived to be

essential to the success of special education administrators. Common areas include: law and

regulations, collaboration and communication, and community and family relations. In all of

these cases, many of the responses could apply equally to administrators in general education.

However, as McLaughlin and Nolet (2004) point out: "On the surface, these competencies may

sound like ideals every school leader should strive for, in reality, they are difficult to achieve if

the needs of the students enrolled in special education are to be met" (p. 200).

<div align="center">Newly Appointed Urban Special Education Administrators</div>

In many schools, novice administrators are assigned special education as one of their

primary responsibilities (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). As Jentz and Murphy (2005) state,

"Starting a new job is inherently confusing" (p. 736), and starting out with special education

responsibilities—especially for the novice administrator—is a bit like being thrown into the deep

end of a pool and told to "sink or swim." The expectations regarding what a special education

administrator must know and be able to do are not always clearly defined, and when new

administrators are "suddenly thrust into situations…related to strange-sounding issues such as

IEPs, 504 decisions, due process hearings, and IDEA compliance" (CEC, 2001, p. 1) "without a working knowledge about students with disabilities" (Diapola & Walther-Thomas, 2003, p. 11), they are not always able to make informed decisions that are in their best interests of the students. When Davidson and Algozzine (2001) surveyed 120 novice administrators in North Carolina using scenario-based questions, they found that the administrators lacked sufficient knowledge of the IDEA and special education law and that many of the administrators acknowledged a need for additional training.

Even when newly appointed school administrators have acquired the requisite skills and knowledge, the demands of a new position can prove to be quite challenging. They must build relationships and communicate regularly with families of students with disabilities (Bateman & Bateman, 2001; Gersten et al., 2001) and provide information to "families and teachers about special education services, promoting disability awareness, monitoring and evaluating special education decisions and services, and ensuring legal compliance" (COPPSE, p. 2). Oplatka (2004) argues that it is unreasonable to believe that newly appointed administrators will be fully equipped to assume the role of principal as efficiently as more experienced administrators. Yet many newly appointed administrators are given the most challenging appointments. Effective leadership is most important to schools where there are the greatest challenges (Leithwood, et al., 2004). In urban schools, for example, "every problem is pronounced, every solution harder to implement" (Snipes, Doolittle, & Herlihy, 2002, p. xiii). However, a review by the South Carolina Educational Policy Center discovered that 69% of the principals in low-performing schools were in their first year at the schools, and more than half were in their first year as administrators (McColskey & Monrad, 2004).

Pre-Service Programs in Education Leadership and Special Education

Recently, leadership preparation programs have been widely and severely criticized for their ineffectiveness. In his four-year study, Levine (2005) found fragmented and outdated programs that addressed skills in isolation to be the norm. DeVita (2005) agrees that the knowledge base of these programs is outdated, and she notes that the course work in leadership preparation is irrelevant because it does not address the issues and problems that school leaders are likely to encounter. Finally, Murphy (2007) states that "...the most recent data on this issue reveal that more than two-thirds of professors of educational administration have had no pre-K-12 experience. And more than 90% of faculty at research universities lack preK-12 administrative experience" (p. 584).

Farley (2002) noted that many of the professors at universities in Tennessee were not trained in special education and opted not to teach classes that prepared principals for special education administration, assuming that such courses would be taught by other faculty members. Similarly, Lashley and Boscardin (2003) found that "While research about the preparation of special education administrators is limited, we have concluded that preparation programs are linked to state certification requirements, there is considerable confusion about preparation and certification requirements, and there are relatively few preparation programs that are oriented specifically to special education administration" (p. 2).

Given the complexity of federal and state rules and regulations regarding special education and the limited training that new administrators receive, it is not surprising that many leave their programs poorly prepared for their responsibilities (Hess & Kelly, 2006): "Unfortunately, licensing for administrators rarely addresses knowledge, skills, and dispositions to develop, supervise, and evaluate the delivery of high-quality special education and related

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services or to collaborate with special education leadership" (CEC, 2001). Moreover, there is a general lack of uniformity in the leadership standards established by the individual states and school districts: "While some states have been quite rigorous, clearly defining competencies and expectations for special education administrators, other states have no such definitions or guidelines" (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003, p. 6).

In a national study of 362 principals by Wakeman et al. (2006), nearly 48% indicated that they had received little special education training in their principal licensing program and less than 38% reported having had some specialized training. As Adams and Copeland (2005) observe, "Licensing, by design, represents only entry-level knowledge and skills, a level sufficient to keep the public from harm. It does not indicate that a principal is able to tackle the occupation's thorniest problems. The hardest and most consequential tasks require expertise beyond the license and a concerted effort to develop it" (p. 2).

<center>Alternative Certification Leadership Programs</center>

There is a vast array of certification choices for candidates seeking positions in educational leadership (Korostoff and Orozco, 2002). As Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, and Meyerson (2005) observe, "In the wake of liberalized policy developments and certification requirements in some states, the emergence of district owned and operated programs has become an increasingly attractive way of supplying the administrative pipeline with qualified candidates" (p. 16). Moreover, principal certification programs "…rarely provide or require preparation for principals to deal with the instructional needs of students receiving special education or the needs of their parents" (Jacobs, Tonnsen, & Baker, 2004, p.11). Therefore, it in not surprising that few school administrators are prepared to assume special education leadership roles positions (Monteith, 2000; Walther-Thomas, DiPaola, & Butler, 2002).

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Due to the enormous degree of variance across school leadership preparation programs, there is no guarantee that all school administrators will be fully prepared or even minimally prepared to meet the administrative demands of working in an urban school setting or with students with disabilities. There have been major legislative changes in the last decade; however, there has not been a change in emphasis in what leadership programs offer. Consequently, it is not uncommon for students majoring in educational leadership to graduate, obtain credentials in school administration and supervision, and, due to the severe shortage of qualified administrators, assume a position in which they are partly or even fully responsible for the administration of special education services without being adequately prepared to assume this responsibility.

Revalidation of Standards

The Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE), an international organization affiliated with the Council for Exceptional Children, began reevaluating the professional standards for special education administrators in spring of 2007. Likewise, the Administration of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), in conjunction with the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) and the Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), is working to revise the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards (ASCD, 2007). The fact that two specialist organizations are in the process of revising their professional standards is indicative of the changing role of school leadership in the twenty-first century.

In-service Programs for Special Education Leaders

Superintendents have acknowledged that their expectations for principals have expanded and that principals' new roles require them to complete new and more demanding tasks (Farkas,

Johnson, & Duffett, 2003). As Chafant and Van Dusen Pysh (2007) have argued, "Increased population and diversity in our nation and in our state demand more and differently trained special education leaders/administrators" (p. 1). Yet educational leadership programs generally prepare candidates for licensure as opposed to leadership (Adams & Copeland, 2005). As a result, many educational programs do not address the "effective or legally correct" delivery of services to children with special needs (Crockett, 2002). Thus, many newly appointed school leaders may hold the proper certification but not be adequately prepared to assume the role of special education administrator.

The need to provide better support for beginning principals has been recognized for some time. The Kellogg Foundation funded an induction program for beginning principals in 1948, and in 1954 the National Conference of Professors of Educational Administration addressed concerns related to the induction year for principals. Articles pertaining to the subject of induction were published in the 1960s in *The Educational Administration Quarterly* (Holifield & Mitch, 1993), while Sage and Burello (1994), Valente (2001), and Collins and White (2001) have all documented the importance of on-going professional development in special education for principals.

Lasky and Karge (2006) have demonstrated that "many principals get their special education training on the job from teachers, staff and students" (p. 27). When these authors asked 205 principals who they sought advice from when they had questions pertaining to students with disabilities, 93 reported that they called their district special education office, 47 obtained assistance from special education teachers in their building, 21 sought assistance from a program specialist, and 30 contacted the school psychologist (p. 27). Similarly, of the 362 principals surveyed by Wakeman et al. (2006), 23.5% reported that they had participated in two

special education trainings within the past two years, 16.2% had participated in one special education training, while 19.7% indicated they had not participated in any special education training. In the same study, 73.9% of the principals in the study reported relying primarily on resources within their school districts for information on special education. Of the one hundred-fifty elementary randomly sampled principals in Burton's (2004) study, one hundred-seven stated that their day-to day experiences and on the job training were more valuable than their administrative course work.

CEC's standards for Beginning Special Education Administrators assume that practicing administrators have met the competencies for implementing effective, collaborative, evidence-based interventions in their earlier teacher training programs. Thus: "Ideally, novice administrators would be well prepared for their appointment because of their previous teaching experience and advanced preparation" (DiPaola, Tschannen-Morgan, & Walther-Thomas, 2004, p. 7). However, as Boscardin (2004) notes, "This assumption may be misguided given the area of preservice training and the period of time elapsed between teacher training and administrative training." The administrator's initial preservice training may have been in an area other than special education or may not have been in education at all (p. 266). Additionally, the overall quality of teacher preparation programs and the limited amount of time devoted to special education leadership programs should be considered when assessing the competencies of newly appointed special education administrators.

As the body of literature on leadership programs suggests, preparation programs vary significantly and there is little solid evidence of their effectiveness in preparing administrators to work with students with disabilities. Until there are sweeping changes in leadership preparation programs, training for newly appointed special education leaders will fall upon the shoulders of

school districts. Directors of special education must be able to distinguish the important competencies from those that are essential to provide in-service training that best meets the needs of newly appointed urban special education administrators. Moreover, they will need to assume more responsibility in providing additional support, resources and training in special education. Novice administrators cannot be expected to fully embrace their roles and functions or to effectively lead others in and through a process about which they have little knowledge. Without the requisite skills and understanding, special education administrators will not be able to effectively advocate for and support students with disabilities.

Directors of special education are perhaps better able than faculty at leadership preparation programs to determine the most essential competencies and to provide suitable training and support for special education administrators. Unfortunately, little training is provided through in-service programs at the district level. Of 62 urban central office directors of special education who responded to a survey, the majority reported that while their school districts provided leadership training focused on general leadership for principals, they provided little or no training on special education or on collaboration between special and general education (Riley, 2002). One special education administrator in a large urban school district stated that her district devoted only one hour per year to mandatory training related to special education and that the time allotted was insufficient to address what she believed were areas of interest. She further questioned the relevancy of the training that was provided.

<div align="center">Summary of Literature Review</div>

Fifteen years ago, Valesky and Hirth (1992) stated that "Due to the lack of fundamental knowledge self-reported by administrators in the field as well as the need to understand the current issues in special education, school districts would do well to focus professional

development activities on the most essential and relevant competencies that would be of greatest benefit to the novice special education administrator" (p. 406). Unfortunately, little has changed in this regard. However, recent federal legislation and the increased accountability of school administrators have led to a transformation in the role of the special education administrator and have generated new discussion regarding the implications of these reforms on special education practices.

Moreover, recent research has shown that many administrators are not prepared to assume leadership positions in special education, and self reports indicate that principals lack critical special education competencies. Newly appointed urban special education administrators who have had little or no preparation or experience working with students with disabilities will not be able to support practices and policies that ensure that these students receive effective learning supports and services. Further research is needed to better understand the unique needs of newly appointed urban special education administrators and the essential competencies required to meet the individual learning needs of all students.

In sum, effective special education programs will involve practices that weave special and general education into a unified system for both students and teachers. If they are to not only successfully navigate the changing landscape of the field but to forge ahead and lead the way, special education administrators in the twenty-first century will need to expand and broaden their training to include a broader range and a greater depth of skills.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Although a considerable amount of conceptual work has been performed in this area in recent years, rigorous empirical investigation of special education leadership competencies remains scarce. This study investigated the perceptions of urban special education directors with regard to the essential competencies needed for newly appointed special education administrators. Ethical considerations are presented first, followed by a description of the study's methodological components: research design, population and sample, variables, participants, instruments, validity and reliability, and data collection and analysis procedures.

Ethical Considerations

The research proposal was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Education Development Center and the University of Central Florida. The study was conducted in accordance with all federal and university mandates to minimize potential harm to participants. Throughout this study, as Creswell (1994) has recommended for addressing ethical dilemmas, the rights, interests and wishes of participants were taken as primary when making decisions. Permission to administer the survey was obtained from all participants.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

The following research questions were investigated and tested in this study.

Research Question One and Hypothesis:

"What are the factor(s) underlying competencies perceived by urban directors of special education to be essential to newly appointed special education administrators?"

Null Hypothesis: There are no underlying factor(s) perceived by urban directors of special education in competencies that are reported to be essential to newly appointed special education administrators?

Research Question Two and Hypothesis:

What relationship exists between the years of experience as a director of special education and the underlying factors identified through Research Question 1?

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between the years of experience as a director of special education and the underlying factors identified through Research Question 1.

Research Design

A quantitative research design was utilized, with a survey method. This survey method involved the use of a self-administered questionnaire designed to gather specific data via a self-reporting system. The literature review in Chapter Two provides the empirical basis for this study. The questionnaire format was chosen to allow for confidentiality, which encouraged candid responses.

Population and Sample

The primary target population for this study was directors of special education from urban public school district offices.

Sampling

The population was comprised of 214 urban directors of special education, of whom 30 contributed data. All of the participants were members of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants for this study.

Participants were guaranteed complete anonymity and were assured of the confidentiality and privacy of their responses. The survey instrument was administered electronically.

Description of the Sample

The study was conducted with 30 directors of special education at school district offices across the nation. The directors were all members of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative and were responsible for the administration of special education services at schools within their school district. Currently, there are a total of 111 urban schools districts nationwide that are a part of the Collaborative. The school districts vary in size and are categorized as large (more than 50, 000 students), medium (between 15,000 and 50,000 students), and small (fewer than 15,000 students). Of the 214 potential participants, less than 15% of the directors contacted completed surveys, although Dillman (2000) reports that 40% of contacts can be expected to respond to a request to complete an electronic survey. The survey was initially open for three weeks. It was closed and then reopened for an additional five weeks. The exceptionally low response rate for the ten-minute survey may have been influenced by the time constraints associated with the administrator's role. Another consideration for such a low response may be the number of items on the survey. Dillman maintains that the length of an instrument has an inverse relationship to response rate. However, the researcher determined that deleting any content or demographic items would compromise the validity of the test.

Instrument

The 2007 Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative Survey examined special education directors' perceptions of essential competencies for newly appointed special education administrators. The questionnaire was developed by this researcher after a careful review of the

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special education leadership literature regarding the skills and knowledge for necessary in the twenty-first century. After a thorough review of the relevant literature, a list of competencies was compiled.

Survey Items

The 2007 Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative Survey was divided into three sections. Section 1 consisted of 24 competencies to be ranked on a scale of 1-5 and one open-ended question, for which participants had the option of writing in additional competencies that they believed to be essential for newly important special education administrators. In Section 2, questions 26-39 focused on central office issues, such as how difficult it was to fill central office positions. Lastly, Section 3 on the survey was the demographic section, which was comprised of 11 questions and which asked participants to provide information relating to their age, ethnicity, years of experience and primary professional background. The present research is based on Section 1, the competency section.

The questions in Sections 1 and 2 were answered using a 5-point, Likert-type scale, which was used to assess the perceived importance of competencies for newly appointed special education administrators. Importance was rated using the following scale: 1 = "not essential," 2 = "somewhat essential," 3 = "essential," 4 = "very essential," 5 = "vital." Some examples of competencies included on the survey were: interpersonal skills; leadership skills; approaches to increasing family involvement; improving student achievement; and knowledge of special education law. Demographic items in section three addressed such topics as gender, ethnicity, number of years in current position, and educational level. Other non-content related items included questions pertaining to special education directors' intent to remain in the field.

Each item was examined and items that were not considered relevant were eliminated. Items that were eliminated were not supported in the literature to be important skills for special education administrators or were found to be redundant. The remaining items were then submitted to a panel of content knowledgeable special education experts. The experts, who were all highly proficient in the content area of special education leadership and knowledgeable of the current trends and issues in special education, critically examined each item. The experts on average had twenty-five years' experience in the field of special education and served in various special education leadership positions at the local, state and national level. All panel members had extensive experience working in urban public school settings and in the field of special education administration. They provided detailed feedback to ensure the appropriateness and relevancy of each item as it related to special education leadership. They also verified the relevance of the items with respect to special education leadership skills.

The questionnaire was pilot tested with two directors of special of education and one recently retired director of special education from urban school districts. As a result of the careful preparation of the instrument and the protocol for application, no changes in the instrument or its use were required following the pilot study phase. Dillman's (2000) Three-Step principles for framing a questionnaire were used. Pre-notification of the survey was announced in the Collaborative's newsletter. The testing window was open from November 7, 2007 until November 28, 2007, a period of three weeks. On January 14, 2008, all members received a final request/reminder to complete the survey before the February 19, 2008 deadline. The survey was administered electronically and took approximately ten minutes to complete.

Design of the Procedures

The study examined urban special education directors' perceptions of competencies for newly appointed special education administrators. The process also sought to identify the most essential competencies for special education leadership.

Developing the Instrument

The instrument was designed on the basis of the literature review regarding what special education leadership skills are needed to effectively serve students with disabilities in the twenty-first century. Literature on special education leadership documents that there has been a major shift in the role of the special education administrator. The researcher began by focusing on the recent legislative mandates and the impact that they have had in the field of special education, specifically on the role of the special education administrator. Therefore, the twenty-four competencies explored are the result of what researchers have found to be important for special education administrators to know and to be able to do.

The researcher began by using the Council for Exceptional Children's *What Every Special Educator Should Know and Be Able to Do* (5th Edition), known as the Red Book, as a guide and then conducted a thorough review of the current literature on the topic. The current literature included many of the items listed in the Red Book. However, a comparison of skills needed for special education administrators revealed that there were other critical skills identified in the literature, such as the ability to retain special education faculty, that were not listed in the Red Book. Other pertinent questions that were included on the survey that were not competency related but were germane to this study were *years of experience as an urban special education director,* and *primary professional background,* as well as the demographic questions that were related to ethnicity, gender and current title.

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Validity and Reliability

Content validity is the representative or sampling adequacy of the content substance, the matter, and the topic of a measuring instrument (Kerlinger, 1986). Based on research literature and previous studies (Chalfant & Van Dusen Pysh, 2007; Chapple, Baker, & Bon, 2007; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003; Stevenson-Jacobson, Jacobson & Hilton, 2006; Riley, 2002; and Wakeman et al., 2006) a list of competencies was generated. Each item was then carefully examined and was included if it was content relevant. Additionally, all items were reviewed and edited by a panel of special education administrators. The protocol for the content validation process was based on those recommended by Kerlinger (1986) and by Haynes and O'Brien (2000).

Survey Pilot Test

The questionnaire was pilot tested with three samples of individuals considered to be representative of the population from which the study was to draw its participants. This test ensured the internal validity of the instruments. The instrument was developed with the various roles of an urban special education administrator in mind. The pilot took place at three locations across the country: Miami, Florida, Clinton, Maryland and Boston, Massachusetts. The results of the pilot test ensured internal validity, as well as comprehensibility of the directions and item content. They also verified the amount of time required for responses and provided other logistical information. As a result of the pilot tests, revisions were made to the questionnaire and procedures.

To measure internal consistency of Section 1 of the instrument, a reliability analysis was conducted. Cronbach's alpha yielded a reliability coefficient of .903, which indicated that the 24 competencies, were highly correlated.

Variables

The variables examined in this study were divided into two categories: twenty-four independent or predictor variables (*Essential Competencies for Newly Appointed Special Education Administrators*) and one dependent variable (*Years of Experience*). Based on a review of the literature, the study identified variables that were germane to the special education administrator's role.

Independent Variables

To address the changing role of the special education administrator, researchers have identified competencies that are critical in order to effectively perform the duties of a special education administrator. However, emphasis on the expansion of the special education leader's role has led the researcher to examine the interface of special and general education and educational leadership practices (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003) in light of recent legal mandates. With regard to research studies on special education leadership competencies, the researcher extracted from the literature competencies that represented both fundamental issues and current trends. Based on the shift in the field of special education and greater expectations for special education administrators, the following independent variables were selected for this study: 1) interpersonal; 2) communication skills; 3) collaboration skills; 4) mediation skills; 5) leadership skills; 6) managerial skills; 7) knowledge of special education law; 8) problem solving skills; 9) instructional leadership; 10) knowledge of general and special education curriculum; 11) time management; 12) knowledge of best ways to recruit faculty; 13) knowledge of best ways to retain faculty; 14) knowledge of best ways to supervise faculty; 15) ability to use data to make decisions; 16) research skills related to implementing change; 17) cultural responsiveness; 18)

improving student achievement; 19) knowledge of research based instructional practices; 20) knowledge of sustaining change; 21) knowledge of characteristics of individuals with special needs; 22) crisis prevention strategies; 23) approaches to increasing family involvement; and 24) monitoring/evaluating programs. A questionnaire was developed by this researcher to capture responses for the 24 variables. All 24 variables were used in the factor analysis to address the first research question. The identified factors were then used as independent variables in the analyses to evaluate the second research question.

Dependent Variable

The number of years of experience as a director of special education was examined to determine whether the perceptions of essential competencies were influenced by the number of years have served in that capacity. Given the enormous expansion in the expectations governing the special education administrator's role, there is a need for data on special education leadership skills that will inform and direct professional learning and that will provide support to newly appointed special education administrators. In general, directors of special education determine—or at least have some input in—the professional development training and level of support that is made available to newly appointed special education administrators in their districts. Yet there is no research or literature to suggest that the variable *years of experience* influences the perceptions of special education leadership competencies or skills on the part of directors of special education. Thus, the researcher was interested to explore the relationship between length of time a director of special education has practiced and his or her perceptions regarding essential competencies for newly appointed special education administrators.

Data Collection

Prior to data collection, the researcher completed institutional review board (IRB) forms for permission to conduct research on human subjects. Consideration of the time constraints and responsibilities of the potential participants were taken into account. The Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative obtained approval from the IRB at the Education Development Center. The IRB at the University of Central Florida granted a waiver of documentation of consent. The Collaborative sent the questionnaire to its members electronically with a letter explaining the study description, procedures, voluntary participation and statement of consent. The data for this study were obtained electronically.

Description of the Setting

The Education Development Center (EDC) is an international, non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing learning, promoting health, and fostering a deeper understanding of the world. The Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative is sponsored by EDC and its Center for Family, School, and Community. The Collaborative is a network of special and general education administrators who work together to improve outcomes for students with disabilities in the nation's urban schools. It provides an array of services and offers a complete menu of professional learning opportunities for its members. Additionally, the Collaborative partners with several federally funded policy, research, and program initiatives that support improved outcomes for students with disabilities and other diverse learners.

The 2007 Special Education Leadership Collaborative Survey was created to obtain information from its members to gain a deeper understanding of the essential skills and training needed for future special education administrators.

Data Analysis

This study is a correlational research study. The research questions address the interrelationship between perceived factors from the essential competencies and years of experience as a director of special education. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 16.0 was used to conduct the analyses. A basic descriptive statistics test was run to obtain frequencies on the demographic variables.

To analyze the data, a factor analysis and multiple regression were used to learn more about the relationship between several independent or predictor variables (24 competencies) and a dependent or criterion variable (years of experience). Multiple regression can establish that a set of independent variables explains a proportion of the variance in a dependent variable at a significant level (through a significance test of R_2) and can establish the relative predictive importance of the independent variables (by comparing beta weights). Multiple regression was used to answer the question "What relationship exists between the years of experience as a director of special education and the underlying competency factors identified through Research Question 1." The Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to obtain a better understanding of the relationship between the variable *years of experience as a director of special education* and the underlying factors. The order of entry of independent variables did not, retrospectively, represent their importance. To answer research question two, a correlation analysis was performed on the three identified factors, along with *years of experience as a director of special education*.

Limitations

The use of a convenience sample and the limited number of participants precluded generalization of the results. Inasmuch as items in the questionnaire were developed from an extensive research review and approved by experts in special education leadership and supervision, they may or may not have measured what was intended. Moreover, the results may not assess the full range of skills and knowledge perceived to be essential for newly appointed special education leaders. Additionally, as with any self-report method, results must be interpreted cautiously, as they represent responses that may be overestimated or underestimated.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to present the analysis of the data collected through the 2007 Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative instrument for urban directors of special education. This study investigated urban special education directors' perceptions of essential competencies for newly appointed urban special education administrators. The study identified three underlying factors and examined the relationship between the derived factors and urban special education directors' years of experience.

Goal of the Study

The goal of the study was to investigate the perceptions of urban special education directors with regard to essential competencies needed for newly appointed special education administrators. In addition, it sought to determine what relationship, if any, existed between years of experience as a director and the identified essential competencies.

Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

To examine the special education directors' perceptions of essential competencies for newly appointed special education administrators, the study focused on two research questions and tested their hypotheses.

Research Question 1

"What are the factor(s) underlying competencies perceived by urban directors of special education to be essential to newly appointed urban special education administrators?"

Null Hypothesis: There are no underlying factor(s) perceived by urban directors of special education in competencies that are reported to be essential to urban special education administrators.

Research Question 2

What relationship exists between the years of experience as a director of special education and the underlying factors identified in Research Question 1?

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between the years of experience as a director of special education and the underlying factors identified in Research Question 1.

To explore essential competencies for newly appointed special education administrators, a principal component factor analysis with a Varimax rotation was conducted on the 24 competencies on the 2007 Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative instrument. Three factors were extracted from this analysis. Multiple regression analysis was performed to investigate the derived factors and how they related to urban special education directors' years of experience. A post hoc analysis design was used to detect patterns within the data related to the subgroups in the sample.

Sample and Population Characteristics

The participants were all members of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative (USELC), which is part of the Education Development Center. The Collaborative's goal is to work with general and special education administrators to improve outcomes for students with disabilities by providing leadership development and support to urban school districts across the country.

Descriptive analyses showed that the male participants accounted for 36.7% of the total sample (N=11) and that 63.3% (N=19) were female. Participant ages ranged from the 36-40 age group to over the over 60 age group (see Figure 1). With regard to level of education, 41.9% held master's degrees, 22.6% had obtained a specialist degree and 35.5 had obtained a doctorate degree (see Figure 2). Approximately 96% of the directors of special education were currently

serving as administrators of special education, and one participant was a supervisor of special

education. In response to the question: "How many more years do you anticipate working in

your current position before retiring?" 35.5% of the participants indicated "within 1-3 years" (see

Figure 3). Analysis of the ethnicity of the participants revealed that 87% were White-Non

Hispanic, 6.5% were Black-Non Hispanic and 6.5% were Hispanic/Latino (see Figure 4).

Figure 1. Age
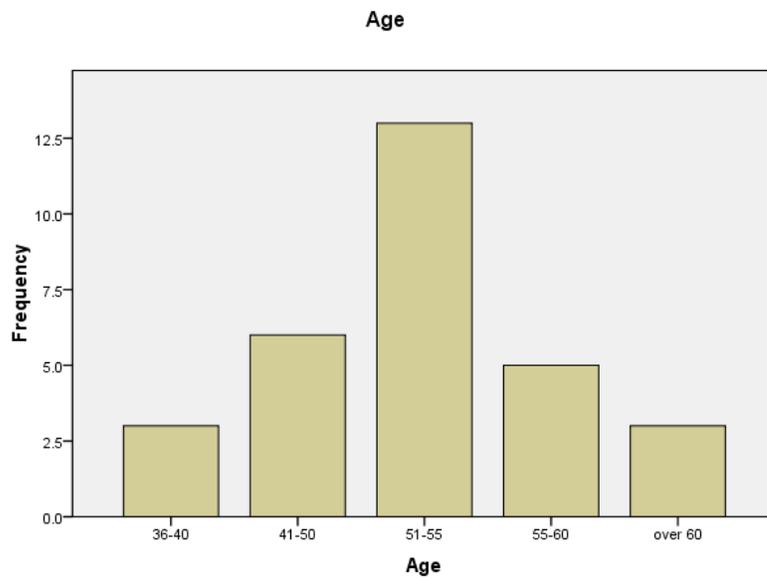
Figure 2. Level of Education
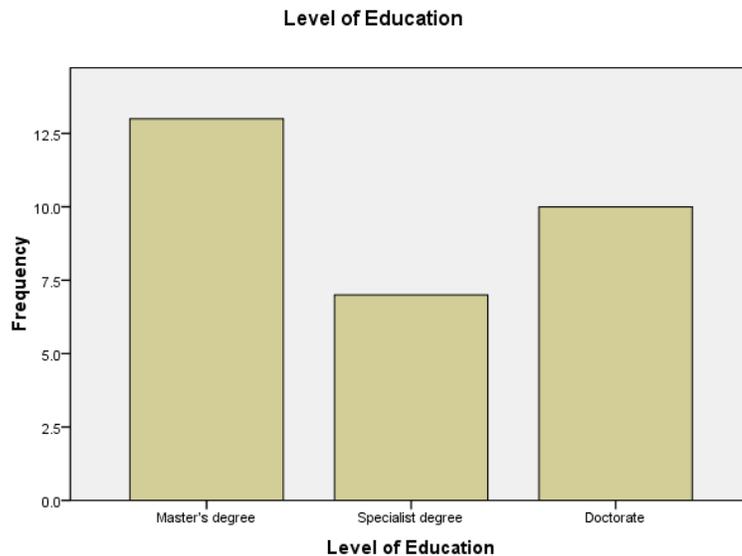
Of the 30 participants who completed the questionnaire, 22 participants or 78.6% indicated that special education had been their primary professional background prior to becoming a special education director while 21% of the participants stated that general education had been their primary background. Directors of special education with three years or less of experience accounted for almost one-third of the total sample (26.7%). The results showed that the largest group of the participants, 30%, had four to six years of experience. Overall, 73% of the participants had less than ten years of experience as a director of special education (see Table 1).

Figure 3.Years Before Retiring
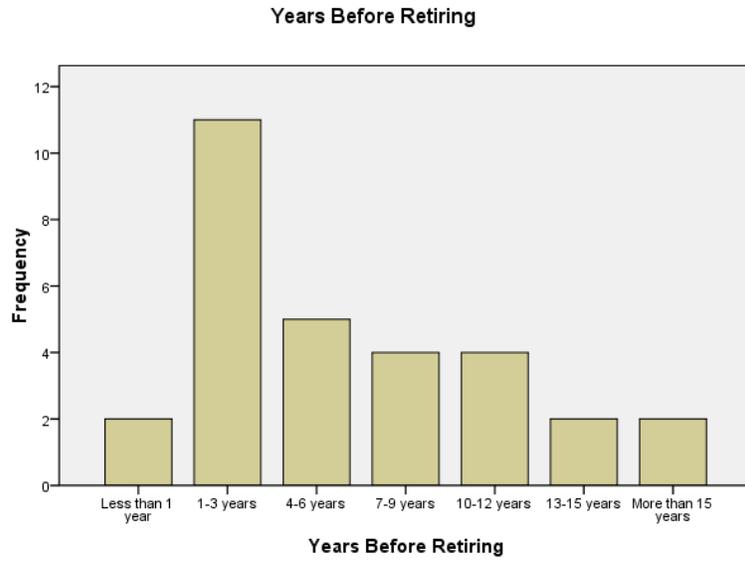
Figure 4. Ethnicity
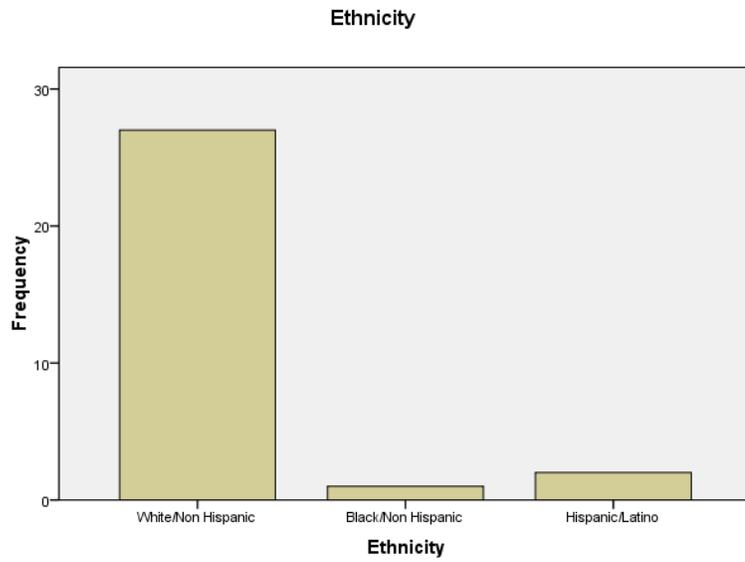
Table 1. Years of Experience

Years of Experience					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 1 year	3	10.0	10.0	10.0
	1-3 years	5	16.7	16.7	26.7
	4-6 years	9	30.0	30.0	56.7
	7-9 years	5	16.7	16.7	73.3
	10-12 years	2	6.7	6.7	80.0
	13-15 years	1	3.3	3.3	83.3
	More than 15 years	5	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total Valid	30	100.0	100.0	

Reliability Analysis

The first section of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative's Survey contained 24 questions addressing competencies. An internal consistency reliability analysis was first conducted to reaffirm the validity and reliability of the instrument to a satisfactory degree. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for Section 1 of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative Survey data was .903 (see Table 2). Descriptive statistics were conducted to confirm that the data were generally as expected with regard to mean and standard deviations and that no out-of-bounds entries existed beyond the expected range. A preliminary analysis of the data (n=30) indicated no missing data. The preliminary analysis also included a case analysis to indicate whether there were any individual observations that were problematic.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics for the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative
Instrument

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.903	.895	24

Research Question 1

"What are the factor(s) underlying competencies perceived by urban directors of special education to be essential to newly appointed urban special education administrators?"

Null Hypothesis: There are no underlying factor(s) perceived by directors of special education in competencies that are reported to be essential to newly appointed urban special education administrators.

Reliability statistics was performed on section one of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative Survey. Based on the analysis, the reliability coefficient was .903 for section one (see Table 2), indicating that the items were related conceptually, which is necessary for factors to form. To investigate the underlying factors perceived by directors of special education in competencies that are reported to be essential to urban special education administrators, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to identify the underlying factors based on the 24 competencies on the survey instrument. The researcher used .6 as a measure to select factors to be combined in an index or scale because Cronbach's alpha, which measures the intercorrelation of items and states that if the alpha is greater than or equal to .6, the items may be combined.

Results of Factor Analysis

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to identify the underlying factors based on the 24 competencies in Section 1 of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative Survey instrument. Using Cattell's (1979) rule to determine which factors were most eligible for interpretation, three prominent factors with an Eigenvalue over 1.0 were identified. Based on this principle, items were regrouped to form three underlying factors. The most prominent factor had an Eigenvalue of 5.235 and accounted for 47.592% of the variance. The second factor, with an Eigenvalue of 1.489, accounted for 13.534 of the variance. The third factor had an Eigenvalue of 1.006 and accounted 9.148 of the variance (see Table 3). Based on Table 5, the three factors were retained because they contained Eigenvalues greater than 1.0 and collectively explained 70.32% of the total variance.

To simplify the number of competencies with high loadings, a Varimax Rotation method was used to combine the like items. Of the twenty-four competencies, the results of the factor analysis yielded eleven competencies based on Cronbach's alpha measure of .6 or higher. The 11 competencies loaded on three factors (see Table 3). Nine competencies loaded on the first factor, which was named *Management, Instruction and Change*. One question loaded on the second factor, which was named *Supervision of Faculty*. The third factor loaded one competency and was named *Team Building Skills*. To confirm that the identified factors were eligible for interpretation, the Eigenvalues were reviewed (see Table 5). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and the following three factors were retained for further analysis: 1) *Management, Instruction and Change*; 2) *Supervision of Faculty*; and 3) *Team Building Skills*.

Table 3. Total Variance Explained

	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5.235	47.592	47.592	5.235	47.592	47.592	3.622	32.925	32.925
2	1.489	13.534	61.126	1.489	13.534	61.126	2.689	24.441	57.367
3	1.006	9.148	70.274	1.006	9.148	70.274	1.420	12.907	70.274
4	.962	8.750	79.024						
5	.588	5.344	84.367						
6	.529	4.810	89.177						
7	.444	4.032	93.209						
8	.320	2.911	96.120						
9	.181	1.644	97.764						
10	.138	1.255	99.019						
11	.108	.981	100.000						
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.									

A scree plot of the Eigenvalues (see Figure 5) provides evidence of the prominence of the prime factors underlying responses to the scale.

Figure 5. Scree Plot

Scree Plot
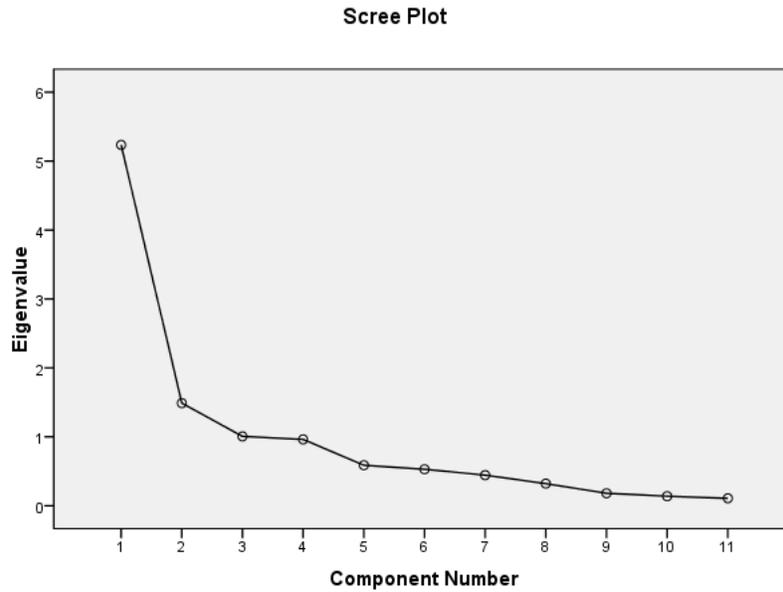
Table 4. Component Matrix

Component Matrix[a]			
	Component		
	1	2	3
Managerial Skills	**.635**	.436	.157
Instructional Leadership	**.747**	-.367	-.029
Knowledge of General and Special Education Curriculum	**.772**	-.272	.249
Time Management	**.748**	.217	-.299
Knowledge of Best Ways to Supervise Faculty	.527	**.661**	.039
Research Skills Related to Implementing Change	**.706**	-.071	-.429
Improving Student Achievement	**.751**	-.224	.322
Knowledge of Research Based Instructional Practices	**.777**	-.436	.157
Knowledge of Sustaining Change	**.799**	-.191	-.192
Crisis Prevention Strategies	**.651**	.442	-.285
Collaboration Skills	.334	.360	**.630**
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.			
a. 3 components extracted.			

Research Question 2

What relationship exists between the years of experience as a director of special education and the underlying factors identified in Research Question 1?

Null Hypothesis: No relationship exists between the years of experience as a director of special education and the underlying factors identified in Research Question 1.

To answer research question 2, the researcher ran a multiple regression to examine whether there was a relationship between the dependent variable, *years of experience*, and the independent variables: *Management, Instruction, and Change*, *Supervision of Faculty,* and *Team Building Skills.* Multiple regression can establish that a set of independent variables explains a proportion of the variance in a dependent variable at a significant level (through a significance test of R_2) and can establish the relative predictive importance of the independent variables (by comparing beta weights). Multiple regression was used to answer the question "What relationship exists between the years of experience as a director of special education and the underlying competency factors identified through Research Question?"

To obtain a sense of the data, an examination of Descriptive Statistics was conducted. The results indicated that the dependent variable, *year of experience*, had a mean value of 3.70 and a standard deviation of (SD1.90). The independent/predictor variables ranged from 37.23 (*Management, Instruction and Change*) to 3.77 (*Supervision of Faculty*). The standard deviation was between 5.09 (*Management, Instruction and Change*) and .77 (*Supervision of Faculty*) (see Table 5).

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Years of Experience	3.70	1.90	30
Supervision of Faculty	3.77	.77	30
Team Building Skills	4.70	.47	30
Management, Instruction and Change	37.2333	5.09	30

A Pearson Correlation was calculated to examine the relationship between directors of special education's years of experience and the three factors: *Management, Instruction*, *and Change* (r=-.303), *Supervision of Faculty* (r =.092) and *Team Building Skills* (r=.012) to measure the association between the variables. The results indicate that a weak correlation that was not significant was found. The years of experience as a director of special education were not related to the three underlying factors: *Management, Instruction and Change, Supervision of Faculty*, and *Team Building Skills,* which further validates the appropriateness of running a multiple regression (see Table 6).

Table 6. Correlations

Correlations					
		Years of Experience	Supervision of Faculty	Team Building Skills	Manage, Instruction, and Change
Pearson Correlation	Years of Experience	1.000	.092	.012	-.303
	Supervision of Faculty	.092	1.000	.373	.452
	Team Building Skills	.012	.373	1.000	.249
	Management, Instruction and Change	-.303	.452	.249	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Years of Experience		.315	.476	.052
	Supervision of Faculty	.315		.021	.006
	Team Building Skills	.476	.021		.093
	Management, Instruction and Change	.052	.006	.093	
N	Years of Experience	30	30	30	30
	Supervision of Faculty	30	30	30	30
	Team Building Skills	30	30	30	30
	Management, Instruction and Change	30	30	30	30

Preliminary Data Analysis

Preliminary data was examined to ascertain that none of the assumptions for running a multiple regression was violated. One assumption is that there is no measurement error in the independent variables. Another assumption is that for every independent variable combination, the residuals are normally and independently distributed with a mean of zero and a constant variance.

A general inspection of scatterplots is a non-statistical method to determine whether nonlinearity exists in a relationship. A visual examination of the histogram showed that the data were normally distributed. The scatterplot of the dependent variable, years of experience, shows a random pattern and thus indicates the absence of nonlinearity (see Figure 6, and Figure 7). In addition, attention was given to the case analysis of the data to determine whether there were any outlier observations or whether there were individual observations that exerted excessive

influence on any of the regression results (Tate, 1998). The beta weight revealed that a standardized unit change in the independent variable *Supervision of Faculty* resulted in .283 unit change in the dependent variable, years of experience. This unit change was higher than *Team Building Skills* and *Management, Instruction and Change*. Therefore, *Supervision of Faculty* explained a sizeable portion of the R^2. Given the discerning result that beta weight for *Management, Instruction and Change* was negative (-435), it suggests an inverse relationship with the dependent variable, years of experience (see Table 9). Preliminary analyses confirmed that all regression assumptions had been met.

Figure 6. Histogram

Histogram

Dependent Variable: Years of Experience

Mean =-1.39E-16
Std. Dev. =0.947
N =30

Figure 7. Scatterplot

Scatterplot
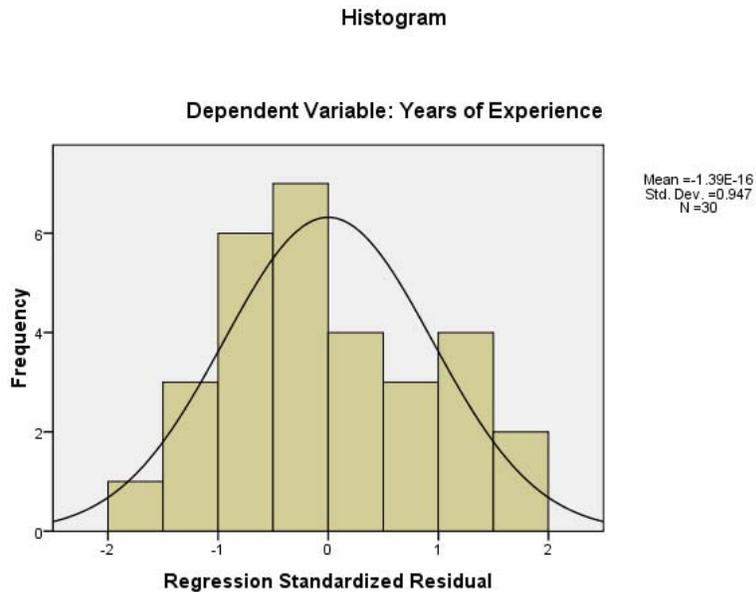
Dependent Variable: Years of Experience
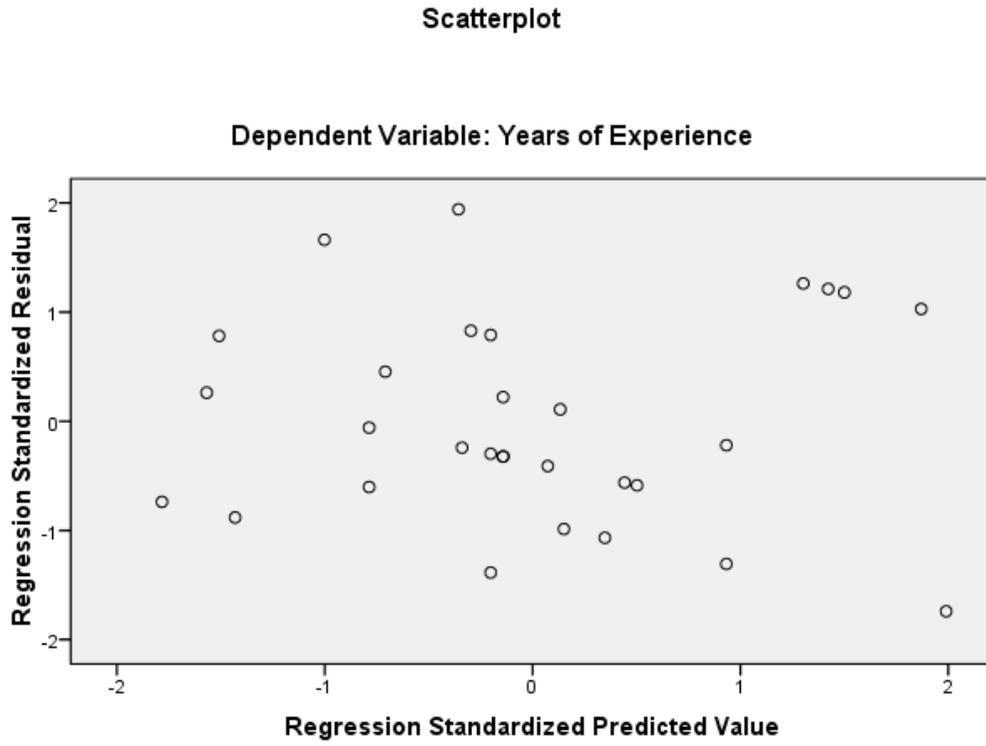
Results of Regression Analysis

A multiple regression was used to answer this question by regressing the dependent variable, *years of experience*, against the predictor/independent variables: *Management, Instruction, and Change, Supervision of Faculty,* and *Team Building Skills*. Overall, the linear composite of the independent variables entered into the regression procedure predicted 15% of the variation (see Table 7). The results of multiple regression analysis were not significant $F_{(3, 29)} = 1.625$, $p > .05$ (see Table 8).

Table 7. Multiple Regression Model Summary

Model Summary[b]									
					Change Statistics				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.397[a]	.158	.061	1.838	.158	1.625	3	26	.208
a. Predictors: (Constant), Management, Instruction and Change, Team Building Skills, Supervision of Faculty									
b. Dependent Variable: Years of Experience									

Table 8. ANOVA

ANOVA[b]						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	16.469	3	5.490	1.625	.208[a]
	Residual	87.831	26	3.378		
	Total	104.300	29			
a. Predictors: (Constant), Research Instruction and Manage, Team Building Skills, Supervision of Faculty						
b. Dependent Variable: Years of Experience						

An investigation of the Coefficient Table (see Table 9) shows that the beta weights did not exceed 1.0, indicating that the values could be interpreted. The b weights were examined to determine whether their associated p-value exceeded the .05 alpha level chosen by the researcher. A review of the variance inflation factor (VIF) revealed absence of multicollinearity with a VIF < 10. All of the confidence intervals around each of the b weights included zero as a probable value. This suggests that the results for each of the independent variables probably do not predict or explain the dependent variable. The results of the regression analysis indicated that the relationship between the three underlying factors and special education directors' years of experience was not statistically significant (see Table 9). Based on the results of the multiple regression the null hypothesis was accepted.

Table 9. Coefficients

							95% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients									
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	6.846	3.862		1.773	.088	-1.093	14.784					
	Supervision of Faculty	.693	.519	.283	1.336	.193	-.373	1.759	.092	.254	.240	.723	1.382
	Team Building Skills	.058	.793	.014	.073	.942	-1.572	1.688	.012	.014	.013	.853	1.172
	Management, Instruction and Change	-.162	.076	-.435	-2.144	.042	-.317	-.007	-.303	-.388	-.386	.788	1.269
a. Dependent Variable: Years of Experience													

Post Hoc Analysis

Taking into consideration the low sample size, family-wise error and low statistical power from the multiple regression, a Kruskal-Wallis One-Way Analysis of Variance (K-Independent Sample Test) was performed to provide a clearer picture of the relationship between the five factors and years of experience. The Kruskal-Wallis test provides a rank order system that can be used to summarize the data in a useful way by processing data from small samples without relying on the estimation of parameters such as mean or standard deviation.

Preliminary Analysis

Nonparametric tests such as the Kruskall Wallis have very few assumptions. The assumptions for conducting a K-Independent Sample Test include randomness, mutually independent samples from populations, distribution functions with the same shape, and equal variances. Additionally, each sample must consist of at least five measures. None of the assumptions were violated.

Results of Kruskal-Wallis Test Analysis

A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted comparing the special education directors' years of experience with the three underlying factors. The results showed absence of statistically significant levels of correlation among *years of experience* and the three factors. No statistically significant level for *years of experience* was found for *Team Building Skills* (H(2) =2.199, p>.05); *Supervision of Faculty* (H(2)= 4.457, p>.05); or *Management, Instruction and Change* (H (2) = 8.463, p>.05), indicating that the groups did not differ significantly from each other with regard to years of experience as a director of special education (see Table 10).

Table 10. Kruskal-Wallis test

Test Statistics[a,b]			
	Team Building Skills	Supervision of Faculty	Management, Instruction and Change
Chi-Square	2.199	4.457	8.463
Df	6	6	6
Asymp. Sig.	.900	.615	.206
a. Kruskal Wallis Test			
b. Grouping Variable: Years of Experience			

A closer look at the ranks revealed that directors of special education with 13-15 years of experience had the highest mean rank score for all three factor rankings the for *Supervision of Faculty, Management, Instruction and Change* and *Team Building Skills*. However, with the exception of *Team Building Skills*, directors with 10-12 years of experience and those with 13-15 years of experience had the same mean rank score. *Management, Instruction, and Change* mean scores did not differ significantly across groups—except for directors with more than 15 years of experience, whose score was significantly lower than were the other group mean ranks. Overall,

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urban directors of special education with more than 15 years of experience had the lowest mean

rank scores (see Table 11).

Table 11. RANK

Ranks			
	Years of Experience	N	Mean Rank
Team Building Skills	Less than 1 year	3	15.00
	1-3 years	5	14.00
	4-6 years	9	16.67
	7-9 years	5	14.00
	10-12 years	2	20.00
	13-15 years	1	20.00
	More than 15 years	5	14.00
	Total	30	
Supervision of Faculty	less than 1 year	3	10.50
	1-3 years	5	19.90
	4-6 years	9	12.56
	7-9 years	5	18.00
	10-12 years	2	17.25
	13-15 years	1	18.50
	More than 15 years	5	15.60
	Total	30	
Management, Instruction and Change	less than 1 year	3	21.67
	1-3 years	5	13.50
	4-6 years	9	14.56
	7-9 years	5	19.10
	10-12 years	2	19.50
	13-15 years	1	27.00
	More than 15 years	5	8.00
	Total	30	

Summary

This study examined the reported underlying factors perceived by directors of special

education in competencies that are essential to urban special education administrators within

their first three years of appointment. It also investigated the relationship between the years of

experience as a director of special education and the underlying factor identified through

Research Question 1. The data were processed through SPSS 16.0 for Windows to yield the

findings.

To analyze the data, a factor analysis and multiple regression were used to determine

more about the relationship among several independent or predictor variables (24 competencies)

and a dependent or criterion variable (years of experience). Results of the factor analysis

produced three underlying factors: *Management, Instruction and Change; Supervision of*

Faculty; and *Team Building Skills*. A multiple regression was conducted to investigate the

question "What relationship exists between the years of experience as a director of special

education and the underlying competency factors identified through Research Question 1?" The

results showed that the relationship among *years of experience* as a director of special education

and the three aforementioned underlying factors was not statistically significant. A post hoc

comparison technique was performed using the Kruskal-Wallis test to gain further insight into

how special education directors' perceptions of the underlying factors were ranked based on their

years of experience. The findings indicated that the group rank scores were not statistically

significant. A discussion of these findings, along with implications for practice and directions

for future research, is found in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine what competencies urban directors of special education perceived to be essential for newly appointed urban special education administrators. Urban directors of special education were surveyed on their perceptions of the essential competencies for newly appointed special education administrators. The rationale was that urban directors of special education would likely have a broad and in-depth understanding of the newly appointed special education administrator's role and thus would be well equipped to identify the competencies essential to this function. This chapter discusses the findings of the study and the implications. The limitations of this study are also addressed, after which recommendations for future research are presented.

Summary of the Study

Changes in school reform and legislation (NCLB, 2001; IDEIA, 2004) have had a tremendous impact on the field of special education. The effects of these dramatic changes may be observed in current practices and procedures throughout the field and, perhaps more significantly, in the transformation of the special education administrator's role (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Katsyannis, Conderman, & Franks, 1996; NAESP, 2001). This dynamic shift has placed greater emphasis on accountability, thus transforming the role of the special education administrator from that of manager to that of change agent. The urban directors of education who participated in this study identified the competencies that they perceived to be essential for newly appointed urban special education administrators with this shift in mind.

Section one of the 2007 Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative Survey, was the focus for this study. The participants in this study were all urban directors of special education working in the field as central or district office administrators. They were drawn from across the United States, and they were all members of the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative. Data were collected through an online survey from November 7, 2007 through November 28, 2007 and then again from January 12, 2008 through February 19, 2008. A total of 41 participants completed the survey and 30 useable surveys were obtained for this study.

Discussion of Study Results

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The first research question was: "What are the factor(s) underlying competencies perceived by urban directors of special education to be essential to newly appointed urban special education administrators?" The null hypothesis was that there were no underlying factor(s) perceived by urban directors of special education to be essential to newly appointed urban special education administrators. A factor analysis conducted with the twenty-four competencies produced three underlying factors: *Management, Instruction and Change, Supervision of Faculty* and *Team Building Skills*. These factors loaded eleven of the twenty-four competencies as reported by the urban directors of special education. The results of the survey suggest that the urban directors of special education who participated in this study perceive these competencies to be essential for newly appointed special education administrators. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Lashley and Boscardin (2003) compiled a list of special education knowledge areas that were identified in the literature as being germane to the successful practice of special education administration. The results of this survey revealed that four of the areas previously identified

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(general education, curriculum and instruction, supervision, and management) were essential for newly appointed special education administrators. However, other areas were identified that appear to be aligned with the current educational reforms and that focused specifically on the areas of collaboration and knowledge of implementing and sustaining change.

These findings may also reflect Lashley and Boscardin's stated opinion that special education leaders need to "integrate knowledge, skills, and dispositions from special education, general education, and educational administration" (2003, p. 11). Moreover, they lend support to what Crockett (2007) has referred to as the changing nature of special education leadership. Further, these findings seem to provide support for the notion that special education leadership has changed considerably and that, consequently, there are many new roles and expectations for special education administrators. This concept holds particularly true for the *Management, Instruction and Change* factor, which consists of nine distinct competencies that could not be neatly organized into a single category. Hence, it was necessary from a practical standpoint to compile the nine competencies into three broad areas.

This study also found that there was no difference in years of experience as a director of special education and the three underlying factors. The absence of significant findings between years of experience as an urban special education director and the underlying factors is noteworthy. In what follows, each of these areas is discussed briefly within the context of special education leadership and/or based on the educational administration literature.

Management, Instruction and Change

Management

Due to the mounting pressure to demonstrate accountability at the local, state and national levels, the documentation and management of data, personnel and resources have

become necessary components to demonstrate school effectiveness. As a result, the demands of increased paperwork and mandatory meetings compete with other important administrative duties related to the principalship (Praisner, 2003). Additionally, administrators of special education must be involved in the supervision and administration of general education programs in order to ensure that students who require special education services not only have access to the general education curriculum but also have the needed support to achieve academic success.

Increased responsibilities, job ambiguity and lack of resources also contribute to the litany of problems that affect the school administrator's ability to manage time efficiently. The challenge of meeting the physical and psychological needs of students during a crisis for example, can be overwhelming for newly appointed special education administrators. Students with emotional or behavior disorders who cause frequent interruptions can cause daily crises and consume an inordinate amount of the administrator's time and energy. Moreover, the increase in incidents of school violence has unfortunately demonstrated the vital need for crisis prevention strategies (Sandoval, Lewis, & Brock 2001). The perceptions that urban school districts are not safe can have a significant effect on the educational environment (Elliott, Hamburg, & Williams, 1998) and can create additional challenges for the special education administrator, resulting in less time to focus on other pertinent issues, such as instruction.

Instruction

The idea of the principal as instructional leader is not a new concept (see e.g., Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). In their review of earlier studies, Lashley and Boscardin (2003) noted that knowledge of curriculum and instruction was one of the competencies identified as essential for effective special education administrators. However, as Lashley and Boscardin pointed out, instructional leadership has become an area of increased emphasis as a result of NCLB.

Because the vast majority of students who receive special education services spend most of their school day in general education classes (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), special education administrators need to become more knowledgeable about how to guide and support general education teachers (Wakeman et al., 2006). Research shows that teacher quality impacts student achievement (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Sanders & Horn, 1998) and that teacher attrition at urban schools is especially problematic (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004), which makes it difficult, if not impossible, for students to benefit from having a succession of experienced and effective teachers. Additionally, research indicates that administrators are better prepared to provide meaningful support when they understand the needs of students with disabilities as well as the instructional challenges faced by educators who work with students with disabilities (DiPaola and Walther-Thomas, 2003). Therefore, providing an appropriate education for students with disabilities requires an understanding of the general education and special education curricula as well as knowledge of the continuum of services available for students with disabilities. Special education administrators need to draw from a broad base of knowledge and skills from both fields in order to make informed decisions regarding best practices for students with disabilities (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003).

The NCLB Act requires that researched-based instructional practices be used so that all students are provided with the same opportunities for success. Special education administrators will need to draw from current research and their knowledge of academic interventions (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran & Walther-Thomas, 2004) to ensure the effective use of researched-based instructional practices in the classroom. As an instructional leader, the newly appointed special education administrator needs to be informed as to what constitutes research-based instructional practices and how best to promote their use. He or she must provide professional development

opportunities for teachers to learn proven strategies and techniques that are appropriate for the children in their classrooms. Further, the special education administrator will need to make certain that research-based instructional practices are integrated in lesson plans, school-based interventions, and in the goals and objectives for Individualized Educational Programs.

Change

Lashley and Boscardin (2003) assert that special education administrators need to be prepared to develop innovative and comprehensive plans for varied yet inclusive education programs that can bring about positive results for students with disabilities. Moreover, they must possess the technical skills to plan, implement and manage change. Yet, as Fullan (1999) states, "it is easy to experience overload, fragmentation, and incoherence" (p. 27). To successfully implement change, special education leaders need to be armed with sound research and skills. Leadership is critical to creating lasting progress (Schmoker, 1996). Recognizing that change does not happen over night and that the capacity to sustain change must be built, special education administrators must also be able to maintain the desired results once they have been achieved. Chalfant and Van Dusen Pysh (2007) argue that special education leaders must be able to influence policy and direction. Therefore, they need to understand the unique characteristics of their school communities.

Supervision of Faculty

Given the high teacher turnover rate in urban school districts, newly appointed administrators need the skills to understand and support special education teachers (Billingsley, 1993; Billingsley, 2005; Ingersoll, 2001: Johnson et al., 2001). Lack of administrative support is the reason often given by special education teachers for leaving the field. Special education

administrators who are aware of and responsive to needs of special education teachers are likely to influence their decision to stay in the profession. Additionally, special education administrators need to work with general education teachers to provide support and resources for students with disabilities who are receiving instruction in a general education setting. General education teachers are expected to participate more fully in the education of students with disabilities yet, many have not had prior experience or training in special education. To address this issue, special education administrators need to not only provide opportunities for professional growth professional, but they must also be supportive.   Because supportive relationships are vital in helping teachers to grow professionally (Soloman, Schaps, Watson & Battishistich, 1992; Wiggins & McTighe, 2006; Zimmerman & Deckert-Pelton, 2003. special education administrators must develop supportive relationships and collaborative working conditions with both special and general education teachers to improve student outcomes.

Team Building Skills

    Team Building Skills was the third factor identified. The leadership role of the special education administrator in building and managing teams is critical. While collaboration has long been considered an important standard for beginning special education administrators (CEC, 2003), the changing demands of the profession require collaboration more than ever. Improving student achievement and providing quality services to the families of children with disabilities will involve collaboration at all levels. Chalfant and Van Dusen Pysh (2007) observe that special education administrators will need to collaborate with a variety of stakeholders, including school faculty, community groups, and families, when making decisions and mediating conflicts in order to ensure successful outcomes for students with disabilities.

Additionally, general education teachers will need to learn about special education (President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002) and, likewise, special education teachers will need to learn more about general education.

Because academic success depends on the knowledge and skills of both special education and general education teachers (NASDSE, 2002), the special education administrator will need to collaborate to unite two systems that have not traditionally worked together to educate children with disabilities.

Unexpected Outcomes

Wakeman et al. (2006) identified several fundamental issues related to special education administration. Special education law has traditionally been a focus for research in this regard. Similarly, knowledge of the characteristics of individuals with special needs is considered to be one of the core components for working with students with disabilities and their families.   The factor analysis identified neither of these two as essential competencies. However, it cannot be inferred that newly appointed special education administrators do not need to possess this fundamental knowledge. In fact, such a conclusion would not be consistent with prior research on special education administration (Algozzine, 2002; Davidson & Gooden, 2002; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Mantle, 2005; Riley, 2002), in which administrators acknowledged that they lacked adequate knowledge of special education law and that they would benefit from professional development in this area. Davidson and Algozinne (2002) have argued that "Principals have a significant impact on the delivery of services for students with disabilities as a result of their knowledge of the laws that govern special education" (p. 47). However, for the participants in this study, this knowledge was not perceived to be essential. A possible explanation could be that the urban directors of special education assumed that special education

administrators would already have acquired such knowledge as part of their job training, education, or previous experience.

<center>Research Question Two</center>

The second research question was: "What relationship exists between the years of experience as a director of special education and the underlying competencies identified through Research Question 1?" The null hypothesis was that there was no relationship between the years of experience as a director of special education and the underlying competencies identified through Research Question 1. A multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the relationship between the dependent or predictor variable—years of experience as a director of special education—and the three underlying factors. The results indicated that there was no statistically significant relationship between the years of experience as a director of special education and the underlying competencies. The results of the regression analysis were not significant: $F (3, 29) =1.625$, $p>0.05$. Overall, the linear composite of the independent variables entered into the regression procedure predicted 15% of the variation. To further examine question two, a post hoc test was performed to detect differences in the directors' years of experience and the three identified factors. The Kruskal-Wallis (K-Independent) test confirmed that there were no statistically significant differences in the directors' years of experience and the three factors: *Management, Instruction and Change; Supervision of Faculty;* and *Team Building Skills*. Specifically, no statistically significant level for years of experience was found for *Management, Instruction and Change* ($H (2) = 8.463$, $p>.05$); for *Supervision of Faculty* ($H(2)= 4.457$, $p>.05$); or for *Team Building Skills* ($H(2) =2.199$, $p>.05$), indicating that the groups did not differ significantly from each other with regard to years of experience as a director of special education. While the multiple regression was used to see if the underlying factors could predict

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the years of experience, the Kruskal-Wallis compared the mean ranks of the urban directors of special education to show how they differed. In both cases, the results were not significant.

It would be logical to assume that there would be some significant differences in the underlying factors based on years of experience with the idea that more years of experience as an urban director of special education would provide a different perspective on the roles, responsibilities and expectations than that of special education directors with fewer years of experience. Interestingly, however, years of experience as a director of special education had no bearing on the three factors: *Management, Instruction and Change, Supervision of Faculty, and Team Building Skills.* In probing the significance of these non-significant findings, two possible explanations are proffered in an attempt to begin a dialogue that would hopefully lead to a deeper understanding as to why no relationship was found between the years of experience as a director of special education and the three factors.

One possible explanation might be because the current legislative reforms are equally challenging and problematic for all urban special education directors and that there has not been enough time to figure out what programs or strategies are effective in meeting the demands of the NCLB and IDEA 2004. The sweeping reforms may have leveled the playing field and thus the most experienced and the newly appointed urban special education director alike are in a quandary as to how to effectively meet the most recent legislative mandates. As a result, more experience as an urban director of special education did not provide an advantage over those directors with less experience.

Based on the demographic information, with a majority of the participants being females and/or the fact that there was not an ethnically diverse representation, the results may indicate that the issues of gender and ethnicity played a greater role than years of experience. Most of the

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participants, 41.9%, reported being 51-55 years old, with approximately 87% of the participants indicating that they were white, non-Hispanic, and 63.7% of these being females.

Considering the need for on-going professional development and support for special education administrators, if years of experience as an urban director of special education and the underlying factors do not offer any insight, it is important to look further into this phenomenon in order to understand how years of experience will contribute to or influence an urban director of special education's perceptions of essential competencies. The current study did not find a relationship between years of experience as an urban director of special education and the three underlying factors

Limitations

Despite care and efforts to ensure findings that were both robust and generalizable, the present research is, like all studies, subject to certain limitations. First, the directors of special education surveyed for this study were all members of the same professional organization, the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative, and, as such, they may share biases or possess similar views or perspectives regarding essential competencies. In other words, their perceptions of the competencies essential for newly appointed special education administrators may not be representative of those of other directors of education who are not affiliated with the Collaborative. As such, the results of this survey may not be as generalizable as results obtained from a more diverse sample.

Second, the 24 competencies on the 2007 Urban Special Education Leadership Survey did not, and could not, represent every possible competency. Although the competencies were based on current literature, they should not be viewed as an exhaustive or complete list.

Third, the internal reliability of this study is limited because it was based on a self-reported instrument.

Fourth, most of the participants were white, non-Hispanic females, and their responses may not accurately reflect the opinions of urban directors of special education from other ethnic groups. A proportional heterogeneous sample of participants might have produced different conclusions.

Fifth, the Institutional Review Board insisted on the use of categorical data on the demographic section. This prevented the researcher from obtaining a clearer and more accurate picture of the participants.

Finally, the most serious weakness of this study lies in the small sample size. The low response rate seriously decreased the representativeness of the sample, thus limiting the generalizabilty of the findings. While it is possible that discomfort with technology impacted negatively on participation, the low response rate is more likely explained by national data that have shown a steady decline in motivation and willingness to complete surveys (Bickart & Schmittlein, 1999; Dey, 1997), although an increase in surveying may be yet another (related) explanation (Sheehan, 2001). With regard to research methodology in the study of the principals, Hallinger and Heck (1996a) reported that conducting quantitative studies is "problematic" (pp. 774-5). Although the urban directors of special education are not principals, as administrators they share many of the same job characteristics and responsibilities and are similarly challenged by time constraints. As a result, the factor analysis procedure was preformed with numbers significantly lower than what researchers have determined to be "minimally acceptable" (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001, p. 588).

Despite these limitations and shortcomings, the present study provides a basis for recommendations for the training and support of urban special education administrators. First of all, research on school effectiveness overwhelmingly shows that the success of school improvement endeavors depends upon leadership (Fullan, 1993). In spite of this common knowledge, many school leadership programs still do not require their leadership candidates to formally study special education administration as part of their graduate programs. At best, administrative topics may be addressed in passing in lectures that address funding or budgeting issues in special education. It is not surprising, then, that many candidates successfully complete their graduate programs and obtain their certification and yet are not sufficiently prepared to assume their roles as special education administrators (Burton, 2004). In light of the recent mandates and legislative changes regarding education and their impact on special education and, in particular, on special education administration, administrators will need a set of knowledge and skills that will allow them to effectively lead personnel, manage programs and services, and collaborate with various stakeholders to ensure quality education for all students with disabilities.

Graduate programs that prepare prospective administrators can help ameliorate this unfortunate pattern of deficiency by requiring all leadership candidates to know and understand the basic principles of special education. While administrators do not have to be experts, they should at least be competent in the field. Additionally, leadership preparation programs would do well to integrate the two systems of general and special education, which have historically operated in isolation. It would be most appropriate for special education and general education leadership programs to collaborate and provide candidates with a solid foundation, one that incorporates the components of special education, general education and educational

administration (Lashley & Bosacrdin, 2003). If this were done, administrators would be better prepared to integrate their schools into an inclusive educational program in which all students are challenged to reach their maximum potential. This message of integration can set the tone and help to foster a climate of collaboration, thus creating a vibrant learning community that meets the needs of all students.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Professional Development</div>

1. Use authentic situations for training

2. Provide mentoring opportunities that will support special education administrators in the supervision and implementation of special education programs and services

3. Develop professional development programs that will be practical and relevant to special education administrators' most immediate needs

4. Provide newly appointed special education administrators with the opportunity to be observed and coached by experienced special education administrators

5. Develop on-going cooperative and collaborative professional development programs between university and school district personnel.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Future Research</div>

Based on the results of this exploratory study, it appears that it would be beneficial if this study were replicated with a larger and more diverse sample. In addition, future research should explore areas of competency that were not included in this study, such as assistive technology, behavior management, and transition. Moreover, a future study might also survey newly appointed special education administrators to see what competencies they perceive to be essential after their initial experience in their job functions. Finally, future research designs

should incorporate both qualitative and quantitative methodology to clarify the importance of and rationale for selection of given competencies.

<center>Recommendations for Researchers</center>

Some populations typically have low response rates (Lusk, Delclos, Burau, Drwahorn & Aday, 2007) and school administrators appear to be included in that category. Cohen and Mansion (2000) reported that populations differ in their accessibility and noted that students and teachers were generally not difficult to survey but identified principals as "elusive group of subjects" (p. 173). The very nature of the special education administrator's job is fraught with paperwork, meetings, evaluations, and unexpected situations, which demand equal time and attention. Any "free time" would most likely be channeled to catching up on work that is due or maybe past due and not spent completing a survey.

Halllinger and Heck's (1996a) review of fifteen years of research on the role of the principal in school effectiveness expressed concern in regard to probability sampling and adequate sample size in reporting quantitative research. An examination of the studies cited in this research study revealed that low response rate was often listed as a limitation. In some cases, even when professional organizations surveyed their members the response rate was still low. However, the researcher believes that it is possible that a higher response rate might be achieved by other avenues such as making multiple contacts through the mail and by using telephone contact in conjunction with the online survey (Dillman, 2000).

Prior to 2000, a 90% return rate for online surveys was not uncommon, compared to the 2-30% average that is now the case (Shaugnessy, Zechmeister, & Zechmeister, 2006). A concerted effort needs to be made not only to understand why response rates are typically low among administrators, but also to create effective ways to address this thorny dilemma, which is

<center>90</center>

common in educational research.

Three possible barriers to response might be the following: 1) the perception of the lack of relevance to their work; 2) lack of time; and 3) over saturation with requests to complete surveys. With regard to the lack of relevance, the research and practice gap has existed and continues to widen. If the perception among administrators is that completing a ten-minute survey from a researcher associated with a university will not have an immediate or future impact on their work, completing an online survey would not be considered the best use of their already limited time.

Despite great measures taken to filter junk mail, unwanted and inappropriate email is still delivered. The need for administrators to determine which email is a priority and then to distinguish between which email gets answered first may take precedence over requests to complete information, pushing aside what does not need to be done. This ability is critical in order to focus on administrative responsibilities.

The saturation of requests for information is an issue that is present for Internet users, both professional and personal. Those not directly related to the job may be viewed as annoying and quickly deleted. Inasmuch as long field times may be effective in increasing response rates, if the lack of time is the primary reason for not responding, a longer field time may not prove to be beneficial.

The low response rate from this population raises several concerns and poses a serious threat to collecting data from a population that has the experience and knowledge to provide critical information and may provide practical implications and insights from the field which can inform and direct research projects. The convenience of technology or the cost cannot be the most important factors considered when conducting survey research.

Therefore, to increase administrators' willingness to participate, the researcher recommends that data be collected at professional conferences. Prospective participants could complete online surveys at kiosks or be given the option of completing a hard copy at the conference, where they can be reminded frequently and encouraged to participate. Also, since response rates among organizations seem to be declining, it is recommended that data be gathered from multiple organizations to obtain a greater sample. In addition, since there is no one approach that is guaranteed to work, it would be beneficial to send letters and/or phone calls in advance to alert prospective participants to expect a survey call from a reputable researcher or district representative. Finally, the researcher recommends that during the time of data collection, friendly reminders be sent thanking the prospective participants in advance for their participation.

Before becoming agents of change, or perhaps in order to become agents of change, newly appointed special education administrators need to possess the essential competencies that will enable them to effectively lead teams, make informed decisions and influence practices and policy. With all of the demands placed upon special education administrators and the limited training and experience in the field of special education, newly appointed special education administrators will find themselves lacking the knowledge and skills to effectively implement and create change. Given the fact that most administrators receive little or no preparation in the administration or supervision of special education programs in their graduate programs, district administrators will need to provide training for newly appointed special education administrators if they are indeed to ensure that every student with disabilities is provided with a quality education.

Research shows that administrators have acknowledged the need for training in special education administration and have expressed a desire for training. In addition, administrators most often turn to their district offices for support and resources when in need. The critical skills and knowledge that were not acquired previously must be learned in practice. Because there is a wide spectrum of knowledge and skills related to special education, it would be beneficial for districts to focus their professional development programs and activities on the most essential skills for the newly appointed special education administrator and then to build strategically upon that foundation. It is not a reasonable expectation to think that newly appointed special education administrators would be prepared to assume their duties without significant support. Until administrators of special education understand the fundamental and current issues in special education, they cannot successfully serve as positive change agents.

Conclusion

This exploratory study identified the factors that underlie essential competencies for newly appointed urban special education administrators as reported by urban directors of special education from the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative. Two research questions and two null hypotheses were generated to investigate the underlying factors in competencies perceived by urban special education directors to be essential for newly appointed special education directors (*Management, Instruction and Change; Supervision of Faculty; and Team Building Skills*) and to investigate the relationship between years of experience as a director of special education and these underlying factors. The results were sufficient to reject the null hypotheses in both cases. The goal of this study was to gather data on essential competencies and to increase the body of knowledge relating to newly appointed special education

administrators. As such, this study can serve as a baseline for future research that examines vital

special education leadership competencies.

APPENDIX A: IRB LETTER

University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901, 407-882-2012 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Notice of Exempt Review Status

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board**
          FWA00000351, Exp. 5/07/10, IRB00001138

To: **Caroline D Pratt Marrett**

Date: **October 26, 2007**

IRB Number: **SBE-07-05144**

Study Title: **What leadership competencies do urban school district administrators perceive to be important for newly appointed urban special education leaders to be effective?**

Dear Researcher:

Your research protocol was reviewed by the IRB Chair on 10/26/2007. Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.101, your study has been determined to be **minimal risk for human subjects and exempt** from further IRB review or renewal unless you later wish to add the use of identifiers or change the protocol procedures in a way that might increase risk to participants. Before making any changes to your study, call the IRB office to discuss the changes. **A change which incorporates the use of identifiers may mean the study is no longer exempt, thus requiring the submission of a new application to change the classification to expedited if the risk is still minimal.** Please submit the Termination/Final Report form when the study has been completed. All forms may be completed and submitted online at https://iris.research.ucf.edu.

The category for which exempt status has been determined for this protocol is as follows:

2. Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey or interview procedures, or the observation of public behavior, so long as confidentiality is maintained.

     (i)   Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that the subject cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subject, **and/or**

     (ii)   Subject's responses, if known outside the research would not reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subject's financial standing or employability or reputation.

A **waiver of documentation of consent** has been approved for all subjects. Participants do not have to sign a consent form, but the IRB requires that you give participants a copy of the IRB-approved consent form, letter, information sheet, or statement of voluntary consent at the top of the survey.

All data, which may include signed consent form documents, must be retained in a locked file cabinet for a minimum of three years (six if HIPAA applies) past the completion of this research. Any links to the identification of participants should be maintained on a password-protected computer if electronic information is used. Additional requirements may be imposed by your funding agency, your department, or other entities. Access to data is limited to authorized individuals listed as key study personnel.

On behalf of Tracy Dietz, Ph.D., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Janice Turchin on 10/26/2007 03:13:01 PM EDT

Janice McTurchin

IRB Coordinator

**Education
Development
Center, Inc.**

Human Protections Program
Alan Stockdale, Ph.D., IRB Chair

David P. Riley, Ph.D.
Education Development Center, Inc.
55 Chapel Street
Newton, MA 02458

October 22, 2007

Re: Essential Competencies for Urban Special Education Leaders

Dear Dr. Riley:

Alan Stockdale, the IRB Chair, has reviewed your application for administrative review of the above named protocol and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB oversight provided for in 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2):

> (b) Unless otherwise required by department or agency heads, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the following categories are exempt from this policy:
>
> (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Investigators conducting work exempt from expedited or full-IRB review are nevertheless responsible for ensuring proper protections for human subjects. These protections include safeguarding privacy and confidentiality; documenting the human subjects training of all key personnel; ascertaining that each potential subject understands the nature of the research and of their participation; taking whatever steps are necessary to gain informed consent; reporting any serious or unexpected adverse events to the Human Protections Administrator; and requesting IRB approval of any proposed change in the protocol that would alter the exempt status prior to its implementation.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 617-618-2971 or at humanprotections@edc.org.

Sincerely,

Alan Stockdale, Ph.D.
IRB Chair

HUMAN PROTECTIONS PROGRAM
55 CHAPEL STREET
NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02458-1060
TELEPHONE 617-969-7100 x2971
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Essential Competencies for Urban Special Education Leaders

Statement of Consent

Dear Collaborative Member:

The Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative is surveying its Members on their perceptions of issues related to contemporary special education leadership issues and I am writing to ask your participation. The survey is being conducted in collaboration with colleagues at the University of Central Florida and will contribute to a deeper understanding of the essential competencies and skills needed for special education leaders. The survey questions will ask about your experiences and perceptions as a special education administrator with regard to leadership preparation and training. Responses will be compiled into a Collaborative Research Brief and an article for a future issue of the Urban Perspectives newsletter.

STUDY DESCRIPTION

This study examines perceptions of essential special education leadership competencies and needed training from an urban special education district administrator's view. The role and function of special education leaders have changed swiftly and significantly over the past five years. The purpose of the study is to identify specific competencies and training urban school district administrators believe are essential for newly hired special education leaders. The Collaborative seeks to examine these perceptions to determine the most effective way to prepare and support special education leaders.

PROCEDURES

You are being asked to participate in an online survey that will take approximately ten minutes. The 50-question survey will ask you questions about your views about the competencies and training needed for special education leaders. This survey is anonymous and IP addresses will not be logged. The data collection period will be three weeks.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS/INCONVENIENCES

The risks and discomforts for participating in this study are minimal. If you become tired or uncomfortable from completing the survey, you may stop and/or complete the survey another time.

BENEFITS

You will not personally benefit directly from participating in this study. However, the information will provide you and your school district with potentially valuable information about preparing and supporting urban special education administrators.

ALTERNATIVES

The survey is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate.

CONFIDENTIALITY

This online survey is completely anonymous and you can be assured that your responses will never be matched with your name, since IP addresses will be removed from the survey when it is submitted.

COSTS

There will be no costs to you associated with this study.

COMPENSATION AND PAYMENTS

You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions about this research study now or later, or in the unlikely event you think you have been injured as a result of the research, you should call David Riley, PhD., the Principal Investigator for this study at 617-618-2340. If you cannot reach Dr. Riley, you may call EDC's Human Protections Administrator at 617-618-2971. You may also call this number if you have complaints about this research study, you believe you are not being treated fairly, or you have questions about your rights as a research subject.

PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY

Your participation in this study is voluntary.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

Please select I AGREE to indicate that you have read the above information, understand the risks and benefits of completing this survey, are at least 18 years of age, and completing this survey constitutes my informed consent.

I agree

Next >>

APPENDIX B: ASSESSMENTS

Essential Competencies for Urban Special Education Leaders

Survey

On a scale from 1-5, please indicate to what extent you believe the following competencies are critical to the effectiveness of newly appointed special education leaders. For purposes of this survey, newly appointed leaders are individuals with 1-3 years of experience who are responsible for improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

	Not Essential (1)	Somewhat Essential (2)	Essential (3)	Very Essential (4)	Vital (5)
1. Interpersonal					
2. Communication skills					
3. Collaboration skills					
4. Mediation skills					
5. Leadership skills					
6. Managerial skills					
7. Knowledge of special education law					
8. Problem solving skills					
9. Instructional leadership					
10. Knowledge of general and special education curriculum					
11. Time management					
12. Knowledge of best ways to recruit faculty					
13. Knowledge of best ways to retain faculty					
14. Knowledge of best ways to supervise faculty					
15. Ability to use data to make decisions					
16. Research skills related to implementing change					
17. Cultural responsiveness					
18. Improving student achievement					
19. Knowledge of research based instructional practices					
20. Knowledge of sustaining change					
21. Knowledge of characteristics of individuals with special needs					
22. Crisis Prevention strategies					
23. Approaches to increasing family involvement					
24. Monitoring/evaluating programs					

25. What other competency/skill not listed do you believe is important for newly appointed urban special education leaders?

26. Are there special education leadership positions that your district has had difficulty in filling this year?

yes

no

a. If yes, please specify which ones:

101

27. Were there special education leadership positions that were vacant due to someone in your district office leaving that you had difficulty replacing this year?

yes

no

a. If yes, please specify which ones:

28. From the list below, type in the number of each type of leadership development training programs offered in your district in the past 24 months to newly appointed administrators? Fill in all that apply.

University-based training program	
District's own leadership program	
State professional development training	
National professional development training	

Please identify other types of leadership development training programs offered in your district in the past 24 months to newly appointed administrators. Include the number of each type of leadership development training programs in parentheses.

28a.

28b.

28c.

Please indicate to what extent you believe the following continuing education training is important to leadership development for special education leaders.

	Not Essential (1)	Somewhat Essential (2)	Essential (3)	Very Essential (4)	Vital (5)
29. Special education laws and regulations					
30. Budgeting and fiscal management					
31. Personnel Management (i.e., hiring, supervising & evaluating)					
32. Curriculum and instruction					
33. Additional on-the-job training					
34. Best practices in professional development					
35. Community Relations					
36. Contract Management					

Please indicate other continuing education training that you feel is important to leadership development for special education leaders.

37.

38.

39. Using the scale below, please rate the following question.

	Extremely Difficult	Difficult	Neither Difficult or Easy	Extremely Easy	Easy
How difficult has it been for your school district to fill central office positions in the past year?					

Essential Competencies for Urban Special Education Leaders

Demographic Questionnaire

Please complete the following information that most accurately describes you and your experiences an administrator.

1. Current Position:

Administrator of Special Education

Supervisor of Special Education

Coordinator of Special Education

Other (please specify)

_____

2. How many years have you served in your current position?

Less than 1 year

1-3 years

4-6 years

7-9 years

10-12 years

13-15 years

More than 15 years

3. How long have you worked for your current school district?

1-3 years

4-6 years

7-9 years

10-12 years

13-15 years

More than 15 years

4. What was your primary professional background prior to becoming a special education director?

Special education

General education

Other (please specify)

_____

5. How many more years do you anticipate working in your current position before you retire?

Less than 1 year

1-3 years

4-6 years

7-9 years

10-12 years

13-15 years

More than 15 years

6. Are you currently looking for another position that does not include special education responsibilities?

yes

no

7. In your current position, how many opportunities were there to receive training in general education in your school district in the past 12 months?

None at all

1-2

3-4

5 or more

8. Gender:

Male

Female

9. Age:

Under 30

31-35

36-40

41-50

51-55

55-60

Over 60

10. Ethnicity: Please check one.

White/Non-Hispanic

Black/Non-Hispanic

Hispanic/Latino

Asian/Pacific Islander

Native American

Other (please specify)

11. Please indicate your highest level of education.

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Specialist degree

Doctorate

<< Prev   Done >>

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