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Special Education "Preparation Gap:" Perceptions of the Western Region Special Education Advisers Concerning Pennsylvania's Special Education Competencies for School Leaders

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SPECIAL EDUCATION “PREPARATION GAP:” PERCEPTIONS OF THE
WESTERN REGION SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISERS CONCERNING
PENNSYLVANIA’S SPECIAL EDUCATION COMPETENCIES FOR SCHOOL
LEADERS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Matthew Richard Conner

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May 2012

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Title: Special Education "Preparation Gap:" Perceptions of the Western Region Special Education Advisers Concerning Pennsylvania's Special Education Competencies for School Leaders

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This study determines the strengths and weaknesses of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework as adopted by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The perspectives of Special Education Advisers (individuals with significant experience in serving students with disabilities) are gathered through semi-structured interviews. This research was designed to (a) identify special education challenges facing school administrators from the viewpoint of special education advisers, (b) contribute to the overall understanding of what beliefs, knowledge, and skills are needed in the administration of special education, (c) determine the current strengths and weaknesses of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders, and (d) develop recommendations for the improvement of principal preparation programs.

The sample for this study consisted of eight special education advisers from Pennsylvania's west region of the Division of Monitoring and Improvement, Bureau of Special Education. Prior to the formal study, the researcher piloted the interview protocol with four special education advisers outside of the formal participant pool. The individuals' feedback provided evidence of the protocol's reliability and validity. Following the success of the pilot study, the formal study was conducted and its data underwent descriptive analysis.

Results were analyzed to make recommendations for strengthening principal preparation and to help schools avoid costly litigation incurred by special education mistakes. The study offers ways to close the “preparation gap” in administrator schooling, a flaw most evident in the area of special education and one that has been highlighted by the high-stakes accountability movement.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

From day-to-day demands of a school building management to being a program-wide instructional leader, principals face a steep learning curve as they approach their list of duties. The principal's performance doubtlessly affects the teachers and students who they direct, and administrators today are held increasingly responsible for the success of their schools. As Tucker and Coddling (2002) reflected:

Why would anyone want the job of principal? Many school principals we know have the look these days of the proverbial deer caught in the headlights. Almost overnight, it seems they have been caught in the high beams of the burgeoning accountability movement. Now as never before, the public and all the organs of government are insisting that student academic performance improve—and fast.

(p. 1)

According to many seasoned administrators, the best education is experience. To meet current standards and support an increasingly diverse student body, however, principal preparation programs must evolve to help administrators readily assume their front office roles.

This study's research problem focuses on the adequacy of principal preparation in issues related to special education. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) demands that schools provide appropriate services, follow special education procedures and safeguards, and implement suitable instructional programs for students with disabilities. Failure to comply with special education laws can place crippling restraints on administrative authority via financial sanctions, lawsuits, and due process hearings.

In spite of these serious implications, an examination of course offerings from Pennsylvania universities suggests that there is little emphasis on special education issues in principal preparation. Recent literature reveals that school administrators suffer a “preparation gap” in their training; that is, discrepancies exist between the special education pre-service training principals receive and the skills they need for their on-the-job special education duties (Levine, 2005). Other studies analyze the licensing standards required for school principals from the perspective of administrators. As of yet, little research focuses specifically on the special education competencies needed for school leadership.

This study analyzed the “preparation gap” for school principals in the area of special education from the vantage point of special education advisers. Special education advisers are employed by the Pennsylvania Bureau of Special Education’s Division of Compliance. These individuals investigate special education complaints filed by parents throughout the Commonwealth and issue Complaint Investigation Reports (CIRs) if necessary. This study collected the views of Pennsylvania special education advisers from the Western Region of the Division of Monitoring and Improvement on the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework and used their perceptions to determine the framework’s strengths and weaknesses. With their knowledge of statewide special education issues, these advisers offered a backward design perspective on which competencies should be emphasized for school leaders in preparation programs. Their insights could help better prepare new elementary and secondary school administrators for the most common challenges of special education.

Statement of the Problem

Administrators are challenged to create a school culture that both prepares students for a global society and meets the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). This legislation has created an anxious climate in schools by placing a school's success or failure directly on its leaders. This level of accountability tremendously increased pressure on administrators and encouraged both educators and educational groups to seek a solution. One response involves improving the training of school leaders.

Several organizations, such as the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC), and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NAASP), along with the states themselves, are devoting more research and discussion to “reinvent[ing] the principalship” (Usdan, McCloud, & Pdmotko, 2000, p. 1) of 21st century schools. The Pennsylvania Department of Education moved to enhance principal preparation by establishing an aligned system of preparation, induction, and continual professional development. To support this framework, the state of Pennsylvania cites its finding that “qualified and effective” teachers encourage student success, and relates this discovery to school administration:

Immediately on the heels of this finding came another, one with a similar logic and reasoned argument, one carrying the same level of imperative: school leaders are also critical to the success of schools and the educational system. The need for “instructional leadership” in addition to effective management practice is essential for student success at both the school and district levels. This

Framework and Guidelines for Principal Preparation Programs is designed to establish highly effective preparation programs within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to meet the increasing need for highly qualified instructional leaders in our schools and educational systems. (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008a, p. 1)

Principals today are instructional leaders for all students, including those with disabilities, rather than being just building-level managers for general education (Boscardin, 2005). Thus, it is striking that current principal preparation programs offer only a cursory overview of topics like special education case law. Tucker and Coddling (2002) reported that “the substance of these programs is typically thin. And there is very little connection between the curriculum as taught and the actual demands, conditions, and problems of everyday practice” (p. 13). Furthermore, while these programs may provide some review of discipline guidelines for special education students, Lasky and Karge (2006) found that many valuable insights about serving individuals with disabilities are overlooked. For example, these programs may provide only a cursory review of discipline guidelines necessary for working with special education students and do not review the importance of displaying empathy with family members of students with disabilities. Current literature of principal programs reflects a disjointed curriculum that does not prepare school administrators for the job in front of them, especially in terms of special education. With a proper background in the educational area and knowledge of common mishaps therein, newly certified school administrators could be much better prepared.

Purpose of the Study

The state of Pennsylvania, through its reform efforts, acknowledges that current principal preparation programs may not supply the skills and know-how necessary for school administrators to be successful (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008b). This study examines the efficacy of the state's Special Education Competencies for School Leaders, which are part of Pennsylvania's Framework and Guidelines for Principal Preparation Programs.

This research was designed to (a) identify special education challenges facing school administrators from the viewpoint of special education advisers, (b) contribute to the overall understanding of what beliefs, knowledge, and skills are needed in the administration of special education, (c) determine the current strengths and weaknesses of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders, and (d) develop recommendations for the improvement of principal preparation programs.

In order to accomplish this goal, an interview protocol was developed for administration to Pennsylvania special education advisers from the Western Region of the Division of Monitoring and Improvement. Relevant literature was reviewed in order to tailor interview questions that could determine the effectiveness of the competencies from the perspective of the special education advisers. Finally, the results were used to formulate recommendations for future principal programs. Information acquired from this study may help both university preparation programs and individual faculty to design curricula that will better prepare principals for current special education problems—a change that will ultimately enable school leaders to better meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Organization of the Study

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the general introduction and background of the problem, as well as definitions of pertinent terminology. Chapter 2 presents the strands of literature that illuminate the area of principal preparation in special education with an emphasis on historical elements and the current practices, standards, and developmental facilitators of the state's Special Education Competencies framework. Chapter 3 outlines the research design and procedures used to conduct the study. Chapter 4 encompasses data collection and analysis. The final chapter presents the results of the study, discusses its findings, and offers conclusions regarding the implications of the research.

Research Questions

The following questions guide this study:

1. Which of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders are viewed as the most important to the success of practicing Pennsylvania school principals from the perspective of special education advisers?
2. What specific beliefs, knowledge, and skills do principals need to effectively supervise site-based special education programs from the perspective of special education advisers?
3. What special education compliance issues occur most frequently across Western Pennsylvania from the perspective of special education advisers?

Theoretical Framework

In order for school leaders to effectively educate all students, they must be adequately prepared for the job. Previous studies have established that special education

issues are generally not part of the coursework for administrator preparation programs, nor are direct experiences with students with disabilities and their diverse needs (Harlin-Fischer, 1998). Other studies have examined the necessary knowledge and skills that principals must possess in order to be effective leaders of site-based special education programs (Burton, 2008). To inspect the framework of Pennsylvania's reforms in the area of principal preparation, this study utilizes a backward design model.

This process, developed by Wiggins and McTighe, begins with the outcome in mind. "One starts with the end--the desired results (goals or standards)--and then derives the curriculum from the evidence of learning (performances) called for by the standard and the teaching needed to equip students to perform" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 8). The backward design model was originally formulated for curriculum development and alignment. Later, Wiggins and McTighe revisited their framework to suggest a three stage process of educational reform planning:

- *Stage 1: Identify desired results.* In Stage 1, change agents establish the aim of a particular reform with regard to its long-term mission and program goals.
- *Stage 2: Determine acceptable evidence.* In Stage 2, reformers think like assessors *before* designing specific action plans. The backward design orientation encourages careful consideration of what evidence is needed to prove that the desired results have been achieved.
- *Stage 3: Plan actions to achieve goals.* With clearly identified results and appropriate evidence in mind, it is *now* the time to plan for action. (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007)

The principles of the backwards design school reform process can be applied similarly to the system change process. For the purpose of this study, the researcher examines the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework as a system. One of the interrelated elements of this system is principal preparation in relation to the supervision of special education and ultimately student achievement. The special education advisers see the end results of what goes wrong in this special education programming system. By examining the strengths and weakness of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework from the advisers' perspectives, appropriate recommendations can be made to improve university preparation programs for school administrators.

Definition of Terms

The commonly used terms of this study are defined as follows:

- *Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)*: This measure of year-to-year student achievement is based on the state assessment system and is a cornerstone of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. States must develop their own goals for AYP and raise the bar in gradual increments so that 100% of their students achieve proficient assessments by the 2013-14 school years. AYP applies to every district and school in the state; however, the only programs that can face NCLB sanctions for not making AYP for two or more consecutive years are those that receive Title I funds.
- *Behavior Management*: With self-discipline as the goal, teachers use these activities to promote positive student behavior. All activities are individualized based on each child's needs. The main objectives of behavior

management are to decrease antisocial and disruptive behaviors and to increase appropriate pro-social behaviors.

- *Bureau of Special Education*: This part of the Pennsylvania Department of Education is responsible for supervising all public schools, school districts, and other public education agencies within the state. The Bureau ensures that each student with a disability receives a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and that each family has the benefit of procedural safeguards.
- *Competency*: The ability to perform a particular activity to a prescribed standard.
- *Competency-Based Training*: Preparation that aims to improve the cluster of related knowledge, skills, and attitudes that play a major role in one's work, correlate with job performance, and can be measured against well-accepted standards.
- *Continuum of Services*: To meet federal regulations, each public agency must ensure that a continuum of alternative placements is available to support children with disabilities. The continuum must include the alternative placements listed in the definition of special education (i.e., instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, and instruction in hospitals and institutions). Moreover, supplementary services (e.g., resource room and itinerant instruction) must be provided in conjunction with regular class placement (Bateman & Bateman, 2001, p. 76).
- *Co-Teaching*: Two or more people sharing instructional duties for some or all of the students assigned to a classroom. This involves the distribution of

responsibility among educators for lesson-planning, instruction, and evaluation for a classroom of students.

- *Division of Compliance*: A part of Pennsylvania's Bureau of Special Education that investigates complaints regarding the implementation of federal and state special education laws. The department is split into three geographic regions: west, central, and east.
- *Due Process*: The procedures that parents can use to disagree with the decisions of school officials concerning special education. The parent is informed of this right by written notice, which describes the options of a prehearing conference, a preliminary resolution session, a formal hearing, and appeals (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008c).
- *Education of All Handicapped Children Act*: "The 1975 federal regulation that assured children with disabilities a free and appropriate public education and provided the states with federal funding to assist them in providing that education" (Bateman & Bateman, 2001, p. 8).
- *Evaluation Report*: "A written report that summarizes the findings of the multidisciplinary evaluation team about the student's disability and necessary adaptations for the student to be successful in their educational setting" (Bateman & Bateman, 2001, p. 71).
- *Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)*: A program of education and related services that is designed to meet an individual's special education needs. Appropriate services are those which allow the child to make

meaningful progress in the school setting. FAPE is provided without charge to parents (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008c).

- *Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)*: "A problem solving process for addressing student problem behavior. FBA relies on a variety of techniques and strategies to identify the reasons for a specific behavior and to help the Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams select interventions that directly address the problem behavior" (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2009).
- *General Education Curriculum*: "The curriculum as established for students without disabilities" (Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose, & Jackson, 2002, p. 9).
- *Inclusion*: A practice that includes special education students in the regular classroom environment to the greatest extent possible. With the help of specially designed instruction and adequate in-class support, students with disabilities can be better integrated into the school community.
- *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*: The federal law which governs the provision of special education services and the rights of parents who have a child with a disability. The original act was amended in 2004 and is now entitled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008c).
- *Individualized Education Program (IEP)*: The plan developed by the IEP team (including parents, general education teacher, special education teacher and the LEA) that outlines the programs and services necessary for a free,

appropriate public education for children with disabilities (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008c).

- *Integration*: The merging of general and special education into a unified educational system.
- *Interdisciplinary*: Collaboration of two or more distinct disciplines, areas of instruction, or professions.
- *Intermediate Units*: A part of the public education governance structure in Pennsylvania that is positioned between the state education agency and the local school districts. Intermediate Units were primarily designed to provide training services in best inclusive practices for all educational programs.
- *Knowledge Base*: Specific information that is acquired for use in a professional or educational field.
- *Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)*: The fact that students eligible for special education will be educated to the maximum extent appropriate for students who are not disabled (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008c).
- *Local Education Agency (LEA)*: The school district representative at IEP meetings. Often administrators themselves, these individuals are responsible for representing the district and its obligations to meet IEP goals.
- *Manifestation Determination*: A procedure requiring all parties to review instances of school rule infractions or misconduct (cumulative ten day rule), weapons violations, or drug/controlled substance violations for the purpose of determining whether the infraction is a result of the student's disability.

- *Mainstreaming*: A practice that encourages the education of handicapped children alongside their non-handicapped peers, to the maximum extent appropriate and in both public and private facilities. Separate schooling occurs only when the nature or severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes—even with the use of supplementary aids and services—cannot be achieved in a satisfactory manner.
- *Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT)*: A team comprised of educators, other professional individuals, and parents that reviews all formal testing of a child and other evaluation materials. The evaluation team must issue a written report that states if a child has a disability necessitating special education and that makes suggestions about programs and services needed (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008c).
- *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)*: "The 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) of 1965. NCLB significantly raises expectations for states, local school districts, and schools in that all students will meet or exceed standards in reading and mathematics by the 2013-2014 school year" (No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, 2002).
- *Preparation Gap*: A discrepancy between what is taught in a preparation program and what is needed to develop the skills and competencies necessary to perform a professional role.
- *Pre-Referral Intervention*: Prior to a referral for formal special education evaluation, these interventions are delivered in a student's regular classroom in an attempt to improve learning.

- *Pre-Service Instruction*: Training in skills and competencies that occurs prior to professional employment at an institution of higher education.
- *Procedural Safeguards*: Those provisions in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act which protect parents' and students' rights with respect to a free and appropriate education (FAPE).
- *Related Services*: Required support services that assist children with disabilities in benefitting from special education. Related services may include transportation, developmental and corrective services, speech-language pathology and audiology services, interpreting services, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, counseling services.
- *Residential Facility*: An educational placement that provides 24-hour supervision for students with disabilities, thereby enabling them to receive a free and appropriate public education.
- *Response to Intervention (RtI)*: The multiple tiers of intervention delivered to students, each of which includes progress monitoring. If none of the interventions result in student success, the individual is then identified as needing special education services. The proactive RtI method differs from the traditional discrepancy model of identifying special education students, which some pundits refer to as the “wait to fail” method.
- *School Administrator*: Those principals or assistant principals who supervise education delivery, including special education services, in public K-12 school settings (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008c).

- *Site-Based Management*: A strategy to improve education by transferring significant authority and responsibility for decision-making from the central office to the individual school site.
- *Special Education*: An educational program individually designed to meet the unique education needs of a child with a disability. A special education professional is directly involved as either a consultant or a provider of services (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008c).
- *Special Education Adviser*: Employed by the Pennsylvania Bureau of Special Education's Division of Compliance Complaints, these individuals investigate special education complaints filed by parents throughout the Commonwealth and issue a Complaint Investigation Reports (CIRs) if necessary.
- *Standards (Educational)*: The knowledge and skills students should possess at critical points in their education and career as defined by the State Department of Education. These standards serve as a basis of educational reform across the nation and a means to measure student success; furthermore, they offer a clear definition of desired schooling outcomes for the reference of educators and policy makers.
- *Student with a Disability*: "A properly evaluated child who has mental retardation, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), emotional disturbance, an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury or other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple

disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services" (Bateman & Bateman, 2001, p. 67).

- *Transition Services*: Specific planning that helps prepare students with disabilities to participate more effectively in higher education or job training, community participation, independent living, continuing and adult education, and employment when they leave school (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008c).

Assumptions

The major assumption of this study is that principals find training in special education to be important to their success as administrators. The second assumption is that the Pennsylvania Department of Education has supplied the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework to universities throughout the Commonwealth. The third assumption is that the Pennsylvania Department of Education is enforcing and subsequently evaluating the changes made by university preparation programs in response to the framework. The fourth assumption is that participants are willing to candidly evaluate the competencies' effectiveness in preparing school leaders for the challenges of special education.

Delimitations of the Study

This study is restricted to the efforts of the Pennsylvania State Department of Education. More specifically, it is concerned with the efficacy of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework. Unrelated issues that arose during this evaluation are not scrutinized.

Limitations of the Study

Qualitative research methods do not require the random selection of informants. Thus, the findings may reflect a social bias, as the informants may have provided responses that present them in a positive light (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Furthermore, this study's data was primarily collected via interviews. Fontana and Frey (1994) indicate that certain qualities of the interview process, such as the researcher's degree of involvement, may skew results.

According to Creswell (2007), qualitative researchers are the primary instrument and must make considerable efforts to become aware of their bias. Qualitative research is limited by its subjectivity and small sample size and therefore cannot be projected to wider populations (Glesne, 2006). While the findings of this study may not be immediately applicable to other states' educational systems, the patterns, ideas and effective strategies that it reveals may inform later research in the area of principal preparation in special education.

Significance of the Study

As noted by O'Leary (2002), current principal preparation programs do not provide the knowledge and competencies necessary for administrative success. Asperdon (1992, May) reported that 40% of surveyed principals had never completed any formal coursework in special education; in a study by Langley (1993), 75% of secondary principals in South Carolina indicated that they, too, had no such training. More recently, a survey of 362 secondary principals discovered that 45.9% had taken no special education courses through their principal preparation program, and 27.8% reported taking only one course (Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahigrim-Deizel, 2006).

Valesky and Hirth (1992) cite principals' inadequate preparation in special education as a key factor both in the financial sanctioning of school districts and their increased involvement in lawsuits, as principals are often the first to come under fire in due process procedures. Moreover, Goor, Schwenn, and Boyer (1997) indicate that methods for disciplining students with disabilities are often omitted from principal preparation programs. Discipline problems, especially those resulting in long-term suspension or expulsion, can be especially problematic for students with disabilities as they may affect an individual's placement or even deny their due process. The exclusion of special education coursework from the principal certification program—coupled with the growing number of students with disabilities in public schools and the demands of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)—places an undeniable strain on administrators.

Indeed, researchers have found that complying with legal guidelines while working with students with disabilities is a high source of stress for administrators (Clash, 2006). At the same time, Burton (2008) argues that to ensure the validity of administration preparation, there must be an assumed linkage between preparation and student performance. Therefore, it may be assumed that principals with inadequate special education preparation may negatively impact the outcomes of students with disabilities. Another significant feature of this study is the overarching goal for all principals to educate all children. To achieve this objective, preparation programs must provide the sort of pre-service instruction to principals that will enable them to educate all children. Review of pertinent research in education administration, preparation, and

the essence of instructional leadership all indicate that the education of all children is the ultimate standard in educators' efforts.

Summary

Special education has greatly influenced the changing landscape of public schooling. This study seeks to ease the burden on school administrators by addressing the deficiencies of principal preparation programs. As legislation expands the roles and responsibilities of school leaders, there is a great deal at stake in the training of these professionals. This includes the provision of instructional leadership for teachers, the avoidance of lawsuits and subsequent financial liabilities, and most importantly the education of all students, including those with disabilities. Chapter 2 will focus on the literature relevant to these topics and the theoretical framework of the study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The need for special education preparation for principals became very clear over the last 30 years, as the number of public school students with disabilities dramatically increased. During this same period of time, inclusion and mainstreaming practices mandated by federal special education laws encouraged the merger of general and special education curricula. With increasing accountability placed on school administrators, the need to adequately prepare principals for a diverse student body became obvious. To this end, the state of Pennsylvania responded with the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework. Do these competencies, however, truly address what school principals need to know?

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature on the principal's place in special education and explore how administrators prepare for special education leadership in K-12 public schools. This literature review includes an examination of the growing responsibilities of school administrators, the transformation of education administration programs, the nature of instructional and special education leadership, and licensure for school leadership. The review also considers Pennsylvania's response to the call for reform and the role of the state's special education advisers, all topics of considerable importance to the study's theoretical framework.

Changing Roles and Responsibilities of School Administrators

Evans (1995) used the following fictitious want ad to describe the demands faced by today's school administrators:

Wanted: A miracle worker who can do more with less, pacify rival groups, endure chronic second guessing, tolerate low levels of support, process large volumes of paper and work double shifts (75 nights a year out). He or she will have carte blanche to innovate, but cannot spend much money, replace any personnel, or upset any constituency. (p. 1)

Principals once functioned solely as school “managers,” responsible the procedures that enabled their program to run efficiently: “discipline, scheduling, maintenance, and adherence to directives from the central office” (Adams & Copland, 2007, p. 156). Now, in addition to leading the implementation of new programs, they are also tasked with numerous, mundane daily activities such as completing paperwork and answering emails from parents. The flexibility and diversity of an administrator’s skill set directly affects their performance—and in turn, that of their students.

A great deal of literature points to the connection between principal’s practice and student achievement. Research indicates that school administrators have an effect on student success (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlsttom, 2004). A study conducted by Brookover and Lezotte in 1979 was one of the first to document this correlation. Using data gathered from eight different elementary schools, they examined the relationship between the each program’s student achievement and the actions of their respective school administrators. Brookover and Lezotte’s findings indicated that better performing schools had principals who focused more on instruction and pressed its improvement as a program objective (Johnson & Asera, 1999).

These findings, coupled with accountability pressures created by national legislation like NCLB, changed expectations of administrator job performance. Principals are now asked to create "...powerful, equitable learning opportunities for students, professionals, and create the system to motivate them to take advantage of those opportunities" (Adams & Copland, 2007, p. 7). School administrators now bear the weight of helping all of their students achieve to the best of their ability, whether that outcome is realistic or not. Tucker and Coddling (2002) reflected:

It is absolutely unreasonable to hold the principal accountable for student performance when that person has little or none of the authority needed to get the job done. No major corporation that expected to stay in business, no military unit of any size, no government agency that has earned the respect of the public would expect its executives to function successfully without the authority to get the job done. (p. 7)

Still, school administrators are expected to act as instructional leaders for their schools. Instructional leadership responsibilities include ensuring that the curriculum is being taught to standards and assessments, collecting and analyzing student performance data, monitoring instruction to make certain that it is commensurate with students' abilities, and guiding faculty in the refinement of their practice (National Institute for School Leadership, 2004).

The staggering amount of books dedicated to school leadership in the United States indicates a high level of interest in the subject. The number of volumes on the topic rose from fewer than 20 published in the first half of the last century to hundreds each decade between 1950 and 1990. Since the latter date, more than 1,000 volumes

were published per decade, many of which included advice from professionals outside the field of educational leadership (Lumpkin, 2008).

Instructional Leadership

Many school leadership publications emphasize the issues of instructional leadership, educational reform, and the need to place teachers' focus on student learning. The educational change process began to appear in literature during in the 1990s, when it was recognized that the performance of American students did not meet that of their peers in other countries. Due to the enactment of legislation that presses greater administrative accountability and improved test scores, a recent focus on student learning developed in public education literature (e.g., Blase & Blase, 2004; Bolman & Deal, 2008; Lindstrom & Speck, 2004; McEwan, 2003).

The essential task of the school administrator, above all others, is to improve teaching and learning. The recognition of the term “instructional leader” as a synonym for “principal” signals a model where learning—and the enhancement of learning—is given “top priority” (Jenkins, 2009, p. 36). Noting that instructional leaders should possess a deep understanding of how people learn and should focus on increasing student learning, Dufour (2002) identified three fundamental knowledge areas needed for instructional leadership:

- *Curriculum*: Principals need to know about the changing conceptions of curriculum, as well as what educational philosophies and beliefs inform these notions. Of equal importance are curriculum sources, conflicts, evaluation, and improvement.

- *Instruction:* Principals must be informed about different models of teaching, the theoretical reasons for adopting a particular teaching model, and the theories underlying the technology-based learning environment.
- *Assessment:* Knowledge of the principles of student assessment, those procedures with emphasis on alternative assessment methods, and evaluations that aim to improve student learning is important for school leadership. (p. 13)

Current principal preparation programs and their curriculums must be examined in order to address the needs of today's school administrators. The attainment of meaningful skills and knowledge would make the transition from the classroom to the administrative office more seamless. To that end, improved principal preparation programs could positively impact both school administrators and the teachers and students they lead.

Special Education Leadership

Without proper knowledge of fundamental and current trends in special education, school administrators cannot properly support their teachers or lead instructional changes—and thus, cannot ensure academic success for all students.

DiPaola and Walter-Thomas (2003) reviewed four different studies on the relationship between the principalship and student achievement. It was concluded that principals who focused on instructional issues, demonstrated support for special education, and provided high-quality professional development achieved better outcomes for students with disabilities. DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran's later study, *School Principals and Special Education: Creating the Context for Academic Success* (2004), indicated a need to connect knowledge and action; while some school principals are aware of the latest research on learning and the effective teaching strategies for students

with disabilities, many need training on how to use this research for educational improvement. In addition, Osborne, Dimattia, and Curran (1993) found that school principals require a unique leadership style to deal with the challenges of special education:

It requires a leader who, by developing effective models of collaboration with others, can improve the readiness within the general education mainstream for the inclusion of those with special needs. The leadership challenge becomes one of identifying the parameters of those who have disabilities and then preparing for their graceful integration into the general education setting to the maximum extent appropriate. (p. 6)

Based on federal and state legislations concerning special education, public school programs have been adjusted for compliance with specified guidelines. However, the policy issues surrounding the implementation of programs for students with disabilities are multiple, complex, and ever-changing. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997) mandated the inclusion of all students in state and district assessment and required the access of children with disabilities to the general curriculum. This legislation was then reinforced by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, with its emphasis on administrator accountability (Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Dezell, 2006).

Numerous practices were implemented in reaction to this legal movement, including co-teaching, functional behavioral assessment, and universally designed instruction. School principals are now held responsible for the successful integration of

these programs into their schools, highlighting the importance of having an instructional leader with knowledge of such practices.

Patterson (2000) identifies several other challenges related to leading special education programs. They include ambiguous and varying definitions of least restrictive environment and inclusion, continued conflicts among advocacy groups for students with disabilities, difficulties in orchestrating collaboration between regular and special education teachers, and dealing with special education issues in conjunction with the general trials of the principalship (Rodriguez, 2007). Qualitative research concerning special education-related legal action led to the recommendation that school administrators become aware of the maximum range of services their students are entitled to receive (Kennedy, 2007).

The need for this awareness is in part due to modern legislation. As required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a local education agency (LEA) representative must participate in forming the individualized education plan (IEP) of every student with a disability. Often, principals are asked to serve as the LEA representative during IEP meetings—a common situation that places school administrators and their districts in a precarious position. LEA representatives must make decisions regarding school resources and programming; thus, their work requires a comprehensive understanding of special education laws, policies, and regulations. Without the ability to interpret relevant data and programming for use in special education, administrators cannot perform optimally either as LEA representatives or school leaders, which may lead to legal action. In recent years, the number of lawsuits due to mistakes or perceived transgressions in special education has sharply increased

(Shorr, 2006). Special education is the most litigated area in schooling today, and that litigation is expensive: Such lawsuits cost school districts \$146.5 million during the 1999-2000 school year alone, a figure that has increased yearly (O'Dell, 2003). Still, 45 universities in a study by Valesky and Hirth (1992) reported that less than 10% of instructional time in their general school law courses was devoted to special education legal issues.

Enrollment trends also gesture to the importance of school administrators being knowledgeable of special education programming. The percentage of students receiving special education services in Pennsylvania rose steadily every school year since 2002. In December of that year, the State Department of Education reported that of the 1,813,506 students in the Commonwealth, 13.5% were identified as receiving Special Education services. Eight years later, the department reported that of 1,780,413 students, 15.2% were receiving Special Education services (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2011).

In light of the student body's growing diversity, the way that principals approach programs for children with disabilities has gained greater significance. Weaver, Landers, Stephens, and Joseph (2003) cite numerous studies which all found a strong relationship between a principal's attitude and special education service delivery. For example, the authors identified a specific study (Idol & Griffith, 2006) that examined special education delivery in four Texas elementary schools and identified if teachers viewed their principals as being supportive of them and facilitative of inclusive practices. The study found principals' leadership qualities to be significant factors in unifying students with

disabilities and special education programs with their schools' overall visions and cultures (Weaver et al., 2003).

Billingsley (2005) expanded on this work through his research of school principals' values in relation to special education programming effectiveness. Principals who display respect and acceptance for students with disabilities, their families, and teachers create an environment in which these parties feel valued. By attending to specific leadership tasks, administrators can foster inclusive and collaborative schools. Such tasks include advocating for full educational opportunities, ensuring access to the general curriculum, facilitating the development of IEPs, ensuring appropriate assessments for students with disabilities, and helping special educators assess their effectiveness (Billingsley, 2005, pp. 118-119). Relevant research, federal and state legislation, and case law alike deem special education leadership to be the responsibility of the school principal. For the benefit of their programs, it is imperative that principals acquire and maintain a working comprehension of special education and apply that knowledge base in practice.

Transformation of Education Administration Programs

In the early development of education administration, there was no clear vision of what the field's programs should look like or accomplish. The beginnings of coursework in this area can be traced back to somewhere between 1879 and 1881, when William Payne—the “founding father” of the field—penned the earliest school administration-themed book ever published in the United States. A superintendent in Michigan, he went on to teach the country's first class in school management at the state's university from 1881 to 1882 (Berney & Ayers, 1990, p. 9).

Preparation programs evolved out of the need to manage schools and supervise teachers as the traditional model of the one-room school house was abandoned. Development of full-blown programs in education administration, however, did not occur until the end of World War II, at which time 125 of these programs existed in the United States. During this period, a few experts in education administration emerged with opposing views as to what school administrators needed from a preparation program.

James Earl Russell, who served as dean of the Teachers College at Columbia University, believed that principal preparation programs should be focused on the practical subjects needed by administrators to do their jobs. His program was designed for use by experienced school administrators who attended on a part-time basis. Meanwhile, Henry Holmes, dean of Harvard's School of Education, proposed a preparation model that included a strong academic curriculum for aspiring principals. Holmes' principal preparation program was aimed at young students who had little or no experience in education, let alone administration. The director of the Department of Education at the University of Chicago, Charles Judd, developed an altogether different program—namely, one that used the science of education and related research to prepare school leaders (Berney & Ayers, 1990).

As education administration continued to develop over the years, more viewpoints were added to the discussion. In the 1950s, the National Conference of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) and the University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA) became the field's first professional organizations. Each went on to develop opposing beliefs as to what was important for aspiring principals to know.

These movements had far-reaching effects, as the beliefs and attitudes of the education administration instructors doubtlessly affected what their respective students learned.

For its part, the NCPEA suggested that principal preparation programs be oriented toward the practical knowledge needed for the administrative profession. The organization felt that “principal preparation should begin with the training required of the classroom teacher because he (the principal) needs to know and appreciate the teacher’s point of view and to appraise and assist with her classroom work” (Hunt & Pierce, 1958, p. 12). Furthermore, the NCPEA recommended that administrative preparatory programs include a broad general education, a fundamental professional preparation, lessons in the understanding and skills required to organize groups of people, and a wide assortment of specialized professional skills and techniques in instructional areas. In the opinion of this organization, “the content of [the principal’s] courses should be shaped to equip him with professional competencies essential to his exercising true educational leadership in his sphere of responsibilities and in the community with which he is associated” (Hunt & Pierce, 1958, p. 27).

On the other hand, the UCEA oriented its principal preparation courses toward academic and intellectual readiness, with the opinion that “professional knowledge is the accumulation of information an educational leader acquires, for example, about education law, state and federal policies, school board procedures, state funding formulas, how to conduct teacher evaluations, and other necessary skills” (Berry & Beach, 2009, July, p. 9). These opposing factions remain vocal in the current debate over the goals of principal preparation programs. There still is “no consensus on whom programs should enroll, what they should prepare their students to do, what they should teach, whom they should

hire to teach, what degrees they should offer, and how education administration relates to teaching and research” (Levine, 2005, p. 17).

The need for principal preparation programs to evolve became evident as the role of the school administrator changed and grew. Accrediting agencies and approval boards at the national, regional, and state levels all recognized the need to better prepare aspiring school administrators for the tasks ahead of them. However, as Eisner (1994) stated, “schools are like elephants, difficult to move in significant ways in a short time” (p. 7).

The following historical developments have helped to create an impetus for change:

- The Civil Rights Movement (1960s) pressured higher education to open its programs to women and people of color.
- *A Nation at Risk* (1983) highlighted the relationship between school leadership and school success, while also placing accountability of student performance on administrators.
- *Leaders for America’s Schools* (1987), a report completed by the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, revealed that fewer than 200 of the country’s 505 graduate programs in education administration were capable of meeting the commission’s standards.
- *Better Leaders for America’s Schools: A Manifesto* (2003), a report constructed by the Broad Foundation and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, placed blame for the “leadership crisis” in America’s public schools on irrelevant coursework and misguided state licensure requirements (Levine, 2005).

By the mid-1980s, leaders in the field identified a decline in respect for education administration and its preparation. In 1985, the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (NCEEAA) was formed, its main focus being the preparation of educational administrators. Hallinger and McCary summarized the findings of the NCEEAA's first study on principal training programs: "...Inadequate skill development, poorly designed opportunities for practicing leadership tasks, limited course work related to teaching and learning, and dysfunctional socialization that rendered the aspiring administrator helpless in the real world of school administration" (Hallinger & McCary, 1990, p. 90). In the absence of established competencies and tools for properly evaluating such standards, education administration programs were essentially preparing modern principals as if it were still the 1940s.

Then, the National Policy Board for Education Administration (NPBEA) produced two significant reports aimed at refocusing school leaders on instructional leadership: *Improving the preparation of school administrators: An agenda for reform (1989)* and *Principals for our changing schools: Preparation and certification (1990)*. These publications paved the way for the significantly reformed principal preparation programs of the 1990s. With this impetus, the decade saw a number of professional educational organizations join forces to construct guidelines and standards for school principals.

In both 1994 and 1996, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NBEA), and the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) in conjunction with the Council of Chief State School

Officers (CCSSO) joined to develop criteria for school leaders to follow for the enhancement of student learning and achievement (Council of Chief State Officers, 1996).

The ISLLC system of standards was developed to help new school administrators meet the current realities and demands of the principalship, and the Pennsylvania principal licensure exam is directly related to these criteria (Educational Testing Service, 2000). The ISLLC standards aim to “stimulate vigorous thought and dialogue about educational leadership among stakeholders” and “provide material that will help stakeholders across the education landscape (e.g., state agencies, professional associations, institutions of higher education) enhance the quality of educational leadership throughout the nation’s schools” (Council of Chief State Officers, 1996). The creation of the widely recognized ISLLC Standards in 1996 established performance standards for educational leaders to meet and theoretically enabled those qualifying principals to be successful as school leaders.

In time, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) revised their Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) Standards to correlate with the ISLLC’s criteria. The ELCC Standards illustrated in Table 1 are used to assess principal preparation programs who desire “national recognition” by the NCATE and the NPBEA (Shipman, Queen, & Peel, 2007).

Table 1

ELCC Standards for Principal Preparation

ELLC Standard	Title	Description
1	<i>Vision as an Essential of Leadership Development</i>	Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a school or district vision of learning supported by the school community.
2	<i>Instructional Culture as an Essential of Leadership Development</i>	Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by promoting a positive school culture, providing an effective instructional program, applying best practice to student learning, and designing comprehensive professional growth plans for staff.
3	<i>Management as an Essential of Leadership Development</i>	Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by managing the organization, operations, and resources in a way that promotes a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.
4	<i>Collaboration as an Essential of Leadership Development</i>	Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by collaborating with families and other community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.
5	<i>Integrity, Fairness, and Ethics as an Essential of Leadership Development</i>	Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairly, and in an ethical manner.

6	<i>Understanding, Responding to, and Influencing the Larger Contexts as an Essential of Leadership Development</i>	Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.
7	<i>Effective Practice as an Essential of Leadership Development</i>	The internship provides significant opportunities for candidates to synthesize and apply the knowledge and practice and develop the skills identified in Standards 1 through 6 through substantial, sustained, standards-based work in real settings, planned and guided cooperatively by the institution and school district personnel for graduate credit.

Note. From *Transforming School Leadership with ISLLC and ELCC* by N. Shipman, J. Queen, H. Peel, 2007(Shipman, et al., 2007)(Shipman, et al., 2007)(Shipman, et al., 2007), Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education, Inc. Copyright 2007 by Eye on Education, Inc. Adapted with permission.

As of 2001, only 287 of the 500 institutions offering administrative education programs were accredited by the NCATE through a process including the ELCC Standards. Such programs are viewed as innovative preparation curriculums that provide for much needed personal reflection opportunities and build upon real experiences. Though there is a growing number of “innovative” leadership preparation programs cropping up around the country, evaluation systems to monitor these opportunities are not evolving at a parallel rate (Jackson, 2002).

By 2005, the nation had 1,206 schools, colleges, and departments of education. These sprawling enterprises are spread across 57% of all four-year colleges and universities. They award one out of every twelve bachelor’s degrees, a quarter of all

master's degrees, and 16% of all doctorates—more than any other branch of the academy (Levine, 2005). Yet, as Stein and Gewirtzman (2003) stated, “there is no formal accountability mechanism to ensure that university program graduates learn anything useful for their future practices” (p. 9).

Examination of these various programs reveals that they may not offer the skills and knowledge necessary for modern day school leadership. Hess and Kelly (2005) examined more than 200 course syllabi from 31 different programs, covering almost 2,500 total course weeks. They found that about 30% of the class sessions were devoted to operational issues such as school law, school finance, and facilities management. The other three most frequently addressed topics were: managing for results, taking up 16% of the class sessions; managing personnel, taking up 15%; and norms and values, taking up 12% (Hess & Kelly, 2005). None of these topics directly prepare aspiring school administrators to work with the special education population.

Most states do not consider the education of students with disabilities as a targeted content area in their instructional leadership or administrative preparation programs. In fact, the majority of instructional leadership programs do not require their students to have a sufficient special education knowledge base in order to gain administrative credentials (Davis, 1990). Sirotnok and Kimball (1994) found a similarly insufficient level of consideration for special education issues in a national study that involved 457 education administration students and the faculty of 23 administrative preparation programs. In an examination of national leadership special education requirements, researchers Paterson, Marshall, and Bowling (2000) found that only five states had special education requirements for pre-service administrators. For his part,

Bateman (2001) observed that of 48 states, 23 reported that no coursework or competencies related to special education or student disabilities are required to obtain principal certification.

Numerous studies inspect the ways that administrators perceive their preparation. Jacobs, Tonnsen, and Baker (2004) argued that principal training in the knowledge and laws specific to special education is of utmost importance to the success of such programs. The researchers reported that over 90% of surveyed administrators indicated a need for formal special education training in order to be effective leaders. Furthermore, 89% of the participants showed interest in participating in such a training program. Over 97% believed that coursework in special education administration would be useful or extremely useful to them, while 95% considered coursework of this kind to be beneficial in terms of performing job duties.

The findings of Lasky and Karge (2006) suggested that principals not only need training in special education while enrolled in pre-service administration programs, but must continually update their knowledge and skills while on the job. The participants acknowledged limited ability and know-how in relation to children with disabilities, regardless of how long they had served as principals. Seventy-three of the 205 participants indicated that they had no experience in working with students with disabilities prior to becoming administrators, while 72 participants indicated some experience, 29 reported moderate experience, and only 27 stated they had lots of direct experience. Slightly more than half of the participants felt that special education coursework was very critical to their development.

In an additional study, 96% of the surveyed principals reported that colleagues were more helpful than graduate studies in preparing them for the job, while two-thirds stated that leadership preparation programs were out of touch with the actual demands of their work (Hess & Kelly, 2005). In their research of principal preparation in special education, DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2004) sought to find which features of principals' formal education and prior experiences were most valuable to them in their work. The study was conducted in Virginia with more than 1,500 K-12 principals identifying professional development needs relative to their developing and expanding roles as instructional leaders. The principals cited special education law and implementation, increased student achievement on standardized tests, data-driven decision making, assessment using multiple criteria, and strategies for faculty and staff development as the top five areas needed for professional development (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2004). A similar study conducted at the National Association of Secondary School Principals' annual conference targeted "new principals" in their first, second, or third year of practice. The participants were asked to assess the 18 domains recognized by the NCPEA's Connexions Project. The knowledge and skill areas that were ranked as the most important were educational leadership, curriculum, site leadership, organizational change, and the administration of special programs, learning theory, and student services (Petzko, 2008).

Farley and McKay (1999) also studied the increased need for the incorporation of special education coursework in the principal certification curriculum. They recommended that school principals be able to do the following:

- understand the historical context of special education law and its impact on current educational practices;
- identify the legal concepts of administrative functions such as IEP development and the monitoring of a teacher's performance;
- demonstrate an understanding of the school's legal responsibilities to children with special needs;
- demonstrate a working knowledge of Due Process and the legal ramifications for schools and school systems with regard to this function;
- understand the ramifications and the legal responsibilities of the administrators involved in a Due Process hearing;
- identify the legal boundaries of disciplinary actions regarding children with special needs;
- identify the scope of educational/support services afforded to special needs children under the law;
- demonstrate an understanding for the use of published references regarding legal aspects of special education;
- integrate an understanding of special education law in the development and/or preparation for meetings that simulate real life problems in the field;
- integrate an understanding of special education law for spontaneous response/decision-making for simulated real life emergencies;
- develop a shared vision that children with special needs do not pose a threat to the operations of the school just because the laws governing these children are more complex;

- identify the role of the regular educator in aspects of special education as mandated by law;
- identify and differentiate between the various placement options and types of services which are afforded by law for students with disabilities (pp. 12-13).

Similarly, Collins and White (2001) recommend that principal preparation programs incorporate portfolio products and accomplishments that demonstrate principal's special education knowledge, skills, and competencies. Their study suggests that administrators should have know-how or ability in the areas of

- the learning and behavioral characteristics of special education students;
- the knowledge and skill supervision of staff in inclusion classroom settings;
- financial analysis and management of special education programs;
- special education law;
- research and best practice of inclusive programs;
- program design, implementation, and assessment of curriculum and instruction for special education students;
- the dissemination of legal information and best techniques for school administrators, teachers, parents, and the community (p. 60).

Furthermore, Monteith (1994) proposed the following courses for the development of the competencies needed to effectively supervise special education programs and personnel:

- *Introduction to Exceptional Children and Youth*: This course provides an overview of students with disabilities and supply participants with an increased awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the educational needs of students in the least restrictive environment.

- *Educating Exceptional Children and Youth*: This course addresses curriculum modifications and specific instructional techniques that assist students with various handicapping conditions.
- *Assessment in Special Education*: This course reviews psychological and educational assessment processes used in identifying students with disabilities. Additional subjects would include the ethical and legal aspects of the assessment and referral processes specific to state regulations.
- *Special Topics in Educational Administration*: This course attends to the topics and problems in administration that are connected to special education, such as full inclusion, mainstreaming, discipline of students with disabilities, special education advocacy, and legal concerns.
- *Internship in Educational Administration*: A supervised internship with an emphasis on special education enables principals to enter the job market with legitimate experience in the area. It also works to “bridge the gap” between methods courses and professional practice. (pp. 13-15)

While university programs are usually responsible for developing their courses’ curriculum design content, the states and their departments of education individually determine the required courses for principal certification. Currently, there is no nationwide standard for such certification, and the states vary widely in their course requirements.

Licensure for School Leadership

Each state’s standards for principal preparation programs are designed to align future administrators with the corresponding licensing requirements of their region. The

licensing of school principals, similar to that of other professions, ensures that individuals possess the “skills and learning upon which the community may confidently rely” (Adams & Copland, 2007; Dent v. West Virginia, 1889, p.122).

Ultimately, the states’ licensure exams for school principals aim to ensure that licensees possess the minimal knowledge and skills to be considered competent. Yet, the regulatory content of school principal licensures differs significantly from state to state, ranging from one requirement (Hawaii) to 435 (Arkansas). The average number of requirements is 39, but the median is 18 (Adams & Copland, 2007). On the other hand, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) asks aspiring school administrators to meet 196 separate expectations.

In a way, the art of school leadership is lost among these licensure requirements. Though the practice of licensing professionals traditionally governs technical occupations, school administration programs and their correlating state directives still follow a similar framework. However, leadership is a social process, not a technical one; its authority must be socially and morally earned (Adams & Copland, 2007). Being able to establish a clear vision, set new directions, build teams, and motivate staff, students, and other stakeholders is key to the effective administrator’s success. No single set of licensing requirements or standards can capture the essence of these abstract skills. Despite their problematic nature, however, state licensing regulations are necessary to protect the interests of the public.

The need for special education competencies in university principal preparation programs was not considered until Public Law 85-926, or The Training for Professional Personnel for the Education of Mentally Retarded Children Act, was formally adopted in

1958. This was the first law to provide federal funds to universities so that they may train professionals to work with the mentally retarded and conduct related research. While this law was viewed as a positive step toward the improved preparation of those who work with mentally retarded students, federal funding was largely exclusive to special education departments (Burton, 2008). Further study by Burton (2008) considered the need for special education competencies to govern principal preparation programs:

As principals have struggled with the education of disabled students for more than thirty years, during this parallel period, principal certification programs have not prioritized the education of disabled students. At the same time, it is apparent that principals need a more specific knowledge base in order to help disabled students function effectively. This includes knowledge of the function of Individual Educational Plans (IEPs), psychological and evaluation reports, differential discipline policies, characteristics of various disabilities, delivery of related services, least restrictive environment and inclusive practices, pre-referral intervention processes, and the role and responsibilities of the principal in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) regulations and standards. These issues are addressed with a low level of frequency in traditional principal certification programs. The lack of substantial exposure to these core special education concepts and the limited development of competencies that are needed in the role of the principal create a “preparation gap.” (p. 40)

Burton’s push for the development of special education competencies echoes the growing desire to update principal preparation programs across the country.

Call for Reform

Art Levine's report, *The Leadership Challenge* (2005), summed up the appeal for major overhauls in educational leadership training. The author indicated that collectively, education administration programs are the weakest of all those offered at the nation's education schools. He concluded that "the majority of [education administration] programs range from inadequate to appalling, even at some of the country's leading universities" (Levine, 2005, p. 17).

In response to findings like these, numerous attempts at reform occurred. In 1994, the National Association of Secondary Schools (NASSP), the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) formed a group called the Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) in order to create a set of professional standards for school leadership. Their efforts produced the ISLLC Standards for School Leaders. These standards encourage school administrators to make teaching and learning top priorities and to sustain learning environments that encourage the success of all students (Council of Chief State Officers, 1996). In 2003, a steering committee consisting of officials from these groups updated their standards to meet the growing demands of school administrators.

The two oldest professional organizations in the field were also involved with recent reform movements. In 2004, the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) collaborated with Rice University to launch the NCPEA Connexions Project. The Connexions Project sought to solicit input from practicing administrators as to what sort of knowledge base and skills were necessary for school

leadership. The study identified eighteen essential knowledge areas for principal preparation, which ranged from the historical and cultural foundations of education, to the administration of special programs, to school public relations. In 2008, these areas were refined to create seven conceptual areas: curriculum, instruction, and technology leadership; site and district based leadership; program preparation and higher education; organizational change; human relations; critical theory, diversity, equity, ethics and gender; and international contributions (Martin & Papa, 2008).

Meanwhile, the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA)—formed in order “to improve the preparation of educational leaders and promote the development of professional knowledge in school improvement and administration”—worked to promote research, instruction, materials, and publications that advanced programs and practices in education administration (Martin & Papa, 2008). A branch of the consortium called the Teaching in Educational Administration Special Interest Group (UCEA/TEA-SIG) has since formed the Taskforce on Evaluating Leadership Preparation Program Effectiveness. This team partnered with states to guide them in creating their own evaluation methods for improving principal preparation programs (Petzko, 2008).

The Stanford Educational Leadership Institute (SRLI) continued this line of thought, stating that “study after study has shown that the training principals typically receive in university programs and from their own districts does not do nearly enough to prepare them for their roles as leaders of learning” (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007, p. 3). The SRLI’s report called for research-based content in principal preparation programs, a logical array of courses and learning activities, and structures that both link theory to practice and are framed around adult learning theory.

The report further recommended field-based internships, problem-based learning, cohort groups, quality mentors, and the maintenance of collaborative relationships between universities and school districts (Petzko, 2008).

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) further claimed that preparation programs are out of sync with demands for accountability. Their 2007 publication, “Schools Need Good Leaders Now,” stated that “every action in these (university preparation) programs should be driven by one essential question: What do principals need to know and be able to do to improve teaching and learning in their schools?” (Fry, Bottoms, O’Neil, & Walker, 2007, p. 5). Another study by the Education Commission of the States (ECS), published in 2009 and entitled “Strong Leaders, Strong Achievement: A Model Policy for Producing the Leaders to Drive Student Success,” made further recommendations for administrative preparation programs. The report suggested that school principals show competency in four domains: setting and sustaining the school vision, building relationships, leading and managing instruction, and improving school organization so that teachers are led to develop strategies that increase student achievement (Christie, Thompson, & Whiteley, 2009). As public schools change, so too does the lens through which they are viewed. Resultant of the accountability push started by legislation like No Child Left Behind (NCLB), training programs for school principals have fallen under a great deal of scrutiny.

Pennsylvania’s Response to the Call

The following describes the reasoning behind the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s aligned framework of preparation, induction, and continual professional development for administrators:

There are considerable efforts underway nationally to improve the skills of school leaders and the professional programs that prepare and develop them.

Universities, colleges, school districts and non-profit organizations across the nation have developed educational leadership programs. Unfortunately, very few of these have demonstrated a direct effect on increased student achievement.

However, it is becoming increasingly clear that there are commonalities in the leadership programs that have correlated program design to higher student outcomes, some promising practices worthy of incorporation into a cohesive set of principles. It is expected that principal preparation programs will incorporate these promising practices into their program design. (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008b, p. 2)

To this end, the Pennsylvania Framework and Guidelines for Principal Preparation Programs deemed three core leadership standards and six corollary leadership standards necessary for aspiring school principals to master (see Table 2).

Table 2

PA Leadership Standards – Framework and Guidelines for Principal Preparation Programs

Core Standards

- I. Knowledge and skills to think and plan strategically creating an organizational vision around personalized student success.
- II. An understanding of standards-based systems theory and design and the ability to transfer that knowledge to the leader’s job as an architect of standards-based reform in the school.
- III. The ability to access and use appropriate data to inform decision-making at all levels of the system.

Corollary Standards

- I. Creating a culture of teaching and learning with an emphasis on learning.
- II. Managing resources for effective results.
- III. Empowering others inside and outside the organization to pursue excellence in learning by engaging, collaborating, and communicating with them.
- IV. Operating in a fair and equitable manner with personal and professional integrity.
- V. Advocating for children and public education in the larger political, social, economic, and legal sphere.
- VI. Supporting the professional growth of self and others through practice and inquiry.

Note. From Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008, retrieved from (<http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt>). Copyright 2008 by Pennsylvania Department of Education. Reprinted with permission.

This framework ultimately aims to create preparation programs that endow administrators with quality teaching and leadership skills, a continuous learning ethic, and the ability to make artful use of infrastructure. The relationship between these four key domains is illustrated in Figure 1.

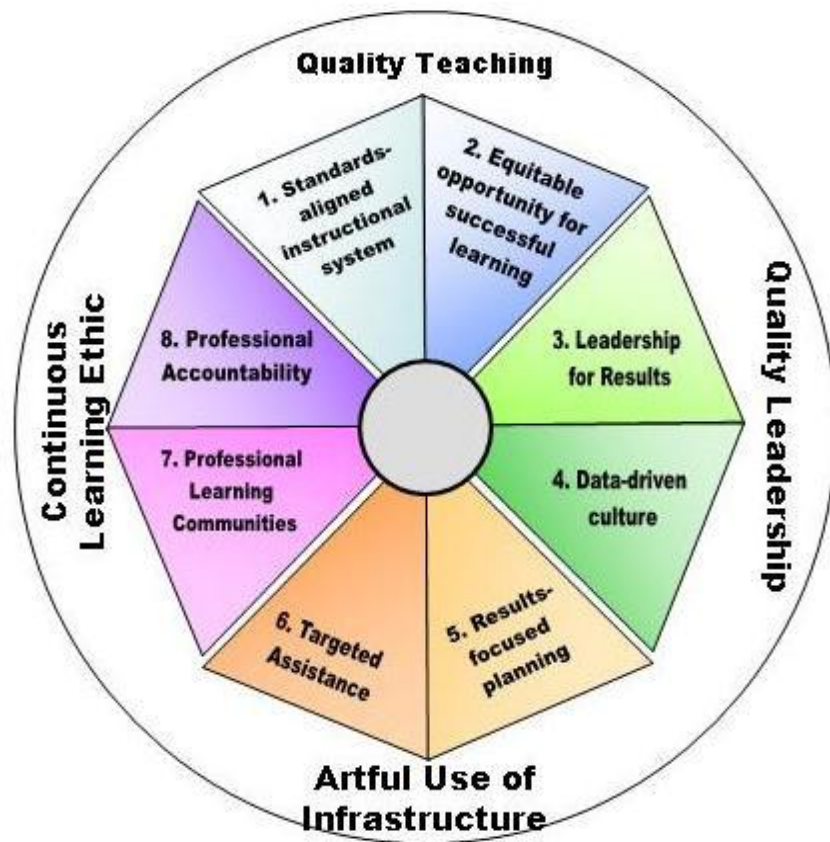


Figure 1. Pennsylvania’s Framework for Principal Preparation Program Guidelines contextual pillars. From Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008, retrieved from (<http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt>). Copyright 2008 by Pennsylvania Department of Education. Reprinted with permission.

In addition to the aforementioned standards in the Framework for Principal Preparation Programs, the Pennsylvania Department of Education created the specific Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework (see Appendix A). They assert that principal preparation programs should not only include the stated competencies, but also the skills needed to supervise and evaluate these competencies in others.

Little documentation exists regarding the formal development process of the Pennsylvania Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework. Through inquiries to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, contact was made with Sharon Brumbaugh, a PDE Executive Policy Specialist.

Brumbaugh reported that the framework was developed by a committee of 45 educational experts. This group consisted of representatives from higher education, public education, parent advocacy groups, and Pennsylvania's Department of Education. The framework was created under the leadership of Rae Talley, a Pennsylvania Inspired Leadership Program Higher Education Liaison. Talley clarified that "the Special Education Competencies were developed by a team of Educational experts that have worked with or have served as a school leader and have noticed a weak link in Educational Leadership programs when it comes to school leaders." One figure who is notably absent from Talley's committee is a state special education adviser, who could share his or her deep knowledge of today's special education issues. Talley went on to say that the framework's development "was a brainstorming process for all involved and research was reviewed, but [it] was not the driving force when developing the competencies" (R. Talley, personal communication, January 4, 2010).

While the special education competencies obviously fill a need observed in multiple studies and a litany of research, do they adequately address the current needs in the state? The development was based on a "brainstorming" process, which is inherently flawed because only the participants in the session had input. Moreover, did the selected representatives chosen to help construct the framework possess the necessary background and working knowledge of current special education issues in the state of Pennsylvania?

The conspicuous absence of the state’s special education advisers from this process suggests that a key set of voices—ones that can truly speak to the challenges facing school principals—may have gone unheard.

As Stephen Covey stated in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, “To begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you’re going so that you better understand where you are now so that the steps you take are always in the right direction” (Covey, 1989, p. 98). The special education advisers are aware of the special education pitfalls and therefore can help provide guidance for what school principals should know regarding special education before entering the field.

Pennsylvania’s Special Education Adviser’s Role

The state of Pennsylvania’s Bureau of Special Education has multiple duties, and for the purpose of this study, only its Division of Compliance is examined. This department investigates complaints regarding the implementation of federal and state special education laws, which include the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and Chapters 14 and 15 of the Pennsylvania State Board Regulations. It is the responsibility of school administrators to ensure their program’s compliance with state and federal legislation.

The special education adviser with the Division of Compliance serves as a point of contact for assigned intermediate unit(s), school districts and approved private schools throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. There are currently 32 filled special education adviser positions in the Pennsylvania Department of Education. These advisers are spread over three regulatory regions: west, central, and east. The assignment

of advisers to each region is determined by the number of districts and school agencies in each region, student density, geographic proximity, and the past history of issues. The job description of special education advisers varies according to their specific assigned duties. However, according to the Western Region of Division Monitoring and Improvement's Division Chief, Thomas Seben, there are three primary duties common to every special education advisers' role:

- Managing of a system for investigation of consumer complaints as required by federal regulations.
- Conducting cyclical monitoring in local education agencies.
- Reviewing and approving intermediate unit and school district special education plans to ensure that full range of services are being provided for students with disabilities. (personal communication, April 13, 2011)

The special education adviser is a Commonwealth of Pennsylvania State Civil Service assigned position. Therefore, individuals interested in said positions must complete an application through the state's civil service commission. The commission then evaluates and ranks the applicant pool based on their supplied materials. Individuals interested in the special education adviser position must possess a special education supervisory certificate and experience in special education programming. Applicants are evaluated and subsequently ranked by the civil service agency on their possession of four distinct work behavior experiences: planning and evaluating special education programs, planning and conducting program reviews, developing and conducting training, and planning and developing special education programs (Pennsylvania State Civil Service Agency, 2011). The Bureau of Special Education functions in conjunction with the

Pennsylvania Civil Service commission in filling special education adviser positions through utilization of these rankings for selecting an applicant pool to interview.

Once hired, new special education advisers each receive a reference manual and intensive four-day pre-service training. The staff refers to these trainings as “boot camp” for new advisers. According to the Western Region of Division Monitoring and Improvement’s Division Chief, Thomas Seben, the agenda for one of these training sessions covers a multitude of legal information related to special education, including: special education programming, civil rights, hearings, and other legal items related to special education (personal communication, April 13, 2011).

Current advisers participate in continuous professional development opportunities. In addition to mandatory training sessions provided by the state, advisers must attend monthly staff meetings for updates on changes in procedures and new developments concerning their roles. Furthermore, all special education advisers attend the annual Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Special Education Conference. Seben also acknowledged that it is common practice for each adviser to attend special education trainings of interest to them or those required by their districts (personal communication, April 13, 2011). For the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on the special education adviser’s job responsibilities surrounding the investigation of special education complaints.

A Division of Compliance complaint can be filed by anyone, including advocates and advocacy organizations, if it is believed that a child’s school or Individualized Education Program (IEP) is not following the laws or required timelines. Complaints are

not limited to individual schools, but may also be filed for district-wide or statewide problems.

The process begins when the Bureau of Special Education receives a signed, completed complaint form. The issued complaint is assigned to a special education adviser for investigation, who begins by interviewing the filer about the problem. Then, the adviser makes an on-site visit to the Local Education Agency in order to conduct more interviews and review relevant records pertaining to the alleged issue. Within 60 days of beginning the investigation, the adviser issues a document called a Complaint Investigation Report (CIR), which explains the issue at hand, cites the adviser's findings, and discusses any legal requirements. The CIR also explains whether any violation was found, and if so, it issues "corrective action" to the agency. The corrective action includes the moves an agency must make to reconcile a problem within an appropriate timeline (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2006).

Through their firsthand knowledge of the special education complaint process, these advisers provide a unique perspective for examining the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework. Special education advisers' jobs put them in the perfect vantage point to observe the common failings of school principals. By starting at the possible end results, this research hopes to provide recommendations regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the current system.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

For this research, the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework is analyzed through program theory, a methodology used to explain how and why a program works. Owens and Rogers (1999) explained program theory evaluation

as analyzing the logic on which a program is built and determining if it is incorrect in some way (e.g., focus, assumptions, etc.). The method proceeds by connecting a program's activities to its expected outcomes upon successful implementation. Ralph Tyler is credited with coining the term "educational evaluation" in the 1930s; he described his procedures as "the comparison of (well-stated) intended outcomes (called objectives) with (well-measured) actual outcomes" (Alkin & Christie, 2004, p. 18). Hosley (2005) simplified the evaluation process by breaking program objectives into if-then statements. He reported that "program theories can often be captured in a series of "if-then" statements—IF something is done to, with, or for program participants, THEN theoretically something will change" (p. 1).

Wiggins and McTighe offered a different perspective. In "Schooling by Design: Mission, Action, and Achievement," they spoke of designing schools around an institutional purpose and compared education to a long-distance trip:

To make our trip effective, we have to plan the route "backward" from the destination (as opposed to starting out with only a list of sites and no sense of where we will end up and how). We can then say how far we have left to travel (as opposed to merely saying how far we have gone from home), and we have a clear sense of what it means to be off course. Without clarity about the destination—the intended effect—we can't really plan for or accomplish a result "by design." (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007, pp. 25-26)

Similarly, administrators must continuously update their special education knowledge as they progress in their careers, lest they lose sight of the program's goals and fall prey to

its challenges. Yet it is problematic to assume—as Pennsylvania’s framework does—that if principals obtain specific competencies, they will automatically succeed as supervisors.

This researcher believes that these criteria are incomplete and that valuable perspectives have been overlooked in their development. A firm strategy for reform is needed. As Drucker (1990) put it, “There is an old saying that good intentions don’t move mountains; bulldozers do. . . . Strategies are the bulldozers. They convert what you want to do into accomplishments” (p. 59). Wiggins and McTighe’s three stages of school reform, outlined earlier in this discussion, are reflected in the Backward Design Template for School Reform (see Table 3).

Table 3

Backward Design Template for School Reform

Stage 1—Desired Results	
Goal(s): What is our vision for this reform? What do we want to accomplish as a result of this initiative?	
Understanding(s): What understandings and attitudes do teachers, administrators, parents, policymakers, and others need for these goals to be met?	Essential Question(s): What essential questions about teaching, learning, results, and change should guide our improvement actions?
Knowledge: What knowledge and skills will teachers, administrators, policymakers, parents, and students need for this vision to become a reality?	Skills:

Stage 2—Assessment Evidence

Direct Evidence:

What will count as evidence of success?
What are the key observable indicators of short- and long-term progress?

Indirect Evidence:

What other data (e.g., achievement gaps; staff understandings, attitudes, and practices; organizational capacity) should be collected?

Stage 3—Action Plan

What short- and long-term actions will we take to achieve our goals (in curriculum, assessment, instruction, professional development, policy, resource allocation, and job appraisal)?

What strategies will help us achieve the desired results?

Who will be responsible? What resources will be needed?

Note. From *Schooling by Design: Mission, Action, and Achievement* (p. 206)(2007), Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Copyright 2007 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Reprinted with permission.

This study uses the backward design model as a basis for program evaluation and focuses mainly on the first stage of school reform described in Table 3. Input gathered from participants is used to postulate the desired results for principal preparation programs and offer recommendations for their development.

Summary

Examination of the historical development of education administration reveals a need for clearly-defined national standards and expectations for the performance of school principals. Despite numerous calls for reform from current administrators,

preparation programs still need improvement, and the state of Pennsylvania responded by creating an aligned framework for principal preparation. Chapter 3 contains a description of the research design, research methods, participants, instruments, and data collection procedures used to study the framework.

CHAPTER 3

PROCEDURES

Introduction

As established, literature in the area of school leadership asserts that principal preparation programs lack focus on special education. This research analyzed the perceptions of Pennsylvania special education advisers and used their responses to determine the efficacy of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders. To collect data for this qualitative study, the researcher designed an interview protocol, selected participants, and invited them to contribute via an e-mail message (see Appendix C).

Statement of the Problem

Pennsylvania's principal preparation programs were found to not adequately address the skills and knowledge that educational leadership research deemed necessary for administrative success. The State Department of Education responded by developing the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework. However, it was unclear whether these competencies were relevant to the everyday special education concerns of practicing school leaders. This study sought to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the framework and formulate modifications for future principal preparation programs.

Research Questions

This research was guided by the following questions:

1. Which of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders are viewed as the most important to the success of practicing Pennsylvania school principals from the perspective of special education advisers?
2. What specific beliefs, knowledge, and skills do principals need to effectively supervise site-based special education programs from the perspective of special education advisers?
3. What special education compliance issues are the most frequently seen across Western Pennsylvania from the perspective of special education advisers?

Purpose of the Study

In the analysis and review of the theoretical and empirical research literature related to principal preparation, it was discovered that the skills surrounding the area of special education are lacking (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008b). The state of Pennsylvania has acknowledged and attempted to address the problem through the creation of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework. The purpose of this study is to examine the current strengths and weaknesses of the competencies for preparation of school principals in the state of Pennsylvania as they are perceived by special education advisers. This group of individuals is responsible for investigating special education complaints filed by parents throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

This research was designed to (a) identify special education challenges facing school administrators from the viewpoint of special education advisers, (b) contribute to

the overall understanding of what beliefs, knowledge, and skills are needed in the administration of special education, (c) determine the current strengths and weaknesses of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders, and (d) develop recommendations for the improvement of principal preparation programs.

In order to accomplish this goal, an interview protocol was developed for administration to Pennsylvania special education advisers from the Western Region of the Division of Monitoring and Improvement. Relevant literature was reviewed in order to tailor interview questions that could determine the effectiveness of the competencies from the perspective of the special education advisers.

Research Methodology and Procedures

Qualitative research is one of the two main investigative methodologies of the social sciences. This methodology was originally considered to be interpretive or constructivist, because the resulting data is socially constructed. As Crotty (1998) explained, human beings construct meanings as they engage their world, and qualitative researchers are interested in understanding that assembled meaning.

Berg (2009) identified qualitative techniques as those which allow researchers to share in the perceptions of others and to determine how people give meaning and structure to their daily lives. He offered six ways to collect qualitative data: interviewing, focus groups, ethnography, sociometry, unobtrusive measures, and historiography. These methodologies are particularly useful in studies where little is known about the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2007). As demonstrated by the literature review, numerous studies were conducted prior to the implementation of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework; however, none were focused on

determining the strengths and weaknesses of the new standards. This study was designed to present an in-depth look at the framework from the viewpoint of special education advisers. From this perspective, the research was phenomenological in nature.

A phenomenological study, as defined by Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), is geared toward gaining insight into the participants' world and describing their perceptions and reactions. The authors described phenomenologists as those who (a) assume that human beings share some commonality of perception when they interpret similar experiences and (b) seek to identify, understand, and explain these commonalities. Commonality of perception is considered to be an essential characteristic of the experience. In this study, Special Education Advisers were asked to share their perceptions on the strengths and weaknesses of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework. This study's procedures aligned with Fraenkel and Wallen's steps in qualitative research (2009).

The Special Education Advisers were identified as participants in this study due to their knowledge base and geographic proximity. This researcher believed that a backwards design approach to this research area would provide a unique data set that identifies what special education issues school administrators should know. The data collection method utilized for this study was semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. The data gathered through the interview process was coded and analyzed through an inductive analysis approach. Finally, interpretations and conclusions on each research question were determined.

Reliability and Validity

McMillan and Schumacher (2001) establish validity as “the extent to which the explanations of phenomenon match the reality of the world” (p. 407). In qualitative research, validity refers to the extent to which the participants and the researcher share interpretations of a study’s concepts. The following strategies enhance validity: prolonged fieldwork, triangulation of data, peer review, negative case analysis, clarifying researcher biases, member checking, rich descriptions, and external audits (Creswell, 2007). In this particular study, the researchers’ findings were compared with the participants upon completion of the interview process in order to ensure validity.

Reliability in qualitative research refers to the extent to which what was recorded captures what actually occurred. Mechanical means of gathering data, such as voice recorders, photographs and videotapes, enhance validity and reliability alike by providing accurate and relatively complete records of data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). This researcher utilized a digital audio recorder to ensure that participants’ complete responses were captured verbatim.

Study Population

The data of this research was gathered through in-depth interviews with selected Pennsylvania special education advisers. Advisers were chosen via what Creswell (2007) calls a purposive sampling process. The participants were selected for their primary knowledge of the special education-related challenges that school principals commonly experience.

These advisers are employed by Pennsylvania’s Bureau of Special Education, which aims “to set high standards for all exceptional students in the Commonwealth

receiving special education services and programs” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2006, para. 1). One of the Bureau’s core duties involves complaint investigation through the Division of Monitoring and Improvement. Special education advisers conduct these investigations and generate reports on their findings. There are currently 32 special education advisers employed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education across the three geographic regions: west, central, and east. There are eight special education advisers in the west region, 13 in the central region, and 11 in the east region. The number of advisers per region depends on the number of districts and school agencies in each region, student density, geographic proximity, and past history of issues, etc. (T. Seben, personal communication, April 13, 2011).

This study focused on the eight special education advisers from the west region of the Division of Monitoring and Improvement, due to their geographic proximity to the researcher. The researcher contends that this region’s school districts provide an acceptable representation of all pertinent demographic categories (including the socio-economic and racial, the size of student population, and classification of district as suburban, rural, or urban).

Data Collection Instrument

The research combined structured and unstructured interview protocols. This approach permitted a more in-depth understanding of the participants’ attitudes and perceptions, as they could be asked to explain or clarify their responses (Gay, et al., 2009). The focal method of data collection consisted of single participant, face-to-face interviews.

Questions for the interviews were developed from the literature review, with consideration for the six types of interview questions delineated by Patton and subsequently described by Fraenkel and Wallen (2009). These categories include inquiries about the participant’s background, knowledge, experience, opinions, feelings, and senses. A careful review of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders was also conducted in order to pose questions that adequately addressed the interests of the study.

Table 4 lists the 10 interview questions that were developed and indicates how each related to Patton’s six categories (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Table 5 connects these inquiries to the related research questions.

Table 4

Interview Questions and Methodology Association

Question Type	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10
Background				X					X	X
Knowledge	X	X		X	X		X	X		
Experience					X	X	X	X	X	X
Opinion	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	
Feelings							X	X		
Sensory						X				

Table 5

Interview and Research Question Association

Questions	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10
Research Question 1		X	X							
Research Question 2	X					X	X	X	X	X
Research Question 3				X	X					

The interview protocol allowed for follow-up questions, enabling more data to be gathered about participant’s perceptions. An audio recording provided a verbatim account of each session and the researcher completed written accounts immediately after each interview including notes and a word-by-word transcription of each dialogue.

In order to limit disruption of the participants’ schedules, the researcher distributed a copy of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework and a brief demographic questionnaire via email to each participant prior to the scheduled interview (see Appendix D). The questionnaire consisted of inquiries as to the participants’ years of experience in education (including special education), years of experience in administration, and general educational background.

Interview Questions

1. What are the elements of special education knowledge needed for school principals in the state of Pennsylvania?

2. Describe what you believe are the essential Special Education Competencies for School Leaders.
3. Please rank order the aforementioned competencies by level of importance.
4. Describe the most common special education pitfalls experienced by school administrators that you observe in your role as special education adviser.
5. From your perspective, distinguish any changes you have noticed in special education issues experienced by school administrators since the implementation of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework compared to before implementation.
6. From your perspective, what are the missing areas of special education preparation in the state of Pennsylvania?
7. What training opportunities could be provided to school principals in order to better prepare them in disciplining special education pupils?
8. What skills are you aware of that strengthen the working relationship between school principals and parents of children with disabilities?
9. What is the best advice you could give to a new school principal in the area of special education?
10. Is there any other information pertaining to the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework that I have not been previously covered that you wish to include as relevant?

Pilot Study

In order to determine the appropriateness and effectiveness of the formal study's methodology, a pilot study was conducted. Creswell (2007) recommended that researchers conduct pilot interviews before formal study begins, not only to test research questions but also to hone interviewing skills.

Prior to engaging in this research, permission to conduct the study was requested from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board. Once permission was granted, an interview was conducted with four special education advisers from the central region of the Division of Monitoring and Improvement. The formal study focused on special education advisers from the western region of the Division of Monitoring and Improvement. The pilot study results were analyzed to determine the strength of the formal study's methodology and analysis procedures. This researcher used the previously described semi-structured interview questions to obtain the reported pilot data.

Pilot Study Results

Piloting the interview questions and demographic questionnaire was necessary to determine the reliability and validity of the study. Once permission was granted from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board, a convenience sample of four current special education advisers from the western region of the Division of Monitoring and Improvement was chosen. The pilot group represented advisers with varied backgrounds, experiences, and years of service in education.

The four pilot participants were provided with electronic copies of the interview questions, the demographic questionnaire, and an overview of the study's research

questions. The advisers were asked to comment on the wording, format, and order of questions. Follow-up phone calls or face-to-face meetings were made with each pilot participant so that he or she could provide additional feedback on the research instrument.

All of the pilot participants offered responses that were detailed and appeared to reflect candor and honesty. Overall, the advisers shared similar comments. The participants felt that the interview questions did address the intended research questions. In follow-up face-to-face interviews or phone call interviews with the respondents, the researcher asked questions such as, “Are the instructions clear? Did you understand the questions? Did any of the questions seem out of order?” The respondents commented that the questions were both easy to understand and the questions made sense.

The pilot study confirmed that the methodology and analysis procedures were appropriate to be utilized successfully in the formal study. It was determined in the completion of the pilot interviewing process that the proposed interview questions elicited sufficient information to provide substantial qualitative data in relationship to the research questions. However, the process of gathering critical background information on each adviser required more time and attention than expected. While the demographic questionnaire did an admirable job obtaining a cursory level of background information, it became apparent that a portion of the interview process needed to be segmented in order to delve deeper into any ambiguous demographic responses. Additionally, the information obtained from each special education adviser needed to be developed and applied to a matrix. This matrix would provide a clearer picture of each adviser’s background and history and also allow for increased rapport building during the interview process. The matrix is included in Chapter 4 to assist the reader in understanding the

core experiences and educational background of the interviewed special education advisers.

Data Analysis

The primary technique for data interpretation in this study was content analysis. This technique involves analyzing interview responses for common themes, which provides the researcher with a systematic way to quantify the obtained data. Specifically, the descriptive data may be converted into categories (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

Rudestam and Newton (2007) referred to Richards' themes of coding categories:

- Descriptive coding, much like quantitative coding, involves storing and summarizing the attributes that describe each case (age, origin, etc.),
- Topic coding, or labeling text (as categories) with regard to its subject, takes time but can be automated,
- Analytical coding, or creating new categories based on ideas that emerge as one reflects on the data. (p. 182)

McMillan and Schumacher (2001) further described the analytical coding process as “content” or “inductive” analysis. In this procedure, categories and patterns are not imposed upon the data by the researcher, but instead emerge organically during the data collection process. Analytical coding generates a more abstract and robust descriptive synthesis of the data, but making sense of it “depends on the researcher’s intellectual rigor and tolerance for tentativeness of interpretation, until the entire analysis is completed” (p. 462).

For this study, the researcher transcribed and reviewed the audiotapes obtained from the interviews for content analysis. A word-frequency count of identified key

words from the research literature was conducted with the transcripts, and inductive analysis was used to identify and categorize emerging themes. The researcher studied the data set in order to identify and name recurring patterns, which subsequently formed an organization system for the study.

Common themes in the data were determined by their frequency of appearance. Specifically, McMillan and Schumacher's (2001) process for utilizing frequencies was employed following the categorization process to determine the major and minor themes. Major themes were identified as making five or more appearances in the data, while minor themes occurred at a frequency of less than five times. The interview data was then synthesized to answer the study's main interview questions. Interpretation of the synthesized data is reported in Chapter 5.

Summary

A qualitative, descriptive methodology was used to examine the perceived strengths and weaknesses of Pennsylvania's Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework. It contained an interview protocol which was based in phenomenology.

The sample for this study consisted of eight special education advisers from Pennsylvania's west region of the Division of Monitoring and Improvement, Bureau of Special Education. Prior to the formal study, the researcher piloted the interview protocol with four special education advisers outside of the formal participant pool. The individuals' feedback provided evidence of the protocol's reliability and validity. Following the success of the pilot study, the formal study was conducted and its data

underwent descriptive analysis. Chapter 4 provides an in-depth review of the data collected in the formal study.

CHAPTER 4

DATA AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

The primary purpose of this qualitative, descriptive study was to identify special education challenges facing school administrators from the viewpoint of special education advisers. A second purpose of the study was to contribute to the overall understanding of what beliefs, knowledge, and skills are needed in the administration of special education. Finally, this study was designed to determine the current strengths and weaknesses of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders. The study followed the methodological tradition of phenomenology and intended for use in developing recommendations for the improvement of principal preparation programs.

This study attempted to capture the perspective of special education advisers who have firsthand knowledge of the common mishaps experienced by school administrators. The critical sample process utilized in this study focused on special education advisers from the Western Region of the Division of Compliance and Monitoring in Pennsylvania. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) suggested that in order to gain insight into the world of one's participants, one should study their perceptions and reactions. Furthermore, the authors refer to the commonality of perception among participants as the essence—that is, the essential characteristics of the experience. From this viewpoint, this analysis attempts to identify and describe the common special education issues observed by special education advisers in Pennsylvania. This researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with eight special education advisers with the goal of answering interview questions

(Appendix D). The interview questions were designed to discover the competencies needed for school principals to successfully lead special education programs.

This chapter presents a demographic overview of the participants and includes a summary of each special education adviser's responses to the questions posed in the semi-structured interview. It then presents the following emerging categorizations: most important special education competencies needed; beliefs, skills, and knowledge needed for school principals; and most frequent special education mistakes by school principals. Next, the chapter presents an analysis of the major and minor themes in each category. Finally, it presents data from a word frequency study that sheds light on important terminology identified by the special education advisers. This analysis, conducted via nVivo software, is further supported by select quotations from the participants.

Demographics

The data of this research were gathered through in-depth interviews with select Pennsylvania special education advisers. For the purpose of this study, eight special education advisers from the Western Region of the Division of Compliance and Monitoring were identified and interviewed. Each special education adviser self-reported information via an electronic survey prior to the interview process. Ambiguous answers to the demographic questionnaire were clarified during the interview process. An overview of the participants' demographics and individual occupational experience is presented in Tables 6 and 7, respectively. It was observed that all of the advisers possess varying degrees of both general education and special education experience that predated their time as advisers.

Table 6

Self-Reported Special Education Adviser General Information

Adviser	Highest Degree Obtained	Certificates Possessed	Years of Experience as Adviser	Years of Experience in Special Education Supervisory Role
A	MS/MA	Spec Ed K-12; Supervisory	1	13
B	MS/MA	Speech/Lang; Spec Ed K-12; Supervisory	3	2
C	EdD/PhD	Elementary; Rdg Specialist; Spec Ed K-12; Supervisory	7	2
D	MS/MA	Principal K-12; Spec Ed K-12; Supervisory	7.5	10
E	BS/BA	Spec Ed K-12; Supervisory	11	0
F	MS/MA	Elementary; English 7-12; ESL; Spec Ed K-12; Supervisory	4.5	0
G	EdD/PhD	Elementary; Spec Ed K-12; Supervisory; Superintendent	5	15
H	BS/BA	Elementary; Spec Ed K-12; Supervisory	11	1

Table 7

Self-Reported Special Education Adviser Comparison of Experience

Adviser	Years of Experience in General Education Setting	Years of Experience in Special Education Setting
A	7	12
B	0	5
C	7	3
D	0	23
E	0	12
F	21	12
G	0	7
H	0	8

Analysis of the Interview Responses

In order to summarize the data collected in this qualitative study, the researcher first distinguished general categories that emerged through the participants' responses to the semi-structured interview questions. The categories that emerged were (a) most important special education competencies needed, (b) beliefs, skills, and knowledge needed, and (c) most frequently seen special education mistakes. Subsequently, major and minor themes were identified for each category. Major themes were identified as making five or more general appearances in transcribed interviews, while minor themes occurred at a frequency of less than five times.

Category #1: Most Important Special Education Competencies Needed

Major Theme #1: Ability to interact and communicate effectively with parents. Five of the eight participants indicated that the ability to effectively interact and communicate with families was the most important special education competency for the success of Pennsylvania school principals. This skill was listed as an indicator under the overrepresentation of diverse students in special education competency. Most of the participants indicated some confusion as to why effective communication skills were not included as an overarching competency in the Pennsylvania's Framework and Guidelines for Principal Preparation Programs.

In particular, Special Education Adviser F emphasized the ability to interact appropriately with families as very important for school principals. The adviser explained that special education parents are generally very passionate about their children and the primary complaints received from parents concerning principals is that they make ridiculous comments. For example, the adviser spoke of a time when a parent of a child with special needs requested a change to their child's academic schedule. In response, the school principal questioned the parents motive by stating "...why, your child will never need that because they will never go to college or be gainfully employed." Special Education Adviser H explained that the root of many special education complaints would not have occurred if school personnel were more compassionate. Special Education Adviser G expanded on this notion and explained that the principal's ability to communicate is the key not only in dealing with parents of students with disabilities, but also for working with their school's staff and students. Special Education Adviser D explained that the school administrator's ability to communicate is essential for ensuring

a smooth IEP process. At times, if IEP meetings become heated between school officials and families, a school administrator must possess effective communication skills.

Special Education Adviser E acknowledged that the most important communication skill for school administrators is the ability to realize that most parents understand their child's disability, and to treat parents as equal partners in advancing their child's education.

Major Theme #2: Effective instructional strategies for students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Five of the eight participants postulated that being knowledgeable of effective instructional strategies for students with disabilities is an integral aspect of being a school principal. Special Education Adviser G noted that until recently, Pennsylvania was behind other larger states with least restrictive environment placements for students with disabilities. The adviser noted that school administrators need to be knowledgeable of effective instructional strategies because of an increase in co-teaching models for special education delivery. Special Education Adviser A indicated similar concerns regarding building principals. The adviser stated that they are too often removed from instructional practice and focus more on purely management and administrative duties than instructional best practice. Special Education Adviser B added that modern-day public school principals are expected to be knowledgeable instructional leaders and that they must perform that role for all of their students, including students with disabilities. Special Education Adviser D similarly explained that all school administrators should be familiar with research-supported best instructional practices. Special Education Adviser C stated that building principals need substantial continuing education in current best instructional practices, both academic and behavioral.

Major Theme #3: Prevention and early intervening. Five of the eight participants recognized knowledge of prevention and early intervening services for students with disabilities as an important competency for school administrators. Special Education Adviser D indicated that many students are placed in special education because they are entering school systems with inadequate preparation. The adviser pointed to early intervention services as a commonly missed form of support. The Response to Intervention model, in contrast to the traditional “wait to fail” model, was recommended as an important tool of which new school administrators must be aware. Special Education Adviser A further emphasized early intervention practices as an important competency for school principals because students operate at different levels of need regardless of whether they are identified as needing special education services or not. Two advisers, Special Education Adviser G and F, discussed the importance for school principals to be knowledgeable of prevention strategies, especially in the area of student behavior. Adviser G specifically mentioned the ability to identify students who are not succeeding in their day-to-day classroom activities, and highlighted the importance of possessing the tools and understanding to assist these students. Special Education Adviser C similarly stated that school principals should assess the overarching difficulties that a student is having in the classroom and determine if the behaviors are a result of the student’s frustrations before turning to disciplinary measures. Adviser C also felt that early intervention should be stressed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and that school districts should be encouraged to house early intervention programs (i.e. Head Start).

Minor Themes of Category #1. As the special education advisers responded to the interview question about which Special Education Competencies for School Leaders they deemed to be most important, the following minor themes emerged:

- Understanding of disabilities
- Elements of the IEP

The participants universally identified the need for school principals to understand students' disabilities and the elements of individualized education plans. With an understanding of the disabilities with which students may be dealing, school principals would be better able to support their instruction. Also, Special Education Adviser G indicated that school principals and their staff should know what triggers their students' behaviors and understand how to assist students as necessary. Becoming familiar with the elements of IEPs is important because school principals act as the representative of the school district, the LEA, during IEP meetings.

Category #2: Beliefs, Skills and Knowledge Needed For School Principals

Major Theme #1: Understanding of special education laws. Five out of the eight participants explained that building principals should be familiar with the laws governing special education delivery in the state of Pennsylvania. Special Education Adviser A stated that first and foremost building principals need to have knowledge about IDEA and also Chapters 14, 15, and 16 of Pennsylvania state code. These chapters entail the guidelines for special education services, 504 service agreements, and gifted education. Special Education Adviser E augmented this suggestion by emphasizing the importance of understanding that federal law is the minimum that must be done, and that state law requirements can exceed federal law. Special Education Adviser B explained

that the disciplining of special education students, and all of its ramifications, is one area often mishandled area by school principals. The adviser suggested that these mistakes were a direct result of new school administrators not understanding special education law. Special Education Adviser C echoed similar concerns, drawing from his experience with procedural mistakes made by school administrators in suspending students with disabilities thus violating those students' rights for Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Special Education Adviser D claimed that with the 20-plus years of experience she possessed, she believed a vast majority of the school principals she worked with had never read the laws. Furthermore, this adviser believed that many of the issues school administrators are involved in regarding special education could be avoided by school principals reading the legal documents governing special education.

Major Theme #2: Role of the Local Education Agency (LEA) representative in the IEP process. Five of the eight participants stated that new school principals should be familiar with the role they assume as the LEA representative in the IEP process and its implications. Principals must also ensure that the IEP is being followed in their school buildings. Special Education Adviser G stressed that building principals must be familiar with the basic special education process, from child find through the evaluation, as well as the IEP process and the nature of placement decisions. Special Education Adviser E echoed those sentiments and added that school principals can no longer just depend on special education teachers and special education supervisors to handle issues related to students with disabilities. He explained that the principal is the sole building contact for special education issues in the absence of the special education administrator. Therefore, to be successful, the school principal must possess a breadth of knowledge

pertaining to the IEP process. Special Education Adviser B postulated that many of the issues he has dealt with in regard to special education complaints stemmed from the fact that IEPs are not always followed as they are written by the IEP team. Special Education Adviser D recommended that school administrators should look at the IEP as a contract and make it their mission to ensure that it is followed as written. Special Education Adviser F believed that building principals should not participate in an IEP meeting without first educating themselves about the student, their disability, and their needs.

Major Theme #3: Understanding the discipline process for students with disabilities. Five of the eight participants identified common misunderstandings with regard to how students with disabilities should be disciplined, and noted the proper disciplinary tactics for these students as a key competency needed by new school principals. Special Education Adviser A identified the misconception of school principals that students with special needs can't be disciplined, which is incorrect. He stated that administrators must be cognizant of the regulations that govern the discipline of those students. Special Education Adviser B stated that in terms of disciplining students with disabilities, the rules related to suspension, expulsion, and positive behavior supports are all immensely important. She explained that many school principals forget to go back to the IEP document and make sure that the behavior is not a manifestation of the student's disability. The principal needs to look at each student individually and be knowledgeable of the regulations relating to discipline before doling out consequences. Special Education Adviser D agreed that school principals often mishandle suspensions for students with disabilities because they do not look at the child as an individual. She explained that administrators should try to find out what behavior triggers are causing

problems for the students and seek to correct it within the community of the school. She expressed frustration regarding students with disabilities being wrongfully suspended from school, when they are the ones least able to afford lost educational time. Special Education Adviser E offered similar examples of school principals trying to treat all students the same way, whether they were disabled or not. Being knowledgeable of students, their unique abilities, and how their disabilities manifest in their behaviors is essential for school principals. Special Education Adviser H felt that school principals often fail to understand how to support student behavior through system-wide positive behavior support programs.

Major Theme #4: Not treating special education services as a separate entity.

Five of the eight participants stated that school administrators' attitudes toward special education services must be addressed. School principals too often treat general education and special education as two separate entities, and this attitude is the root of many special education complaints. Special Education Adviser B proposed that school principals and special education supervisors should have a shared appreciation for instructional leadership in school buildings. For example, in her evaluation of employees, she found that students benefitted most when their administrators shared supervision responsibilities and knew the instructional practices that best served students with disabilities. Special Education Adviser H recognized these issues by highlighting the importance of making all students feel included in the school community. This starts with the leadership modeled by the school principal and the attitudes he or she displays. Special Education Adviser F said that some issues with principal attitudes would be eliminated if the training opportunities were changed for our school leaders. She explained that higher

education programs need to intertwine their training for special education and general education instead of treating them as wholly separate entities. If general education teachers, special education teachers, school principals, and special education supervisors were trained to educate all students, attitudes would ultimately change. Special Education Adviser G explained that in an ideal world, there would be periodic joint meetings where both building principals and special education administrators would receive training. Special Education Adviser C explained that principals must learn how to make special education faculty feel like they are a valued part of the staff. The goal is for all members of a school's leadership to be on the same page, which would enable them to prepare the best instructional program for all students.

Minor Themes of Category #2. As the special education advisers responded to the interview question of what specific beliefs, knowledge, and skills principals need to effectively supervise site-based special education programs, the following minor themes emerged:

- Least Restrictive Environment requirements
- Graduation/Drop-out rates
- Adequate Yearly Progress/Data driven decisions
- School-based mental health
- Seeking to understand how parents feel about raising a child with disabilities

The special education advisers recognized multiple areas of which school principals must be knowledgeable in their positions. It is interesting to note that the participants often pointed to items that are related to the state of Pennsylvania Special Education Plan, which focuses on district-level change. In other words, the areas of special education

services that they highlighted appear at the same level at which school principals play an integral role.

Category #3: Most Frequently Seen Special Education Mistakes

Major Theme #1: Poor communication skills when dealing with parents. Six of the eight participants reported that in Western Pennsylvania, school principals often exhibit poor communication skills when dealing with parents of students with disabilities. Special Education Adviser D stated that the majority of issues she deals with regarding special education compliance could be avoided if administrators exercised greater sensitivity. Too often the school principal misspeaks and/or misinforms the parents during IEP meetings, which can cause tension in the future. Special Education Adviser F explained that special education compliance issues basically all come down to power struggles and the lack of communication skills. She suggested that principals need to have a willingness to think outside the box and be flexible when dealing with students with disabilities. Special Education Adviser C stated that many times she received phone calls from parents because principals made inappropriate comments. If school principals were more cognizant of how parents perceived their statements, many communication problems would be eliminated. Special Education Adviser G added that even when parents are distressed and angry about their child's circumstances, they believe school principals are going to fix everything. School principals need to keep this in perspective; parents are their child's biggest advocate.

When meeting with parents, building principals have a difficult task in explaining special education services and academic progress as it relates to each student. Special Education Adviser E stated that the communication skills needed for school principals

boil down to listening skills and the ability to build relationships with parents. Principals must show parents that they understand their son or daughter's disability and how it impacts their learning. School officials need to remember that parents know their children better than anyone else. Finally, Special Education Adviser H gestured to the importance of school principals putting themselves in the parents' shoes, because the same student who misbehaves at school goes home to their parents' supervision each and every day.

Major Theme #2: Knowing the contents of the IEP, participation in the IEP process, and ensuring its implementation. Five of the eight participants indicated that a majority of compliance issues where school principals are at fault result from their failure to understand their students' IEPs and to ensure that their schools follow those IEPs. Special Education Adviser G suggested that principals should focus on making sure that their staffs are doing the right things for students with disabilities. He indicated that not knowing the IEP process and making procedural errors often results in special education complaints. Special Education Adviser E focused on the need for school principals to know their students, especially the ones with disabilities. If they are aware of each student's needs and their IEPs, then they can make sure that their staff is implementing the IEPs correctly. Adviser E stated that you can't paint all students with learning disabilities with the same brush. Ultimately, the school principal must ensure that the IEP, similar to a contract, is followed.

Special Education Adviser A similarly addressed the need for school principals to not just look at each of a student's disabilities, but instead to look at the whole child. With such an understanding, the implementation of the IEP would be easier because the

principal would understand why the aides and services are necessary. Special Education Adviser C reiterated the need for school principals to understand the urgency of implementing IEPs. She explained that most of the phone calls she received from upset parents stemmed from the fact that school administrators did not understand what needed to be implemented in an IEP. For example, it is problematic if an IEP states that a child needs to take their reading class assessment in a resource room, but when the test is given, the student is not taken to the appropriate location. In this circumstance, parents frequently call the advisers and report that their child's IEP was not followed. As mentioned, the IEP should be treated as a contract; building principals can't unilaterally decide on what child with disabilities needs or doesn't need. Special Education Adviser B concurred with the idea that someone in school administration should be familiar with all implemented IEPs and ensure that they are followed.

Major Theme #3: Principal's role in discipline for students with disabilities.

Many of the advisers interviewed highlighted the importance of school principals understanding the rules and guidelines governing discipline of students with disabilities. Five of the eight participants pointed out that complaints related to the discipline of students with disabilities are very common. For example, Special Education Adviser B explained that when school principals discipline students with disabilities, they often forget to go back to the IEP document and determine if the behavior exhibited could be considered a manifestation of the child's disability. Special Education Adviser F pointed out that often times a student with behavioral problems might be a direct result of their frustration with their learning difficulties. Furthermore, she stated that school principals need to take a different approach with discipline depending on the child's disability. For

example, she said students with emotional disabilities do not respond well to school principals who have an aggressive approach to discipline. Special Education Adviser D expressed frustration with the complaints she received surrounding school principals who often suspend students with disabilities. She explained that these students are often already performing behind their peers. Therefore, suspending them from school just causes them to fall further behind. Special Education Adviser H emphasized that many complaints stemming from improper discipline procedures for students with disabilities would be eliminated if school principals implement school-wide positive behavior supports in their respective buildings. Special Education Adviser A discussed unfamiliarity with disabilities and their manifestation in the classrooms—both academically and behaviorally.

Minor Themes of Category #3. As the special education advisers responded to the interview question regarding the shortcomings of school principals that appear in the special education complaint process, the following minor themes emerged:

- Recognition of the special education continuum of placement or least restrictive environment restrictions
- Understanding the state special education regulations and their relations to their federal counterparts

Both minor themes involve the need for school principals to understand the legal regulations governing special education services. Lack of knowledge in these areas may result in special education complaints being filed against school districts.

Analysis

To summarize the data gathered in this study, an analysis of each participant's emphasis during their interview was completed. Further examination of the major and minor themes as identified by each participant, along with an analysis of the frequency of interview responses recorded per theme, was also conducted. Finally, a word frequency study enabled by the use of nVivo software was performed on the interview transcriptions in order to shed light on important terminology identified by the special education advisers.

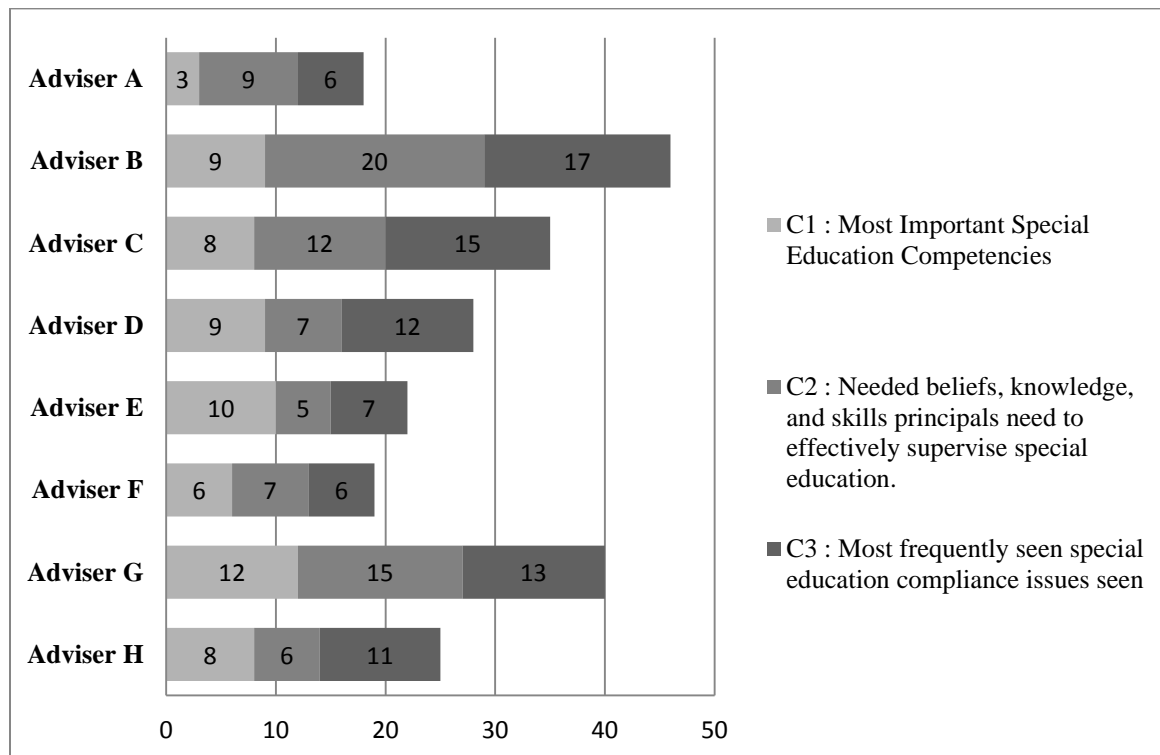


Figure 2. Individual participant emphasis, determined by the number of verbal references made to each of the three categories noted as C1, C2, and C3.

Category #1: Most Important Special Education Competencies Needed

Eight special education advisers discussed the following identifiers regarding the most important Special Education Competencies for School Leaders. Table 8 and Table 9 depict the major (five or more responses) and minor (less than five responses) themes that were revealed.

Table 8

Major Themes for Category #1

Identifier Description	Special Education Advisers Who Identified Theme
Ability to Interact and Communicate Effectively with Parents	5 of 8 identified/F,H,G,D,E
Effective Instructional Strategies for Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Settings	5 of 8 identified/G,A,B,D,C
Prevention and Early Intervening	5 of 8 identified/D,A,G,F,C

Table 9

Minor Themes for Category #1

Identifier Description	Special Education Advisers Who Identified Theme
Understanding of Disabilities	3 of 8 identified/A,D,E
Elements of an IEP	4 of 8 identified/G,B,D,C

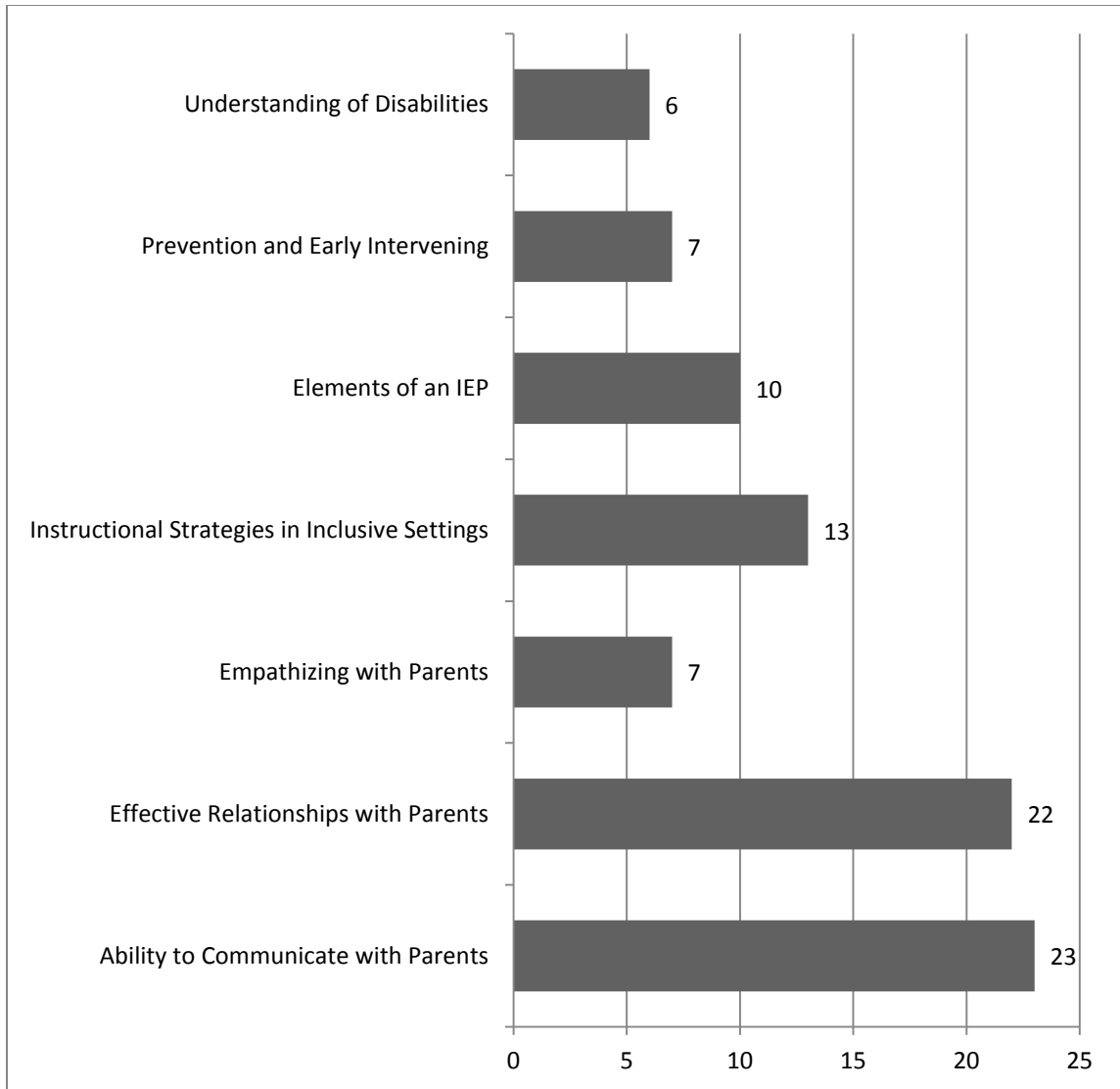


Figure 3. Number of references made by the participants to the major and minor themes of Category #1: Most Important Special Education Competencies Needed.

For Category #1, the special education advisers were asked to examine the current Special Education Competencies for School Leaders to identify which they deemed to be most important. Notably, the participants reported uncertainty as to how the particular competencies were decided upon. These thoughts were exemplified in a statement by Special Education Adviser C:

When I looked at the competencies I really thought something was missing, like I missed part of the attachment. I think the wrong things are being covered. I don't know if I could come up with it on the top of my head, but discipline is something that needs to be looked at. Then it would take something like this (dissertation study), I guess, to determine the big issues that need to be included. But this (the special education competencies) seems so empty. I think there is a lot missing.

In analyzing the current competencies, the participants questioned the choice to make overrepresentation of diverse students in special education an overarching Special Education Competency for School Leaders. While agreeing it is important for school leaders to be aware of diverse student populations, the advisers feel that this is a regional issue relegated to only a small percentage of the state. The participants indicated that their responses pertaining to the needed knowledge, beliefs, and skills school leaders need were more indicative of the competencies necessary for principals to successfully lead special education programs.

Category #2: What Beliefs, Knowledge, and Skills Are Needed for School Principals

Eight special education advisers discussed the following identifiers regarding the beliefs, knowledge, and skills school principals need to effectively supervise site-based special education programs. Table 10 and Table 11 enumerate the major (five or more responses) and minor (less than five responses) themes.

Table 10

Major Themes for Category #2

Identifier Description	Special Education Advisers Who Identified Theme
Understanding of special education laws	5 of 8 identified/A,E,B,C,D
Role of the LEA in the IEP process	5 of 8 identified/G,E,B,D,F
Understanding the discipline process for students with disabilities	5 of 8 identified/A,B,D,E,H
Not treating special education services as a separate entity	5 of 8 identified/B,H,F,G,C

Table 11

Minor Themes for Category #2

Identifier Description	Special Education Advisers Who Identified Theme
Least Restrictive Environment requirements	2 of 8 identified/A,C
Graduation/Drop-out rates	3 of 8 identified/A,G,C
Adequate Yearly Progress/Data driven decisions	3 of 8 identified/A,D,E
School-based mental health	1 of 8 identified/B
Seeking to understand how parents feel about raising a child with disabilities	4 of 8 identified/C,D,E,F

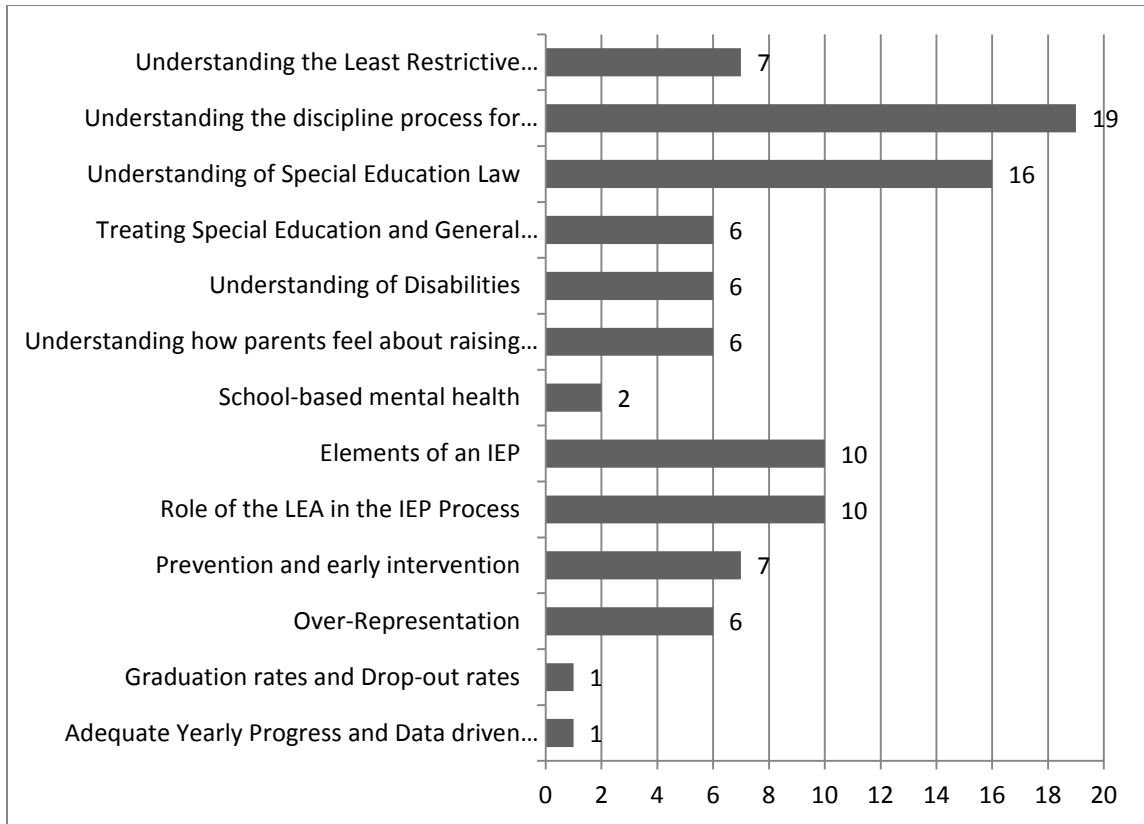


Figure 4. Number of references made by the participants to the major and minor themes of Category #2: What Beliefs, Knowledge, and Skills Are Needed for School Principals.

The special education advisers all identified specific beliefs, knowledge, and skills principals need to effectively supervise site-based special education programs. Their responses and the major themes thereof can be categorized into two general areas. First, participants emphasized that school principals need to be familiar with the legal guidelines that govern special education services. Special Education Adviser D summarized this view, saying:

I think that principals really have to know what the laws actually state. I think they are written in such a way that there shouldn't be any problem with someone who is at that level (school administrator) being able to understand them. In my

experience, and I have eleven years of experience in this job and prior to that I taught for twelve years, I do not believe that the majority of the principals that I have worked with have ever read them. Because when I am stating things to them that are basic, they don't really seem to know. I would say that it sounds like it is too simple, but sometimes those are the things that are overlooked. That's what I think is one of the most important things, is to take the time to read the regulations.

Similarly, Special Education Adviser C indicated the importance of understanding the legalities surrounding IEPs:

The most important (competency) is the implementation of IEPs and I say that because most of the phone calls I receive deals with folks who do not understand the legalities surrounding what needs to be implemented in a IEP. An example would be if it is stated in the IEP that a child needs to take a test during reading class. Take all tests during reading class in a resource room. Then there is a test in the reading class and the child does not go. Then the parent calls me and says my child did not take the test in the resource room. Then what ends up happening there is some kind of conversation or disagreement with the leadership of the building, typically the principal. That says we thought that the child did not need to go to the resource room for the testing. They are unilaterally deciding on what a child needs or doesn't need. And that is why I say implementation of IEPs because it really stems from that and surrounds the law and regulations. That is what I usually hear and what I deal with, that type of issue.

The human element involved in successfully navigating special education services emerged as the second major thematic area. According to the special education advisers' responses, simple people skills are immensely important for school principals when supervising special education programs. Special Education Adviser H reported the following with regard to the skills that school principals must strengthen:

Communication, first and foremost. So often in this day and age where we are under such scrutiny and accountability from a financial perspective, parents just think they are not getting what they are supposed to be getting or what their student deserves to have because the district is cutting corners. I think that open communication [is important], not allowing parents to think that you are withholding any information from them. Again that piece of being responsive to your IEP team members and that decision making process goes a long way. When I say responsiveness, I mean that to the parents and I mean that to your staff members because it makes them feel valued and it make them want to work with you, I think, even more so in terms of coming to a resolution for that student or that family when everyone is involved.

Regarding the people skills school principals need to develop, Special Education Adviser F also stated:

It's showing parents that you understand the disability and how it impacts their child. Just being communicative with parents, listening and not always telling them is important. We have found that is where we have problem, because parents say that nobody listens to them at school or they belittle them (or they think they do). It's very intimidating to some parents to come into an IEP and sit

there with all these educational experts. The meeting can prevent a lot of problems if the educational people understand they may be the experts but the parents do know the kid better than anybody. Once you validate the parents they are on your side.

Category #3: Most Frequently Seen Special Education Mistakes

Eight special education advisers discussed the following identifiers regarding the special education compliance issues they observe most frequently. Table 12 and Table 13 illustrate the major (five or more response) and minor (less than five response) themes that were revealed.

Table 12

Major Themes for Category #3

Identifier Description	Special Education Advisers Who Identified Theme
Poor communication skills when dealing with parents	6 of 8 identified/D,F,C,G,E,H
Knowing the contents of the IEP, participation in the IEP process, and ensuring its implementation	5 of 8 identified/G,E,A,C,B
Principal’s role in discipline for students with disabilities	5 of 8 identified/B,F,D,H,A

Table 13

Minor Themes for Category #3

Identifier Description	Special Education Advisers Who Identified Theme
Recognition of the special education continuum of placement or least restrictive environment restrictions	3 of 8 identified/A,C,D
Understanding the state special education regulations and their relations to their federal counterparts	2 of 8 identified/H,C

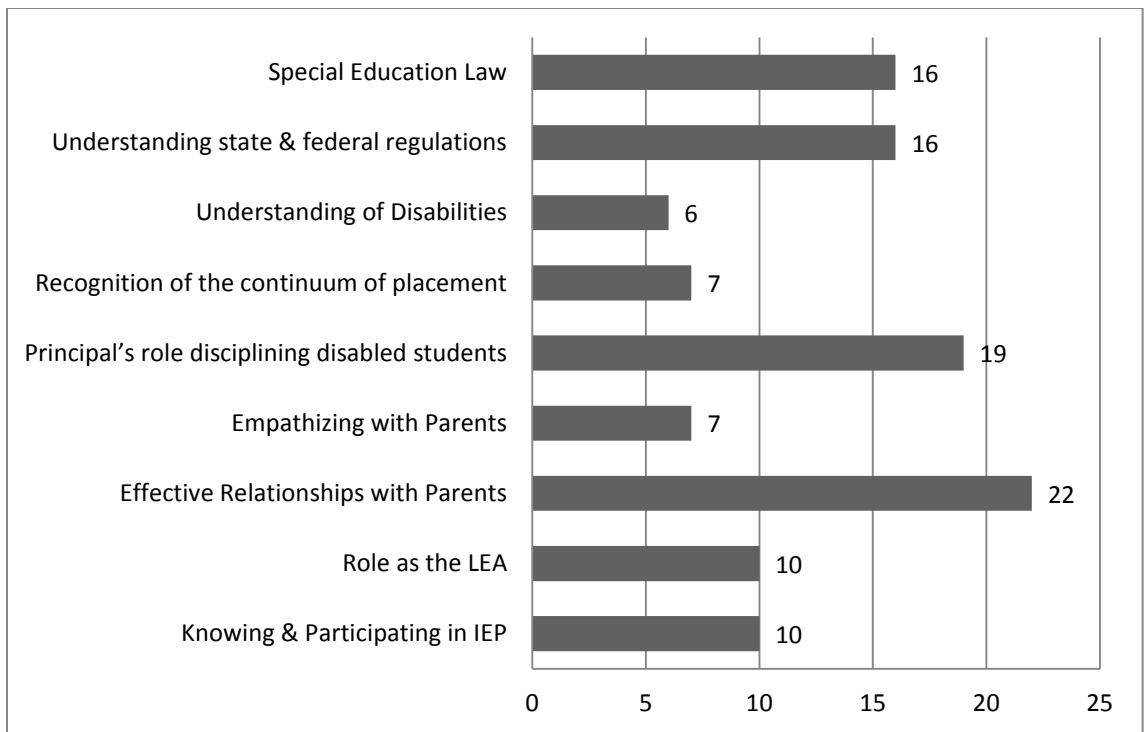


Figure 5. Number of references made by the participants to the major and minor themes of Category #3: Most Frequently Seen Special Education Mistakes.

In analysis of the most frequently occurring special education compliance issues, many of the themes are in agreement with the identified knowledge, skills, and beliefs necessary for school principals. The one basic item that seems to be a trigger area for most compliance issues is the breakdown of the relationship between school principals and the parents of students with disabilities. Regarding the relationships school principals need to develop, Special Education Adviser E offered:

I think as a principal they definitely need to be able to relate to families. I think that's very important especially when you are dealing with special education because often times you have irate parents that are upset about something with their child and they are very passionate about their child. Many times, as an adviser, I am getting phone calls from parents because principals just made a ridiculous comment. When you get right down to it, if they were just a little compassionate, so many problems would be eliminated and/or if they were familiar with the law, they wouldn't be in the situation that they are in.

Confrontational interactions during the special education process lead to a break down in the school-parent relationship and in turn the complaint process is initiated. While the special education complaint process is undesirable for the school district, ultimately the student suffers the worst consequences when the school-parent relationship sours.

Word Frequency Study

A word frequency study was conducted using the interviews completed with the eight special education advisers (Table 14). The entire transcribed interview text consisted of 23,302 words. Throughout the process of developing the research questions for this study, "critical words" were identified because of their frequent occurrence in the

literature. The terms were then applied to the transcribed text in order to determine frequency of use. Results from the word frequency study indicated that the high frequency words such as “understanding,” “communication,” “regulations,” and “listening” highly correlate to the aforementioned, identified general categories which emerged throughout the interview process. Those categories are: (a) most important special education competencies needed, (b) beliefs, skills, and knowledge needed, and (c) most frequently seen special education mistakes. The researcher also acknowledges the unexpected results of the word frequency study. Interestingly, the terms “legal” and “leader” showed a fairly low frequency of use during the interview process. These inconsistencies may be a direct result of using different terminology for similar beliefs and phenomenon. For example, the terms “legal,” “laws,” and “regulations” can all refer to the same matters.

Table 14

Word Frequency Study

Selected Term	Frequency
Behavior	87
Communication	247
Discipline	112
Empathy	95
Families	114
IEP	120
Interaction	55
LEA Role	116
Leader	45
Legal	45
Listening	143
Regulations	150
Relationships	39
Requirements	45
Understanding	245

Summary of Data Analysis

The following summarizes the interview results with the special education advisers from the Western Region of Division of Compliance Monitoring in the state of Pennsylvania:

- Special education advisers found the current Special Education Competencies for School Leaders to be lacking in what school principals need to know in order to successfully lead special education programs.
- Special education advisers believe that the capacity to maintain effective relationships with parents is a major competency for school principals to attain, particularly with regard to special education programs. Both the ability to communicate and the ability to empathize with parents are elements of effective relationships.
- Special education advisers determined that a solid foundation of special education law is essential for school administrators. Understanding the discipline process for students with disabilities was one example highlighted by the advisers.
- Special education advisers emphasized the importance of school administrators having an awareness of special education disabilities and understanding how they relate to student performance, behavior, etc. Furthermore, school principals should be aware of available services to which parents of special education students can be referred for assistance (e.g., mental health services).

- Special education advisers similarly discussed the need for school principals to be aware of the IEP process, the role of the LEA in the process, and the different elements of the IEP document.
- Special education advisers spoke to the importance of school principals ensuring that special education and general education services are treated as equally important.

Summary of Chapter 4

This chapter included a profile of each special education adviser from the Western Region of the Division of Compliance and Monitoring who participated in the study. Data related to the research questions were collected during the semi-structured interview process and later analyzed; in addition, major and minor themes were identified. Chapter 5 goes on to address the interview findings as they relate to each of the research questions. Major themes were defined as having responses from five or more special education advisers. Minor themes were defined as having less than five special education adviser's responses. Finally, a word frequency study of the transcribed text was conducted using selected special education leadership vocabulary noted in the literature.

Chapter 5 will discuss the results of the study and offer insights on steps which may be taken to address the "preparation gap" for school principals in the area of special education.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to review the research problem, research questions that served as the basis for this study, and summarize the findings. Conclusions are drawn and recommendations for further study are presented.

The purpose of this study was to examine the current strengths and weaknesses of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders for preparation of school principals in the state of Pennsylvania as they are perceived by special education advisers. As outlined in Chapter 1 and 2, previous studies have acknowledged the existence of a ‘preparation gap’ in the special education knowledge of school principals. Osborne, Dimattia, and Curran (1993) found that school principals require a unique leadership style to succeed with the challenges of special education:

It requires a leader who, by developing effective models of collaboration with others, can improve the readiness within the general education mainstream for the inclusion of those with special needs. The leadership challenge becomes one of identifying the parameters of those who have disabilities and then preparing for their graceful integration into the general education setting to the maximum extent appropriate. (p. 6)

Art Levine’s report, *The Leadership Challenge* (2005), concluded that “the majority of [education administration] programs range from inadequate to appalling, even at some of the country’s leading universities” (Levine, 2005, p. 17). As a result of the growing criticisms to principal preparation programs, various states responded to the call for

reform. In the Framework for Principal Preparation Programs, the Pennsylvania Department of Education specifically created the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework (see Appendix A). They assert that principal preparation programs should not only include the stated competencies, but also the skills needed to supervise and evaluate these competencies in others.

These Special Education Competencies for School Leaders have not yet been examined for their effectiveness, nor has the vantage point of special education advisers ever been used to determine what knowledge Pennsylvania school principals should possess. This study uses the backward design model as a basis for evaluation of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders. Input gathered from participants is used to postulate the desired results for principal preparation programs and offer recommendations for their development. A semi-structured interview protocol was developed in order to assess perceptions of special education advisers from the Western Region of the Division of Compliance and Monitoring. This study examined the perceptions of the eight special education advisers from the Western Region of the Division of Compliance and monitoring to answer the following research questions:

1. Which of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders are viewed as the most important to the success of practicing Pennsylvania school principals from the perspective of special education advisers?
2. What specific beliefs, knowledge, and skills do principals need to effectively supervise site-based special education programs from the perspective of special education advisers?

3. What special education compliance issues are the most frequently seen across Western Pennsylvania from the perspective of special education advisers?

Discussion of the Research Findings

The following discussion couples the conclusions drawn from the special education adviser interviews with a review of the research. Summaries are presented in response to each research question posed in this study.

Research Question 1: Which of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders are viewed as the most important to the success of practicing Pennsylvania school principals from the perspective of special education advisers?

The findings indicate that Pennsylvania's Department of Education Special Education Competencies do not accurately reflect what the Western Region Division of Compliance Monitoring's special education advisers feel to be the most important skills needed for supervising special education programs. Given the current competencies, the advisers overwhelmingly pointed to the ability to interact effectively with parents as most important for school principals. The advisers indicated disappointment that this competency is not categorized as one of the three overarching Special Education Competencies for School Leaders. Instead, it is listed as a sub-standard under the Over-Representation of Diverse Students in Special Education.

The advisers subsequently identified the possession of effective instructional strategies for the inclusion of students with special needs as the second most important competency. The next in the hierarchy, according to the participants, is the knowledge of early intervention and prevention skills for students with disabilities. Finally, overrepresentation did garner a little attention as an important competency. Many of the

advisers regarded it as a regional issue, however, and deemed it unnecessary as an overarching special education competency.

The advisers identified two minor themes regarding competencies for school principals: understanding of disabilities and knowledge of the elements of IEPs. In light of the special education advisers' responses, this researcher concludes that necessary competencies are missing.

Research Question 2: What specific beliefs, knowledge, and skills do principals need to effectively supervise site-based special education programs from the perspectives of special education advisers?

In this area of inquiry, the advisers' responses concurred with the research literature in finding that school principals suffer from a 'preparation gap' in the area of special education leadership. The participants identified the following areas of knowledge that school administrators should possess in order to successfully supervise special education programs: understanding of special education laws, role of the LEA in the IEP process, understanding of the discipline process for students with disabilities, and ensuring that special education and general education is treated equally important. Unfortunately, none of these items are listed in the current Pennsylvania's Framework and Guidelines for Principal Preparation Programs.

Participants recognized the following minor areas as to be important for school principals leading special education programs: understanding of the least restrictive environment requirements, understanding of graduation/drop-out rates in their implications for special education, utilizing data driven decisions and adequate yearly progress, having an understanding of the types of school-based mental health options

available to students, and finally empathizing with parents on how it feels to raise a child with disabilities. Again, these items are not identified amongst the current Special Education Competencies for School Leaders. These findings indicate that the competencies must be revised in order for them to fully encompass the specific beliefs, knowledge, and skills that are truly needed by school principals leading special education programs.

Research Question 3: What special education compliance issues are the most frequently seen across Western Pennsylvania from the perspective of special education advisers?

In order to best prepare school principals for supervising special education programs, it is important to determine the common areas where current administrators make mistakes. To this end, this study examined the perspectives of special education advisers who are knowledgeable of common problems experienced by school principals in the area of special education. The participants identified the following compliance issues as being the most troublesome for school principals who are leading special education programs: poor communication skills when dealing with parents, lack of understanding of IEP contents, process and ensuring the IEP is implemented properly, and understanding discipline guidelines for students with disabilities. Special education advisers also cited the recognition of least restrictive environment regulations and the understanding of how federal and state special education regulations interact, in addition to more minor compliance issues. Not surprisingly, the most frequently-observed compliance issues directly correlate to what beliefs, knowledge, and skills special education advisers feel school principals need to possess. These identified compliance

issues are not addressed by the current Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework. In identification of the current areas where school principals have mishaps in the area of special education, it is believed that further research should occur in the near future in order to make necessary revisions to the framework.

An unexpected outcome from the interview process was the impact that the passion and professional insight of the special education advisers had on this researcher. The confidence, exuberance and straightforward honesty expressed by each special education adviser during the interview process were inspiring and infectious. It was clear to the researcher that the advisers all put the needs of students first in their professional lives.

Recommendations for Action

Based on Wiggins and McTighe's (2007) Understanding by Design framework for program evaluation, school leaders should determine their desired end results first when developing effective principal preparation programs. Producing school administrators who are aware of potential special education pitfalls and prepared to lead strong special education programs should be among the goals of principal preparation programs. As a result of this study, the state of Pennsylvania and higher education institutions should understand that the current Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework needs to be updated to include practical knowledge. The insights gleaned from the special education advisers' first-hand experience with special education pitfalls points to several competencies not currently acknowledged in Pennsylvania's framework. It is proposed that principals should be able to

- maintain effective relationships with parents and display both the ability to communicate and the ability to empathize;
- possess a solid foundation in special education law and the corresponding legal requirements, especially with regard to the discipline process for students with disabilities;
- exhibit an awareness of special education disabilities and an understanding of how they relate to student performance, behavior, etc., in addition to being aware of available services to which parents of special education students can be referred (e.g. mental health services);
- prove knowledgeable of the IEP process, the role of the LEA in the process, and the different elements of the IEP document;
- ensure that special education and general education services are treated equally as important.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education should view the results of this study as pressing call for reform to principal preparation programs. It is recommended that state officials revisit Pennsylvania's Framework for School Principals, specifically the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders. The beliefs, knowledge, and skill sets identified by the participants should be inserted into the competencies.

Colleges and universities can view this study as an early guidepost for the development of principal preparation programs that focus on the practical skills and knowledge needed most by school principals. Careful consideration should be given to the development of joint training opportunities for school principals, special education supervisors, and school psychologists. Such training will reinforce the equal importance

of special education programs along with general education. Furthermore, these findings would also be useful to university-based principal training programs as they screen applicants and create internship opportunities for mentorship with current school administrators. Through the involvement of postsecondary leaders in the analysis of this study's results, the next generation of school principals will be better prepared for the job in front of them.

School districts will be best served if they use this study's results in the professional development training of their current administrative staff. A proactive approach in closing the "knowledge gap" of their school principals may prevent costly special education litigations in the future—a very relevant issue for Pennsylvania schools. Currently, the state ranks among the 10 most litigious in the nation in special education (Andren, 2010).

For the individual educator, this study reinforces the notion that practicing school administrators must consider themselves to be lifelong learners. An astute awareness of the numerous changes and influences to the landscape of public education is necessary for school principals. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of educational leaders to assure that their knowledge base is expanding in order to successfully meet the challenges of leading their schools.

At the time this study was completed, the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework was four years old. This researcher strongly suggests that the Pennsylvania Department of Education form committees to reexamine the competencies. The inclusion of special education advisers as committee members is also recommended. These individuals have exactly the first-hand, practical knowledge needed to develop

programs that will help school principals be successful in the area of special education. Based on the results of this study, special consideration should be given to effective communication skills, along with a background in special education law and regulations. A more complete understanding of special education guidelines would be also beneficial.

Recommendations for Further Study

Based on the results of this study, this researcher offers the following considerations for future research:

1. This study revealed interesting ideas relative only to the voices and experience of select special education advisers. Replicating this research with all of the state's special education advisers is recommended, as it would provide a fuller understanding of the group's views on the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders.
2. This study, along with a short survey, should be replicated with current school principals, special education supervisors, and superintendents as participants. Their perspectives may further enhance our understanding of what school principals need to be familiar with in the area of special education.
3. While the voices of special education advisers were never considered in determining the effectiveness of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders until this study, parent groups and advocates would also provide an interesting viewpoint in this area. One competency that advisers felt strongly about for school principals was the effective relationships with parents. As such, the perspectives of parents of children with special needs would be a valuable resource for future program development.

4. Qualitative or quantitative studies should be conducted with higher education personnel to determine their perceptions of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders.
5. Qualitative or quantitative studies should be conducted to determine what sort of relationship exists between leadership preparation and subsequent school principal performance in the area of special education.
6. Furthermore, additional qualitative or quantitative studies are needed in order to determine if principal preparation concerning special education is better in other states. Insights may be gleaned from neighboring states' best practices in special education training for school administrators.

Conclusions

The literature in the area of school leadership asserts that principal preparation programs lack focus on special education. Pennsylvania's principal preparation programs were found to inadequately address the skills and knowledge that educational leadership research deemed necessary for administrative success. The State Department of Education responded by developing the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders. However, it was unclear whether these competencies were relevant to the everyday special education concerns of practicing school leaders. This study sought to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the framework and formulate possible recommendations for modifying the framework and improving future principal preparation programs. Special education advisers from the Western Region of Division of Compliance and Monitoring were interviewed for this study.

Based on the results of this study, special education advisers from the Western Region of Division of Compliance and Monitoring perceive that the current competencies are missing the mark as to what competencies are truly needed for school principals in the area of special education. This study suggests a need for revisions to the current Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework based on the perceptions of special education advisers.

Through the utilization of the *Understanding by Design* framework, principal preparation programs should be revised with careful consideration to the desired outcomes. Specifically, a desired outcome is producing school principals that possess a myriad of skills, beliefs and knowledge specific to in order to be successful in the area of special education.

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Appendix A

Pennsylvania's Framework and Guidelines for Principal Preparation Programs

Special Education Competencies for School Leaders

Principal Preparation Programs should include the following competencies as well as the knowledge, skills, and demonstration in supervising and evaluating these competencies in others.

Over-Representation of Diverse Students in Special Education

Candidates will be able to:

- Identify factors contributing to the over-representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in programs for individuals with disabilities and implement strategies for reduction of the over-representation.
- Demonstrate an understanding of over-representation of minorities in special education so as to not misinterpret behaviors that represent cultural, linguistic differences as indicative of learning problems.
- Demonstrate ability to interact and meet effectively with families.
- Distinguish between the culture of the family and the economic situation of the family and how poverty affects families.
- Identify how the family's culture and values affects how they view disabilities.
- Celebrate heritages and cultures and link directly to learning.
- Incorporate stories and resources from many cultural and ethnic traditions.
- Build on students' strengths when teaching literacy skills to language minority students.
- Directly use best, evidenced-based practices for teaching students from diverse backgrounds.
- Implement processes that successfully prevent inappropriate placement and ensure that the opportunities for educational achievement to minority students equal those offered to the majority group.

Prevention and Early Intervening

Candidates will be able to:

- Connect general education curriculum, compensatory and special education in providing high quality standards-based instruction/intervention that is matched to students' academic, social emotional and behavioral needs.
- Demonstrate high-quality instruction for all students, through scientific research and evidence-based practice to produce high rates of learning for all students.
- Implement universal screening of all students with periodic monitoring of students' progress in the curriculum
- Provide interventions for struggling learners provided at increasing levels of intensity and matched to individual student need.
- Implement an integrated system of assessment and data collection for identification of students struggling to meet academic and behavioral expectations.
- Monitor students' learning rates and levels of performance and use that information in ongoing problem solving and decision making.
- Determine which students need additional help regarding the intensity and likely duration of interventions, based on each student's response to instruction across multiple tiers of intervention.

- Participate in school wide approaches to intervention and effective instruction.
- Demonstrate evidenced-based practices for use in both the special and regular education settings in the school.

Effective Instructional Strategies for Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Settings

Candidates will be able to:

- Identify effective instructional strategies to address areas of need.
- Scaffold instruction to maximize instructional access to all students.
- Monitor student progress to provide mediated scaffolding and increase academic rigor when appropriate.
- Provide feedback to students at all levels to increase awareness in areas of strength, as well as areas of concern.
- Strategically align standard based curriculum with effective instructional practices.
- Identify and implement instructional adaptations based on evidence-based practices (demonstrated to be effective with students with disabilities) to provide curriculum content in a variety of ways without compromising curriculum intent.
- Analyze performance of all learners and make appropriate modifications.
- Design and implement programs that reflect knowledge, awareness and responsiveness to diverse needs of students with disabilities.
- Use research supported methods for academic and non-academic instruction for students with disabilities.
- Develop and implement universally designed instruction.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the range and the appropriate use of assistive technology (i.e., no tech, low tech, high tech).
- Demonstrate efficient differentiated instruction and an understanding of efficient planning, coordination, and delivery for effective instruction required for inclusive settings.

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Appendix B

Email Invitation to Participate in Study

Month, Day, 2011

Dear _____:

You are cordially invited to participate in a study being conducted by Mr. Matthew R. Conner under the supervision of Dr. Cathy Kaufman of the Administration and Leadership Studies Program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

The high-stakes accountability movement in public education has created numerous reforms including renewed attention to principal preparation. A 'preparation gap' for school administrators has been identified, especially in the area of special education. The Pennsylvania Department of Education has attempted to respond to the call for reforms of principal preparation by establishing an aligned system of preparation, induction, and continual professional development. The purpose of this qualitative method designed study is to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the current Special Education Competencies for School Leaders Framework adopted by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Indiana University of Pennsylvania respects the protection of participants in research studies. The study has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the protection of Human Subjects. There is no known discomfort or risks involved in participating in this study. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence. Your responses will be considered only in combination with those from other participants. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential at all times. Study participants may withdraw at any time. In order to withdraw from consideration in this study, please email the primary researcher at (matt_conner@hotmail.com).

If you are willing to participate in this study, please reply to this email by completing the attached electronic response form. I truly thank you in advance for participating in this valuable study. If you have any questions or seek and additional information, please contact me by telephone or email.

Educationally yours,

Matthew R. Conner
Primary Researcher
Doctoral Student IUP
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matt_conner@hotmail.com

Project Coordinator
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Electronic Response Form on which Invitees Confirm / Decline

Dear Mr. Conner,

Please check the appropriate boxes.....

I accept your invitation to participate in the research study: _____

I decline your invitation to participate in the research study: _____

I understand that I can withdraws from the study at any time: _____

Participant Name: _____

Date: _____

Best time researcher can reach me: _____

Preferred email address: _____

Preferred telephone number: _____

Mailing address: _____

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE INDIANA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS. (724-357-7730)

Appendix C

Special Education Adviser Participant Demographic Questionnaire

Please *circle* the *answer* or *fill* in the blanks as appropriate.

1. Number of years serving as a special education adviser: _____ years
2. Certificates possessed: _____
3. Highest Professional Degree attained:
 - a. BS/BA
 - b. MS/MA
 - c. Specialist
 - d. EdD/PhD
4. Number of years teaching in a general education setting: _____ years;
 - a. What was the setting: _____
5. Number of years teaching in a special education setting: _____ years;
 - a. What was the setting: _____
6. Number of years serving as in a supervisory role in a special education setting: _____ years;
 - a. What was the setting: _____
7. In your current role as a special education adviser, rank the following items in terms of time spent: (place the number 1 besides the item you spend the most time dealing with and a number 5 beside the item you spend the least amount of time on)
 - a. Complaint Management _____
 - b. District Special Education Plans _____
 - c. Intermediate Unit Special Education Plans _____
 - d. Compliance Monitoring System _____
 - e. Least Restrictive Monitoring System _____
 - f. Dealing with the discipline of students with disabilities _____

Appendix D

Interview Questions

1. What are the elements of special education knowledge needed for school principals in the state of Pennsylvania?
2. Describe what you believe are the essential Special Education Competencies for School Leaders.
3. Please rank order the aforementioned competencies by level of importance.
4. Describe the most common special education pitfalls experienced by school administrators that you observe in your role as special education adviser.
5. From your perspective, distinguish any changes you have noticed in special education issues experienced by school administrators since the implementation of the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework compared to before implementation.
6. From your perspective, what are the missing areas of special education preparation in the state of Pennsylvania?
7. What training opportunities could be provided to school principals in order to better prepare them in disciplining special education pupils?
8. What skills are you aware of that strengthen the working relationship between school principals and parents of children with disabilities?
9. What is the best advice you could give to a new school principal in the area of special education?
10. Is there any other information pertaining to the Special Education Competencies for School Leaders framework that I have not been previously covered that you wish to include as relevant?