Special Education Teacher and Administrator Perception of the Teacher Evaluation Process in

Western Pennsylvania

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Special Education

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by

Amanda R. White

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Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania
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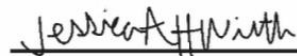For the Degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)
Presented by:
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Special Education Teacher and Administrator Perception of the Teacher Evaluation Process in
Western Pennsylvania
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ABSTRACT

Teacher evaluations have long been used to increase teacher effectiveness and accountability in public schools. According to the literature, special education teachers have varied roles and responsibilities, the most crucial being improving the post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities. With the number of students identified with disabilities increasing each year, it is more important than ever to develop the skills of marginal teachers and further develop those who are already proficient.

This qualitative study investigates the perceptions of special education teachers and administrators in Western Pennsylvania regarding the evaluation process used by public school districts. Survey data were collected from five special education teachers and five administrators representing five different school districts in Western Pennsylvania. Data tools included the Teacher Evaluation Profile for Teachers and Administrators, followed by individual interviews via Zoom. The Teacher Evaluation Profile had Likert-type questions and open-ended responses. The Likert-type questions, open-ended responses, and subsequent interviews allowed special education teachers and administrators to reflect on their perception of the evaluation process in their district.

This study demonstrated that special education teachers are more frustrated with the evaluation process. However, the administrators were reasonably satisfied with the process. They found that using Differentiated Supervision allowed special education teachers to take a more active role in their evaluation and subsequent professional development decisions. This study resulted in findings that support the need for additional professional development for teachers and administrators in evidence-based practices in special education classrooms and a more significant presence in the special education classroom by administrators.

DEDICATION

I owe my ability to achieve this accomplishment to my family and friends. Without the support of my husband, children, and family, I would not have persevered to complete this journey. To my husband, Jim, I am sorry that this took much longer than expected but thank you for seeing this through with me. I dedicate this to you, and the time it took away from us for me to reach my goals. To Abby and Carter, no matter how old or how long it takes, you can meet all your goals with hard work and perseverance. I love you all.

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Lastly, I would like to thank my students. They are the reason why I chose this topic. They deserve the best teachers they can get.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Due to general and special education policy changes, school leaders and educators feel increased pressure to meet rising expectations to prepare students for successful post-school outcomes. Politicians, educational leaders, and parents closely scrutinize the post-school success of all students. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004) mandates a set of coordinated activities in employment, continuing education, adult services, and independent living. These activities are designed to improve the outcomes in the above areas for students with disabilities. (Sprunger, Harvey, & Quick, 2018). Studies have found that students with disabilities significantly lag behind their general education peers in graduation rates, college acceptance, and employment.

Compared to general education students' success, fewer than 30% of students with disabilities meet the same state performance standards (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014; Stetser & Stillwell, 2014). The need to close the achievement gap is critical for students with disabilities. To close that gap and improve special education students' academic outcomes, teachers must be highly effective in research-based instructional practices (Sledge & Pazey, 2013). One way education policymakers have attempted to improve these learning outcomes is to promote the use of observation tools to evaluate instruction and inform professional development needs (Morris-Mathews, Stark, Jones, Brownell & Bell, 2021).

This chapter aims to capture the history of special education, the laws that have established the importance of special education, and the need for effective evaluation for special education teachers. This chapter also shows the context for this study by identifying the perceived benefits of the Danielson Framework for Teaching and Differentiated Supervision as

an evaluation model, the teacher's perception of effective evaluation, and the perceived benefits of these models by administrators.

To determine what effective special education looks like, educators and administrators should understand what special education is and its development. Special education is how children with disabilities receive an education designed to help them reach their full learning potential. It is the set of services that students receive within the school setting and may include instruction, related services, and supplementary aids and services (Friend, 2018).

History of Special Education

Education for students with disabilities was noted as early as 1800 when French physician Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard began his work with 12-year-old Victor, who was deaf and mute (Kanner, 1964). In the early 19th century, Segun developed a method of instruction that included a structured learning environment geared towards developing the senses, learning basic academic skills, and engaging in regular physical activities. With the advent of compulsory education in the early 20th century, it became apparent that certain children required more than the standard, assembly-line style of teaching offered to students of that time. Special ungraded classes became common even though the law did not require special education (Friend, 2018).

Mutua, Siders, & Bakken (2011) noted that during the early 20th century, intelligence testing became a popular tool to provide educators with a scientific basis for learners who had not been successful in typical classrooms. Educators began to believe that the intelligence quotient could be the basis for determining the ability level of students with intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, and visual or hearing disabilities.

In the 1960's research conducted by Lloyd Dunn (1968), Goldstein, Moss, & Jordan (1965) began to analyze traditional special education classes and students who attended these

with those of similar ability in a general education setting. They found that students with intellectual disabilities in general education settings achieved more academically than their peers in separate special education classes. This research led to the belief that effective teaching and technology could teach students with disabilities alongside their general education peers.

Impactful Laws

At the same time, parents began to win landmark cases such as *The Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. The Commonwealth of PA (PARC)* (1972) and *Mills v. Board of Education (Mills) (1972).* Under *PARC v. PA*, Pennsylvania had to provide free public education for students with intellectual disabilities. The *Mills* decision affirmed that children with disabilities had a right to free public education and due process. These cases ensured that all students were educated in the general education classroom, including those students with disabilities. Cases such as *Diana v. State Board of Education of California (Diana)* (1970) and *Larry P. v. Riles (Larry P.)* (1972) ensured that assessment for special education was not discriminatory based on race or language.

In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was the first federal law to directly affect the education of students with disabilities (PL 89-750). It funded states to create and improve programs and services for students with disabilities. The Education for All Handicapped Children (1974) furthered efforts by increasing federal special education funding and charging states to create full educational opportunities for all students with disabilities. In 1975, the law was amended, and the Education of the Handicapped Act funded child find efforts and mandated that states follow the law to receive federal funding (Friend, 2018). The law was reauthorized in 1990 and became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Since then, additional supports have been provided to meet the needs of infants and young children,

post-secondary and vocational options, discipline, parent participation, and the role of general education teachers in the education of students with disabilities. The 2004 reauthorization added provisions to ensure that IDEA was more consistent with other public education laws (Friend, 2018).

The goal of inclusive education is not just social in nature. For the 80% of students served by special education without intellectual disabilities, the goal is academic achievement at a level like that of their general education peers while learning skills aligned with the general education curriculum. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) or No Child Left Behind (NCLB) outlined these expectations for all students receiving an education (Friend, 2018).

The tenets of No Child Left Behind, which made the most significant impact on education and teacher evaluation in the 21st century, include:

- Nearly all students should be proficient in reading and math, including those with disabilities.
- Students with disabilities are required by law to take the same standardized tests as their peers without disabilities. Students with significant disabilities can take an alternate assessment with alternate standards aligned to those that all students must meet.
- States, districts, and schools are accountable for the achievement of all students according to state standards measured by state assessments.

Rigor and accountability are found in the provisions of NCLB and in IDEA, which requires that special educators monitor student progress as often as other students receive progress reports. In addition, students should participate in all assessments with accommodations. Districts are also required to report progress on these standardized test scores for students with disabilities like they report scores for all students. Many states have also

adopted the Common Core Standards, raising rigor and accountability in instruction requiring students to cite evidence, analyze text, and expand their problem-solving abilities (Friend, 2018). The demand for inclusive practices, rigorous instruction, and accountability have significantly influenced teacher evaluation and its effect on student success.

Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA (2015) moved to allow states more freedom to alter their teacher evaluation policies. However, this move is at odds with many of today's evaluation systems (Close, Beardsley, & Collins, 2020). The Danielson and Marzano observational frameworks drive the post-ESSA evaluation measures found in most states today. These frameworks break the complex activity of teaching into scored subcomponents that are used for formative purposes (discussion and professional development). Laws like No Child Left Behind and the Race to the Top initiatives suggested that student growth measures include standardized assessments of student achievement, often reported as a value-added measure to demonstrate student success. The Every Student Succeeds Act ensures that student growth measures include more diverse measures such as student surveys, student learning objectives (SLOs), and teacher observation systems. According to Close et al. (2020), the definition of student growth should be more holistic and custom-made. However, teacher-level observations remain the dominant feature of current evaluation systems.

History of Teacher Evaluation

Districts evaluated teacher performance as far back as the 1940s and 1950s when effective educators were known for their voice, appearance, emotional stability, trustworthiness, warmth, and enthusiasm. These traits became known as the hallmarks of effective teaching during this time. During the 1960s and 1970s, teacher research prompted a dramatic shift in evaluation based on the need for teachers to enhance basic skill acquisition and improve

instruction in science and mathematics. At this time, "clinical supervision" also allowed

evaluators to more accurately document what was occurring in the classroom (Danielson &

McGreal, 2000).

Clinical supervision was first used in the late 1950s as a systematic approach to working

with student teachers. The process was like the one used as a supervisory practice in teaching

hospitals, where practitioners and residents drove each other to higher levels of growth and

effectiveness (Marzano, 2011). Goldhammer (1969) developed and focused on the five-phase

approach to clinical supervision, which included a) the pre-observation conference, b) classroom

observation, c) analysis, d) supervision conference, and e) analysis of the analysis in his book

Clinical Supervision: Special Methods for the Supervision of Teachers. Cogan (1973) further

developed the process citing that supervisors should be looking for "critical incidents" that occur

during instruction that may impede the learning process. In his book *Clinical Supervision*, Cogan

(1973) viewed the clinical supervision process as vital to the continued improvement of teaching.

Through this process, it was also first noted that a supervisor's own personal teaching model

might impede their ability to provide effective feedback to teachers (Marzano, 2011).

Principal-conducted classroom observations became the norm in the '80s. They often

included checklists that focused on classroom conditions and teacher behaviors that did not focus

directly on the quality of instruction (Burnett, Cushing, & Bivona, 2012). These traditional

evaluation systems did not effectively distinguish between superior, sound, and weak teachers

and provided teachers with little feedback about the quality of their instruction.

In the 1980s, Madeline Hunter developed a behaviorist view of teaching grounded in

basic learning theory. This model led to instructionally focused professional development, which

promoted a simple, summative evaluation. Hunter's seven-step lesson design (anticipatory set,

objective, instructional input, modeling, checking for understanding, guided practice, and

independent practice) and the subsequent evaluation criteria derived from it encouraged a single

view of teaching practice (Danielson & McGreal, 2010).

In the 80s and 90s, concerns over the United States economy and the complex skills

students would need to demonstrate success in the job market led to a change in the language of

"good teaching." The shift from behaviorist to cognitive learning theory led to the belief that

students construct their understanding during the educational process. Educators and researchers

began to locate more reliable and valid forms of student assessment resulting in a search for an

evaluation that demonstrated effective teaching practice and its effects on student achievement

(Danielson & McGreal, 2010; Marzano, 2011; and Tucker & Stronge, 2005).

Teacher effectiveness was born out of this era of teacher research, which led to studies

that sought to find the specific teacher behaviors linked to student achievement. This early

research became the basis of the fundamental teaching skills that are now part of the current

framework for teaching (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Currently, school systems have moved to

observation frameworks with detailed descriptions with distinct levels of teaching practice and

professionalism (Burnett, Cushing, & Bovina, 2012).

Teacher Evaluation

Teacher evaluation systems have moved towards a multi-method approach that includes

student outcomes and classroom observations as primary measurement forms (Johnson &

Semmelroth, 2014; McGuinn, 2012). Defining a teacher's effectiveness through student

outcomes allows districts to do two things. They can identify those teachers to retain and reward

while at the same time identifying those that are not effective to dismiss or retrain them.

Regardless of which evaluation model is used, most include the opportunity for teachers to assist

in developing and implementing a professional growth or development plan. These plans should

promote professionalism, continuing education and build teacher expertise. They are based on

the four domains found in most models: a) classroom strategies and behaviors; b) planning and

preparing; c) reflecting on teaching; and d) collegiality and professionalism (Marzano, 2011).

Educational leaders at the federal, state, district, and school levels are counting on these

evaluation systems to improve the overall quality of teachers in their districts. One key

component in teacher improvement is using reflection and goal setting to increase student

achievement levels (Lewis & Young, 2013; Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014; Little, Goe, & Bell,

2009; National Council on Teacher Quality, 2012; Sledge & Pazey, 2013; Marzano, 2011).

Danielson Framework

In Pennsylvania, the supervision of classroom teachers consists of two models: **Formal

Observation** and **Differentiated Supervision** (PDE, 2020). **Formal Observation** includes a

pre-observation conference where the teacher and supervisor discuss the shared lesson plan

taught during the live teaching demonstration. After the observation, the teacher should complete

a self-assessment rubric before the post-observation conference between the teacher and

supervisor. The **Differentiated Supervision** model recognizes that teachers understand the level

of experience, effectiveness, and professionalism of the evaluation process and provide them

with the opportunity to develop an action plan for professional development that meets their

unique needs. Whether teachers in Pennsylvania participate in Formal Observation or

Differentiated Supervision, an overall performance rating is required to demonstrate annual

teacher effectiveness (PDE, 2020).

As of July 1, 2021, Pennsylvania teachers must design student performance measures

(formerly known as student learning objectives) as a component of their annual evaluation under

Act 13, which revised the Educator Effectiveness system established in Pennsylvania. Teachers,

schools, or districts create student performance measures to measure individual students or a

whole class. Pennsylvania allows special education teachers to use IEP progress toward goals to

measure annual student growth. Student learning objectives may provide a more proximal

measure of teacher impact. However, there is little empirical evidence that SLOs are a reliable

measure of teacher effectiveness (Buckley & Marion, 2011). Act 13 increased the emphasis on

observation and practice as part of the comprehensive evaluation and expanded the flexibility for

measuring student performance (former SLOs).

The Pennsylvania Department of Education recognizes Charlotte Danielson's *Framework

for Teaching* as the model for supervising classroom teachers. The Charlotte Danielson

Framework for Teaching (FFT) consists of 22 components within the four domains of instruction

that measure teacher effectiveness according to the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support

Consortium (INTASC) standards (Evans et al., 2015). Each domain includes a unifying thread to

engage students in learning meaningful content. Danielson's (2007) four domains refer to a

distinct area of teaching and, to a certain extent, can be an independent area of focus.

The Danielson *Framework for Teaching* (2011) is broken into the following four

domains:

- Domain 1-Planning and preparation, which includes selecting standards-based lesson goals and designing effective instruction and assessment;

- Domain 2-Classroom environment, including establishing a culture for learning and appropriate classroom management techniques that maximize instructional time;

- Domain 3-Instruction, including the use of research-based strategies which engage students in meaningful learning and utilize assessment results to make decisions about student needs; and

- Domain 4-Professional responsibilities, including using systems for managing student data and communicating with student families.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education worked with professionals across the Commonwealth to address professional employees with unique roles and functions, including special education teachers. These professionals generated general and specific examples of what teaching may look like for these individuals in each domain of the Danielson Framework. In addition, these examples are referenced as an optional and potentially beneficial tool during the evaluation process. They are not mandated as part of the validated Danielson Framework for evaluating instructionally certified personnel in Pennsylvania (PDE, 2020).

Some researchers have compared the rubric items in Danielson's Framework for Teaching (FFT) with the research-validated instructional strategies used by special education teachers. The instruments designed for general educators fail to account for the specialized techniques such as direct instruction, modeling, task analysis, or the use of picture exchange communication systems (PECS) used by special education teachers in their classrooms (Lawson & Cruz, 2017; Jones & Brownell, 2013). The observation tool used for special education teachers is as equally important as the individual responsible for providing the rating. There has been little research on school administrators and their reliability as raters of the instructional practice of special education teachers. However, there are limited studies where researchers look at the potential limitations administrators may have when recognizing and understanding the type of instruction that should be seen in a special education classroom (Lawson & Cruz, 2018). Many school administrators report a lack of understanding of how to evaluate special education service delivery (Brotherson, Sheriff, Millburn, & Schertz, 2001; Murphy, Hallinger, & Heck, 2013); a lack of special education practices (Bays & Crockett, 2007); and a lack of understanding

of the varied roles and the evidence-based practices utilized in the field of special education (Ax, Conderman, & Stephens, 2001; Blanton, Sindelar, & Correa, 2006).

The lack of training, coupled with the lack of knowledge of special education, often prompts school administrators to modify the observational instruments used to evaluate special education instruction (Lawson & Knollman, 2017). Most school administrators gain knowledge of special education through their professional development or personal experiences. Their lack of background knowledge and inexperience may result in the inability to effectively monitor and provide feedback about the effectiveness of a special education teacher (Steinbrecher, 2015).

Roles of Special Education Teachers

Special education teachers find themselves fulfilling multiple roles throughout the school year. These roles and responsibilities and the varying needs of the students they teach present numerous challenges to evaluating their effectiveness. According to the IRIS Center (2013), a special education teacher's job may be fragmented as they balance their role between teaching and clerical tasks. Demands such as lesson planning, instruction, IEP meetings, writing reports, testing, paperwork, and scheduling can lead to role overload and an inability to demonstrate effective practices in the classroom (The IRIS Center, 2013). Vannest and Hagen-Burke (2010) estimate that special education teachers spend only 16% of their time on instruction, with the remainder of their time on clerical responsibilities such as adherence to paperwork timelines outlined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004).

Eisenman, Pleet, Wandry, and McGinley (2011) argue that the primary challenge for today's special education teachers is to maintain their primary focus, which is the education of students with disabilities. Depending on state licensure regulations and school districts, special

education teachers may teach students with only one type of disability (students with autism) or

multiple disabilities in a support setting (i.e., learning support). Instruction may be remedial,

developmental, or strategic, depending upon the needs of the students they serve. During the

school day, they may also be responsible for preparing and adapting materials, assessing, and

reporting progress, supporting behavioral and academic needs, and managing their overall

educational program (Friend, 2018).

Administrators may ask special education teachers to co-teach classes (Friend,

2018); supervise paraeducators working in self-contained or inclusion settings (Causton &

Tracy-Bronson, 2015); and collaborate with parents (Cook, Shepherd, Cook, & Cook, 2012). In

most school districts, administrators rely on special education teachers for the same duties as

their general education counterparts, such as bus duty, hall monitoring, or cafeteria duty. Among

all these requirements, they are also held responsible for meeting the same accountability

standards as all other teachers in their district or state. Special education students must work

towards state academic standards, while states and districts evaluate teachers on the extent to

which they meet them (Friend, 2018).

Purpose of Study

This study aimed to understand the perceptions of special education teachers and

administrators employed in school districts and private special education schools located in

Western Pennsylvania regarding their evaluations and the inherent challenges of effectively

teaching students with disabilities. This study examined various observation and evaluation

techniques used in several school districts across Western Pennsylvania to ascertain whether the

methods used to evaluate special education teachers improve their teaching effectiveness.

Research Questions:

- How do special education teachers benefit from using the PDE Danielson Framework and Differentiated Supervision models to evaluate their teaching practice?

- What do special education teachers in Western Pennsylvania perceive as an effective practice in evaluating teaching effectiveness?

- How do administrators perceive the benefit of using the PDE Danielson Framework and Differentiated Supervision models as an effective practice in evaluating special education teacher effectiveness?

Definition of Key Terms

Action research model: a research model that seeks to engage the researcher in an action-oriented, systemic approach to determine an effective solution to a problem they encounter within their professional or personal setting (Stringer & Aragon, 2020).

Differentiated supervision: a framework for professional growth designed by professional employees to improve their teacher effectiveness, instructional practices, and student achievement (PDE, 2013)

Formal observation: consists of formal and informal observations during the school year. These observations are measured by research-supported best practices: Danielson's Framework for Teaching.

Danielson Framework for Teaching (FFT): a common language for instructional practice grounded in the research Evaluation system developed for teacher evaluation, which includes the

following characteristics: rigor, validity, reliability, and defensibility. It is also rooted in a research-based definition of good teaching (Danielson & McGreal, 2000).

Effective teacher: one who makes a positive impact on student achievement and influences the quality of the learning environment (Sledge & Pazey, 2013)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is an opportunity for the federal government, states, districts, and schools to design an education system that ensures those that have been historically underserved in education (students with disabilities, students of color. low-income students, English learners, homeless students, or those in foster care) receive an education that prepares them for the 21st century. There are four main provisions: (1) access to learning higher-order thinking skills, (2) multiple measures for accountability, (3) requires states to address resource inequities for schools, (4) the emphasis on the use of evidence-based interventions for school improvement (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): A law that ensures a free appropriate public education for eligible children with disabilities throughout the United States. It governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities (IDEA, 2004).

Individualized Education Plan (IEP): A written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting. It must include a child's present academic and

functional performance levels, measurable annual goals, reports of progress on identified goals,

and a statement of related services and supplementary aids. In addition, the extent to which the

child will not participate with nondisabled children, individual accommodations, the projected

dates and duration of services, and any transition services beginning no later than 16 or younger

if determined by the IEP team (IDEA, 2004).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) was designed on

several premises: (1) clear targets for academic outcomes, (2) the identification of low-

performing schools, (3) student performance will enable stakeholders to make informed

decisions, and (4) targeted assistance to stimulate school improvement (Floch et al., 2007).

Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE): The Pennsylvania Department of Education is

responsible for overseeing the education of students attending all public schools (cyber, charter,

Career and Vocational, Intermediate Units, State Juvenile Correctional Institutions, Head Starts,

publicly funded preschools, and Community Colleges) in the state of Pennsylvania. The mission

of PDE is to ensure that all learners have access to a world-class education that prepares them to

be productive citizens (PDE, 2021).

Special educators: teachers whose primary focus is the education of students with disabilities.

Student Learning Objectives (SLO): a thorough analysis of a student's present level of

performance. This analysis is used to determine rigorous goals aligned with the state standards

and is one component of teacher evaluation (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014).

Teacher Evaluation: A complex system that should contain standards for acceptable

performance, techniques, and procedures for assessing teaching, and trained evaluators who

consistently judge performance (Danielson & McGreal, 2000).

Value-added measure: An estimated contribution to student test scores made by educators.

Districts use these test scores to diagnose student needs. These measures allow districts to

evaluate how well teachers and schools address them (Harris, 2011).

Assumptions

It is assumed that all participants are current classroom teachers and

administrators in southwestern Pennsylvania. It is believed that all participants will respond to

the questionnaire and follow-up interviews based on their experience working as special

education teachers or administrators in public schools in southwestern Pennsylvania. Because the

Teacher Evaluation Profile (Teacher and Administrator versions) has been used in the past, it is

assumed that the study results will be valid. The interview questions are also believed to be clear

and concise, so all participants understand what is being asked.

Limitations

The findings of this study will be limited to perceptions of a regional group of

special educators and administrators from southwest Pennsylvania and may not be indicative of

special educators across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania or nationally.

Limitations of this study are participants' responses with a survey instrument

(TEP) and open-ended interview questions. The study participants only include special education

teachers and administrators in southwest Pennsylvania. Additional limitations include the small

number of research studies on teacher evaluation from the perspective of a special education

teacher. Teacher responses as they reference the Danielson Framework for Teaching may be biased due to the framework's structure (general education teacher observation). Due to the small number of participants, this study may not necessarily be generalized to other areas outside of the school districts within the study.

This study was conducted during the COVID pandemic, which could affect participants' opinions due to the additional stress of online learning, other responsibilities, and personal impacts. The Pennsylvania Department of Education eliminated all testing and SLOs as part of the teacher evaluation process for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years.

Summary

The literature suggests that many teacher evaluation systems are ineffective due to the complex nature of special educators' responsibilities (Jones, 2016). Evaluation models and performance criteria often do not fully consider the varying roles of special educators. In addition, evaluators may not have extensive training or a background in special education (Glowacki & Hackmann, 2016). This study aims to examine teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the effectiveness of evaluating special education teachers using the models **Formal Observation** - Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and **Differentiated Supervision** and its effects on their teaching practice.

This study is organized into five chapters, references, and appendices. Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature and will expand on teacher evaluation and the frameworks used to evaluate teachers in Western Pennsylvania, the roles of special education teachers, and the perceptions of teachers and administrators of the current teacher evaluation model. Chapter 3 provides the data collection methods and design of the study. Chapter 4 will discuss the findings from the data analysis and include descriptive summaries of the identified themes of the data

collected. The final chapter will summarize the results, a discussion, and implications for future research.

Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature

Overview

This chapter will frame the current research on the characteristics of effective teaching, specifically the evaluation of special education teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching (FFT), value-added measures, differentiated supervision methods, the challenges that each present, as well as the teacher's current perception of the evaluation process. In addition, this chapter will provide the background associated with the successful evaluation of special education teachers within public schools. The literature refers to all models describing the current special education teacher evaluation methods.

These resources were located primarily through Slippery Rock University searches using *keywords: special education teacher evaluation, value-added measures, Framework for Teaching, challenges in special education evaluation, and differentiated supervision*.

This chapter will first establish the need for effective measures for evaluating special education teachers related to the varying needs of students with disabilities in public school special education programs. Second, research conducted on teacher effectiveness will be presented. Third, research on specific observation protocols, including the Danielson Framework (FFT), will be analyzed. Next, research on value-added measures and differentiated supervision within the context of effective teacher evaluation will be considered. Finally, the challenges in evaluating special education teachers and current perceptions of the process may lead to developing a better model to address the variety of disabilities, roles, and responsibilities special educators experience in public school special education. There has been limited research conducted on the evaluation of special education teachers. Due to this, conceptual articles, research, and policy briefs are included for added depth in the literature review.

Teacher Evaluation

Before 2011, teacher evaluations were mostly made up of subjective data, primarily based on principal observation. In addition, most states maintained an evaluation system with two possible ratings ("satisfactory" and "unsatisfactory"). This rating scale prevented schools from differentiating between adequate and exceptional teacher performance (Ross & Walsh, 2019). Today almost every state has adopted a newly designed teacher evaluation system. Many of these systems include an increase in the number of possible ratings teachers can earn, supplemental measures, and an increase in the number and impact of the evaluation itself (Kraft & Gilmore, 2017; Ross & Walsh, 2019). By 2015, 44 states had implemented reformed teacher evaluation models, with 43 requiring an objective measure of student growth (Jacobs et al., 2009, 2015). Pennsylvania remains one of the many states that maintain current evaluation requirements. These requirements include annual evaluations, student growth data based on the state standardized test, more than two rating categories, yearly evaluations, survey data, and support for struggling teachers via an improvement plan (Ross & Walsh, 2019). Teacher-approved practice models for supervision of teacher evaluation in the state of Pennsylvania include formal observation using the Danielson Framework for Teaching (FFT) and differentiated supervision (PDE, 2020).

Recent initiatives such as Race to the Top grants, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waivers, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 2004) have changed teachers' roles in the classroom. IDEA (2004) mandates that all students with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment. This means their education no longer falls just in the special education classroom. Special education services may be provided in various locations and by multiple personnel. Race to the Top required states to restructure

their teacher evaluation process and ensure that student growth was a significant factor. Historically, the teacher evaluation process has been designed for general education teachers and did not include the expanded role of the special education teacher (Glowacki & Hackman, 2016).

The most influential school-based factor in student success and the one to affect student learning directly is the classroom teacher. According to Marzano (2003), students with highly effective teachers demonstrated yearly gains of 53 percentage points. Those with average teachers gained 34 percentage points, and those identified with ineffective teachers only gained 14 percentage points. Over three years, the students with the least effective teachers gained only 14 percent percentage points, while those with the most effective teachers gained 83 percentage points. Traditional teacher performance evaluations have failed to distinguish a significant difference between high and low-performing teachers. Marzano (2011) recommends a comprehensive evaluation to determine teacher effectiveness, including standards, scoring rubrics, and multiple classroom observations. Regardless of how well these evaluations predict student achievement or determine who should stay or go, evaluations that include student work and teacher reflection have the most value on teacher effectiveness. However, special education teachers are responsible for large, diverse student caseloads, managing multiple individualized education plans, working with various colleagues, and working in numerous school and classroom settings. Even with Marzano's recommendation for a comprehensive evaluation, districts and administrators measure the performance of special education teachers against tools developed and used in the general education setting (Woolf, 2015).

Recent research supports Marzano's earlier work, even with changes to teacher evaluation systems that include multiple observations, value-added measures, and standardized rubrics. The percentage of teachers rated as unsatisfactory has stayed the same in most states with new

teacher evaluation systems. Fewer than 1% of teachers studied by the New Teacher Project in 2009 were rated unsatisfactory through their school's evaluation process (TNTP, 2015), while significantly more teachers were rated below proficient in the past.

In *The Widget Effect*, differences in teacher quality were noted in great clarity by Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, and Keeling (2009). Their research of 15,000 teachers in 12 districts found that poor performers are ignored, and effective teachers go unrecognized by educational leaders. This phenomenon is known as the *Widget Effect* and is derived from the idea that school administrators consistently rate teacher performance at the same level. Within the study, districts that used a binary "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory" rating rated more than 99 percent of their teachers as satisfactory. Even districts that used a broader range of rating options rated 94 percent within one of the top two categories and less than 1 percent unsatisfactory. Administrators see teachers as "widgets" who can be easily interchanged, much like the mechanical parts within a particular system. Weisberg et al. (2009) found that school leaders paid little attention to the variations in teacher performance, failing to recognize and support teachers' individual differences. Administrators also failed to provide specific, frequent, and rigorous feedback resulting in a lack of coaching and support needed for professional growth.

Kraft and Gilmore (2017) chose to revisit The Widget Effect to determine the degree to which new evaluation systems differentiate among teachers. Since the "Widget Effect" was first recognized, the US Department of Education's Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative and the No Child Left Behind Act prompted states to adopt sweeping changes to their evaluation systems. By the 2014-2015 school year, 38 states had piloted or fully implemented a new teacher evaluation system. In their case study, Kraft and Gilmore (2017) compiled data from a large urban district in the Northeast with a student body of primarily Hispanic and African American

students, with over 70% of those eligible for free and reduced lunch. Their study consisted of

evaluator surveys and interviews. Principals were asked to rate the percentage of teachers in their

school in each of the four reporting categories and predict the percentage that would receive an

overall summative evaluation rating at each level. They found that the percentage of teachers

rated as unsatisfactory had not changed in most of those states that had adopted a new evaluation

system. There was variation across the states in the number of teachers rated in the categories

just below and above proficient. Their findings also showed those teacher evaluation systems

often only differentiate at the top of the rating scale. More categories do not always equal more

significant differentiation at the lower end of the scale.

In 2010, Lipsky identified "limitations of the workforce," which still come into play

today as evaluators struggle to navigate the evaluation policies at the "street level." These

difficulties explain why few teachers receive below-proficient ratings and why ratings do not

always reflect evaluators' perceptions. Time constraints, teacher motivation, and potential;

personal discomfort; and the challenges of removing and replacing teachers continue to

challenge evaluators in the field of education. Kraft and Gilmore (2017) found that their study

correlates with the findings of TNTP in 2009 in that only a fraction of teachers were rated as

unsatisfactory but significantly more rated below proficient than in the past.

Importance of Special Education Teacher Evaluation

Through an analysis of value-added research, Pianta and Hamre (2009) found that a

teacher's skill and learning affect the learning environment and student outcomes. Their findings

support the need for a comprehensive, accurate set of characteristics that define an effective

teacher's qualities and those linked to positive student outcomes.

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) believes that all special education teachers should be evaluated using high-quality, systematic, rigorous evaluations collaboratively developed with special education teachers (CEC, 2012). To effectively evaluate special education teachers, evaluation tools should be designed based on a solid understanding of the diverse roles, evidence-based interventions, reliable indicators of student growth, and the promotion of special education as a profession. To evaluate special education teachers accurately, the evaluation must align with the role of the special education teacher, its relation to individual students, and the duties associated with that role (CEC, 2012). In 2012, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) adopted standards set forth by the Council of Exceptional Children (CEC) to create a framework for initial preparation standards for special education teachers. The areas included learning environment, curricular content and knowledge, assessment, instructional planning and strategies, professional learning and ethical practice, collaboration, learner development, and individual learning differences (Steinbrecher et al., 2015).

Only 30% of special education students can meet performance standards (Odom, 2009). This number is not surprising, with only 20% of a special education teacher's time spent on instruction (Vannest & Hagan-Burke, 2009). Students with disabilities are taught by a teaching force that is highly subject to high attrition and turnover (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014). This turnover impacts the educational services received by students with disabilities who are already at risk of receiving substandard services. To improve the educational outcomes of these individuals, their teachers must adjust their instructional practice (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014). A systems-level change is needed to improve the practice of special education teachers. These changes need to be found in teacher preparation practice, improved working conditions, and an

evaluation system that focuses on performance improvement through the measurement of instructional practice (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2012).

Special education teachers are responsible for similar yet distinctly different tasks than their regular education counterparts. Special education teachers are asked to (1) develop and oversee the implementation of students' individualized education plans (IEP); (2) collaborate between general education teachers and other special education service providers; (3) demonstrate knowledge of special education laws and policies; (4) guide and supervise paraprofessionals; and (5) engage in regular and ongoing communication with parents. There is also a significant variation in the preparation program for teachers of students with disabilities and those prepared to teach in the general education classroom. Pre-service teachers of students with disabilities must know the critical concepts of their discipline, the distinct characteristics of various disability categories, and how a disability may manifest itself in multiple situations. (Sledge & Pazey, 2013).

Special education teachers must also have knowledge and skills related to the following: (a) personal care; (b) sensitivity to the challenges faced by those with disabilities; (c) the management of challenging behaviors; (d) individualized instruction; and (e) the understanding of appropriate social skills. Special education teachers must also be prepared to utilize a differentiated model of instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities in their classrooms. A special education teacher may take on various roles, such as co-teacher, case manager, or classroom teacher during the school day. In many cases, special education teachers share the responsibility of providing instruction and coordinating services for students with disabilities with their general education counterparts.

Steinbrecher et al. (2015) designed a qualitative study of public or charter elementary school administrators and their understanding of an effective special educator. Multiple themes were found beneficial when looking at successful special education teachers. These include policy and procedures, collaboration, classroom management, individual learning differences, curricular content knowledge, instructional planning and strategies, and assessment. Administrators noted within the study that new special educators require "professional curiosity" and an ongoing commitment to the field of special education due to the ever-changing demands of special education students.

However, administrators within the study had conflicting opinions on how to meet the needs of students with disabilities best. Administrators referenced best practices, but only one participant could expand on what those methods may look like in the classroom. Within this study, administrators expressed concern that special education teachers receive the professional development required to implement district-approved curricula. Administrators also noted within the study that teacher disposition is a prerequisite for an effective special education teacher. This is not an area that has been addressed by the CEC standards or any evaluation framework (Steinbrecher et al., 2015).

Models of Evaluation

Supervisory leadership for the 21st century requires enhanced collaboration, reflective listening and practice, teacher self-direction, and collaborative relationships. There is a need for alternative approaches to implementing procedures and improving instruction to be a viable goal.

These options can include clinical and developmental supervision, non-evaluative mentoring, and peer coaching. There is a need to create innovative ways to effectively support classroom teachers and implement alternative supervision approaches. Some districts use peer

supervision, action research, and student performance measures in conjunction with teacher

observation to evaluate effective teaching practice.

Differentiated supervision: peer supervision

Teachers are often reluctant to share in the supervision process due to the lack of

philosophical grounding for supervision and evaluation of administration (Retting, 1999).

Providing substantive feedback to new and veteran teachers can be daunting for new

administrators. Administrators must supervise teachers with no teaching experience in certain

grade levels nor experience in specialty areas such as physical education, special education,

English as a second language, and guidance. The continually expanding body of knowledge also

compounds this lack of expertise. Evaluative judgments are based on "snapshot" observations

two to three times during the school year. Principals also use one form for both summative and

formative feedback. This form requires administrators to provide feedback on multiple areas and

often provides little substantive input on the teaching process (Rettig, 1999).

Peer supervision provides teachers with routine opportunities to meet with peers in a non-

threatening manner. It also allows teachers to reflect on and improve their teaching practice

while implementing specific skills needed to increase knowledge through faculty or curriculum

development (Sullivan & Glanz, 2000). The use of peer supervision as a model for evaluating

teachers offers a way to empower teachers to take control of their professional growth. It

provides a process for teachers to recognize the value of their ideas and concerns, which become

the focus of dialogue, personal development, and instructional improvement. Peer supervision

encourages risk-taking due to its non-evaluative, non-judgmental nature (Heller, 1989).

According to Rettig (2019), differentiated supervision allows teachers to decide their

professional development. It also allowed them to assume personal accountability while focusing

on their development as educators. Study participants also stated that the differentiated

supervision model improved instruction and student learning. Teachers participating in the

clinical supervision model indicated that it helped them analyze their teaching strengths and

weaknesses. For self-directed practices to be more substantive, teachers must be given the time

to meet and observe one another. They also must be assured that their role is not supervisory or

evaluative but simply to improve each other's teaching ability.

Differentiated Supervision: Action Research

Action research is the "inquiry teachers take to understand and improve their practices"

(McCutcheon & Jung, 2001, p.144). Action research provides educators with an authentic and

job-embedded approach to improving their professional practice. Educators can critically and

systematically examine their training to understand how their instruction influences student

learning (Morewood, Ankrum, & Taylor, 2012). The practice of action research allows teachers

to actively participate in the evaluation process while developing a structured ongoing reflection

of a practice-related issue (PDE, 2020).

Action research in teacher evaluation allows teachers to develop professional knowledge

while comparing new situations with those they have experienced in the past. They can then act

based on what they have learned (Bulterman-Bos, 2017). Cook and Brown (1999) even went so

far as to say that doing is an epistemic activity. One acquires ways of knowing that cannot be

accepted unless engaged in practical exercises. To become an expert teacher, one must be

involved in reflective action. The construction of knowledge separate from action is less likely to

contribute to the knowledge-building required for effective classroom teachers (Bulterman-Bos,

2017).

Action research consists of four basic steps that drive an ongoing process of reflection: a) selecting a focus, b) collecting data, c) analyzing and interpreting data, and d) taking action. When appropriately used, action research can create a systemwide mindset for school and classroom improvement while promoting reflection and self-improvement (Sullivan & Glanz, 2000).

Sullivan and Glanz (2000) used a modified form of grounded theory to analyze a case study of five approaches to teacher supervision. One case study focused on using action research as a supervisory model. The classroom teacher used this primarily self-directed model to determine whether cooperative learning activities are effective instructional practices in the classroom. Collaborative learning and problem-solving were assigned to separate classes. She determined that the students were more successful using the cooperative learning method through anecdotal records and attitude questionnaires. As part of the action research, she shared her results with her peers and developed a plan to continue assessing this model.

In a study of four classroom teachers and a media specialist, Morewood et al. (2012) found that educators did change their literacy instruction based on their involvement in a job-embedded action research project. This study suggests that educators transfer knowledge from professional learning to classroom instruction. This awareness allows educators to be responsive to their students' needs. The action research process guided their instruction over time to be more purposeful.

Student performance measures (value-added)

Accountability for academic success has placed pressure on school leaders and educators to meet the expected outcomes for student success. Students with disabilities face multiple challenges to achieving academic success. Compared to their general education peers, students

with disabilities lag significantly behind on graduation rates, standardized test scores, employment, and enrollment in post-secondary programs. These gaps persist regardless of implementing more inclusive practices in today's schools. The 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports a difference of 35 points in the average reading scores of students in fourth grade and 36 points for those in eighth grade. The achievement gap in math was significantly higher, with a difference of 21 points in fourth grade, increasing to 58 points in eighth grade (NCES, 2009). According to Sledge and Pazey (2013), research confirms that effective teachers positively affect student achievement gains and influence the quality of the learning environment. These findings support the need to create an accurate and comprehensive set of characteristics that define an effective teacher.

The availability of nationwide databases of standardized test results has opened the door to the increased use of value-added measures in teacher evaluation. These measures are calculated using prior student performance to predict student outcomes. The value-added measure is calculated by comparing the actual student outcome to the predicted outcome (Sledge et al., 2013). The financial incentives offered through programs like Race to the Top (RTT) (US DOE, 2009) and *A Blueprint for Reform* (US DOE, 2010) provided grant funding that incentivized districts to identify "top-performing teachers" based significantly on student growth.

A review of states' progress toward implementing new teacher evaluation systems by NCTQ suggested that student achievement should be the most significant factor in teacher evaluation. Their 2012 report on teacher evaluation recommended that all states adopt teacher evaluation systems. Evidence of student gains is essential in determining a teacher's annual performance rating.

Defining a special education teacher's effectiveness in a value-added model is difficult due to the multiple roles, responsibilities, and locations where services are provided. Value-added scores can only be calculated for students in grades 3-8 who take the general assessment in math, reading, and science. Of the 79% of students with disabilities who participate in the general assessments, their scores are low due to the number of items designed to measure proficiency at grade level versus instructional level. This results in less reliable scores and less information about a student's actual level of achievement. Special education teachers often teach smaller groups of students eliminating those who teach students with severe disabilities (Brownell & Jones, 2015).

Research conducted by Buzick and Jones (2015) found that students with disabilities who received accommodations one year and did not receive them the previous year grew more than expected. At the same time, students who received accommodations on the math assessment the prior year and not the subsequent year had much lower levels of growth. Another challenge to defining effectiveness with VAM is the growth attributed to individual teachers. For students with high-incidence disabilities, special education occurs in multiple locations within the school building. They may receive instruction for a core subject from a regular education teacher and intervention from a special education teacher. The value-added score reflects the instructional quality of both teachers based on the amount of time spent in each location (Brownell & Jones, 2015).

Teacher Observation

Direct observation is the primary means of information for administrators regarding instructional practice in the classroom (Grissom, Loeb, & Amster, 2014), the primary source used in most teacher evaluations (Holdheide, Goe, Croft, & Reschly, 2010), and the primary

source of hiring and retention decisions for local school districts (Goldring et al., 2015). Most

observation systems include an instrument that identifies an effective classroom teacher (e.g.,

student engagement, communication, and professional development). Observers often include

trained administrators who assign teachers a score on each part of the framework. These scores

are combined to form a summary score to reflect a teacher's classroom practice (Bell et al.,

2012). These scores also allow an observer to give feedback and the teacher to improve their

performance in each area. Clear and specific feedback to teachers from their administrators has

led to substantial gains in student achievement (Allen, Piante, Gregory, Mikami, & Lun, 2011;

Kane & Steiger, 2012; and Taylor & Taylor, 2011).

In 2010, Holdheide surveyed local districts and found that 94% utilized teacher

observations as part of the evaluation process. They noted within the surveys that the protocols

were often unreliable predictors of teacher quality due to variability in the interpretation of the

instrument, alignment to best practices, and the fidelity of instrument implementation. Of the

respondents, 85% reported utilizing the same observation protocol for all teachers. More than

half (56%) reported that they modified the protocol to reflect the unique role and skill of the

special education teacher. Only 12% of the respondents reported access to a different protocol

for special education teachers. The written protocol was only used in those cases where teachers

were instructing students with low-incidence disabilities. This study suggests that many believe

the standard observation protocols do not accurately represent the roles and functions of a special

education teacher. However, when these protocols are modified, the standards can be applied

subjectively.

Rodl Et al. (2018) surveyed 929 California school administrators to determine the

training administrators received during their preparation programs and subsequent years of

employment to evaluate special education teachers. Participants report a greater confidence level

when evaluating general education teachers versus the evaluation of special education teachers.

However, as administrators with no special education background gain years of experience, their

confidence increases. The study participants with backgrounds in special education noted no

significant change in their confidence level, no matter the years of experience.

Danielson Framework

Many states that use an observation framework for teacher evaluation utilize the

Danielson Framework for Teaching (FFT), which is intended to be used across all areas of

instruction (Jones et al., 2013). The FFT designed by Danielson (2007) includes four domains:

(a) planning and preparation, (b) classroom environment, (c) instruction, and (d) professional

responsibilities. The domains are further broken down into 22 components and 76 elements

(Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014). The use of the FFT to evaluate special education teachers is an

ineffective tool, specifically around instruction, due to its constructivist view of learning and

teaching. Students with disabilities benefit most from instruction that is highly structured and

supported. Instruction that is intensive, explicit, systematic, and individualized provides students

with disabilities the opportunities to develop fluency and automaticity that allow them to

ultimately engage, transfer, and generalize more complex skills (Morris-Matthews et al., 2021).

Research suggests that for observations to identify effective teachers, measures must use

standardized observation protocols that minimize measurement error and permit valid inferences

(Meyer, Cash, & Mashburn, 2011).

Effective teacher evaluation systems for special educators should include: (a) a common

framework that defines effective teaching and includes a differentiated framework; (b) utilizes

standardized assessment data and other evidence of student outcomes; (c) align the evaluation

framework to professional development opportunities to improve practice; (d) include evidence-based practices in instruction. (Holdheide et al., 2010).

Suggestions for improving special education evaluations include modifying the current observation protocols with clear expectations and performance criteria. Specific training should be provided to assessors who guide school leaders in the expertise required to evaluate and assess teacher effectiveness and feedback to teachers of students with disabilities. Peer evaluations include master teachers working with school leaders to evaluate less experienced teachers and design relevant professional development to improve teaching practice is another way to improve teacher evaluation (Sledge & Pazey, 2013).

According to Jones and Brownell (2014), there has been limited research on using the FFT (Danielson, 2011) to evaluate special education teachers. The framework uses a broad, constructivist approach to teacher evaluation and leaves much interpretation to the administrator's perspective and philosophy. In their comparison of rubric items within the Framework for Teaching (FFT) Evaluation Instrument (Danielson, 2011), they found that the instrument may not be an appropriate match for the teaching skills required of a special educator. General educators emphasize a more student-centered, constructivist view of learning where effective instruction for students with disabilities often includes explicit, direct instruction. Many observation instruments assume that teachers are engaging primarily in whole-group instruction. Special educators often teach small groups of students. Observation instruments often fail to account for the specialized strategies used in the special education classroom.

Ho and Kane (2103) investigated the reliability of school administrators in scoring classroom instruction using the FFT in the Measures of Effective Teaching Project (MET). Their study found that administrators often scored their teachers higher than administrators unfamiliar

with the classroom teacher. They also found that reliability was higher for administrators rather than peers who were involved in the evaluation of a teacher's performance.

Wakeman et al. (2006) designed a study to determine the need for professional development for secondary principals responsible for evaluating special education teachers. However, research has found that principals receive little to no formal pre-service or in-service training in special education. Many states do not require coursework in special education to meet the requirements for principal licensure. During the study, they found that their participants had a fundamental knowledge of special education. However, most had a limited understanding of the current issues in special education (self-determination, functional behavior assessment, and universal design). Many shared a need for professional development in teaching students with disabilities. Principals who reported knowing more about special education had personal or professional experience in the field. Those who reported learning more about special education were more involved in their special education programs. They also believed that students with disabilities should have access to the general education environment and understand how to provide that through universal design for learning.

RESET (Recognizing Effective Special Education Teachers)

RESET, or Recognizing Effective Special Education Teachers, is an evaluation system developed by the Idaho State Department of Education and Boise State University. It is grounded in the Danielson Framework to determine how graduates could effectively implement evidence-based practices in the classroom. Johnson (2015) built on prior research that effective special education teachers should identify student needs, implement evidence-based instructional practices and interventions, and demonstrate student growth (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2013).

The RESET evaluation system focuses on the idea that an effective evaluation system must address high-quality instructional techniques in various teaching contexts and connect these to improve student performance and outcomes. The quality of instruction provided by special education teachers is critical in determining student growth. The focus on evidence-based practices allows the evaluation instrument to be adaptable and applicable to a wide range of scenarios in special education. RESET includes developing and aligning 25 rubrics, including the key elements of various evidence-based practices identified in the literature to promote and reward strong instructional practice (Johnson, 2015).

Lawson and Cruz (2017) examined both rubric items and raters in the context of special education teacher evaluation using the RESET evaluation tool. Participants were asked to score special education teachers' classroom instruction with rubric items that reflect evidence-based practices. The purpose of the study was to investigate the limitations that school administrators may face in understanding and recognizing the type of instructional practices that should be seen in a special education classroom. The participants included 19 special education teachers recruited using a convenience sampling method to ensure the trust and rapport necessary to video-record lessons. The administrators recruited for the survey had no prior experience in special education.

In this study, Lawson and Cruz (2017) found that peers were more reliable than administrators, suggesting that knowledge of special education may be necessary for effective special education evaluation. In a later study on the RESET tool, Lawson and Knollman (2017) found that the rubric was often too specific, leading evaluators to express a desire for the freedom to expand beyond rubric items when they observed special education teachers in various settings. Continued research on the RESET by Johnson, Zheng, Crawford, and Moylan (2019)

looked at Explicit Instruction (EI), which is one of the 21 evidence-based practices (EBPs) included in the RESET observation tool. They found that teacher performance on the abbreviated EI observation protocol resulted in variance between the beginning of the year performance and subsequent student growth.

Challenges in the Evaluation of Special Education Teachers

The debate over how special education teachers should be evaluated continues to plague school administrators, teacher preparation programs, and educational leaders. This debate is fueled by the various conditions special education professionals find themselves in. Special education teachers work under varying conditions, support students with individualized goals, and work with a heterogeneous population (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014). This variability in working conditions makes developing a special education evaluation tool challenging. Most teacher evaluation processes and tools are designed for teachers in general education classrooms and do not fully incorporate the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers. As a result, these evaluation measures have not effectively promoted the professional development and teacher performance of special education teachers (Glowacki & Hackmann, 2016).

In addition, the field of special education has been besieged by high attrition rates (Billingsley, 2004; Boe et al., 2008; Holdheide, Goe, Croft, & Reschly, 2010; Sindelar, Brownell, & Billingsley, 2010), job dissatisfaction (Gersten, Keting, Yovanoff, & Hamiss, 2001; Stempien & Loeb, 2002), and personnel who are not fully certified or certified through alternate means (Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994; McLeskey, Tylen, & Flippon, 2004). An evaluation system that provides actionable and meaningful feedback may help strengthen and retain a higher-quality teaching force (Jones & Brownell, 2014). The instructional practice of special education teachers must improve to improve the outcomes for students with disabilities.

Research conducted by Morgan et al. (2008) found in classroom observation studies that the services received by students with disabilities cannot be expected to mitigate the effects of their disabilities. Current research has shown that the academic achievement of students with disabilities has either declined or not improved, even with the range of evidence-based practices developed over the past three decades. Special education teachers are being asked to do more with less time. Special education challenges make it difficult to "fit" special education teachers into the existing teacher evaluation systems. There is a significant need for students with disabilities to make meaningful educational progress and demonstrate positive post-school outcomes. This is another reason why an evaluation system informs the professional development needed by special education teachers to improve their practice and ultimately improve post-school outcomes for students with disabilities (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014).

Jones and Brownell (2014) noted an additional challenge in evaluating special education teachers using the FFT framework. Their research found that states and districts choose to limit or eliminate Domain I of the framework, which covers planning and preparation. This could impact special education teachers, who spend significantly more time planning and coordinating services for their students and fewer hours providing direct instruction.

Jones and Brownell (2014) also found that limited research has been conducted on the evaluation of special education teachers due to the unique challenges of their position. Sharing instructional responsibilities with other teachers, variation in student ability level, and teaching across settings (self-contained, resource, and co-teaching) are just a few examples of special education teachers' roles in schools. Students with disabilities also receive instruction from general education teachers and services from other related service personnel. Measuring teacher effectiveness depends not only on the instruction special education teachers provide students

with disabilities but the instruction those students receive in those different settings (Brownell et al., 2009).

Rodl et al. (2018) proposed that the challenges to evaluating special education teachers arise due to the school administrators' lack of training or licensure responsible for completing the task. This lack of training has implications for high-stakes decisions (tenure and retention) and low-stakes decisions (professional development and placement). Glowacki and Hartmann (2016) noted that principals must understand the instructional methodologies and legal obligations of special education to be effective leaders. Lasky and Karge (2006) believe that principal training should be provided in pre-service preparation programs and on the job. Pazey and Cole (2013) focused on the knowledge imparted in leadership preparation programs. They also found that administrator preparation programs should include content regarding special education and laws to avoid legal entanglement and promote social justice.

Perceptions of Administrators in Teacher Evaluation

Glowacki and Hackmann (2016) researched elementary principals' perceptions in the evaluation process for special education teachers. Principals reported that the district evaluation process is slightly less effective for special education teachers. Of the 325 respondents, 48 (14.8%) reported differentiation of the process, while 277 (85.2%) reported no differentiation. The study's primary theme was using a completely different evaluation system for special education teachers. The second theme was to develop uniform standards and expectations for special education teachers. The final piece was related to the Danielson Framework (FFT), which they believed permitted differentiated feedback for special education teachers.

Respondents who were certified in special education believed that evaluation should include performance indicators related to the unique job responsibilities of special education

teachers. They also felt that their skills were higher in providing feedback. Suggestions for improvement in the evaluation process included an overall improved evaluation process (39.7%), a need for an enhanced evaluation tool (32.5%), and more extensive training for evaluators (19.8%).

Most principals within the Glowacki and Hackmann (2016) study believe that evaluators must be skilled in offering feedback to all teachers. A critical difference between administrators licensed in special education and those who were not was their perception that they were more effective in providing feedback based on their knowledge of special education. Frost (2010) reached a similar conclusion regarding principals' perception of effectiveness based on their special education background. Principals with a background in special education reported higher skill levels when supervising all teachers. Those who did not hold special education certification were less likely to report effective skills in providing feedback according to the CEC (2009) areas of professional responsibility.

Respondents noted specific areas of concern, including their ability to identify whether special education teachers individualize instruction, use effective data collection measures, create IEPs, monitor student progress toward IEP goals, apply disciplinary and behavioral procedures, use specific goals for behavior management, report student behavioral changes to the IEP team, follow state and federal laws, and consult with general education teachers (Glowacki & Hartmann, 2016). Research also finds that principals have varying degrees of understanding of special education practice. It applies to co-teaching and inclusion (Kamens et al., 2013), which may be the primary roles that some special education teachers play in their school district.

A study by Mimms (2011) in North Carolina found that principals reported low proficiency levels when evaluating IEP paperwork. Sisson (2000) discovered that principals

needed additional training to manage students with chronic disciplinary issues and behavior disorders. Throughout their research on the FFT, Danielson and McGreal (2000) continually found the need for professional development a vital component of the teacher evaluation process.

The need for additional training for observers responsible for evaluating special education teachers goes back to early research conducted by Holdheide (2010) on teacher evaluation. A study by Lawson and Knollman (2017) found that school administrators without a special education background may need additional support and information when evaluating teachers who provide instruction to students requiring more intensive academic or behavioral support. Participants shared that training matters within the study, but administrators often learn how to evaluate through practice. They also found that evaluators were confident in identifying what good teaching looks like regardless of the setting. However, the participants stated that there was a certain amount of bias in evaluating special education teachers based on the demands of their classrooms.

Summary

Teacher effectiveness is one of the most significant factors contributing to student achievement. For students with disabilities, the need is greater to close the achievement gap and improve student outcomes (Sledge & Pazey, 2013). As parents of students with disabilities demanded more educational opportunities for their children, federal laws such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (PL 89-750) and the Education for all Handicapped Children (1974) charged states to create full educational opportunities for students with disabilities. Recent federal laws, such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, outlined the expectations that students with disabilities receive the same educational opportunities as their general education peers (Friend, 2018).

Pennsylvania adopted the teacher evaluation models of **Formal Observation** and **Differentiated Supervision** to determine teacher effectiveness. In addition, teacher evaluation includes student learning objectives and value-added measures (PSSA) to generate an overall performance rating to demonstrate annual teacher effectiveness (PDE, 2020). Even though the Pennsylvania Department of Education worked to address special education teachers' unique roles and responsibilities, there is no mandate that specific expectations be included as part of the Danielson Framework for evaluating special education teachers (PDE, 2020).

Current research has found that measuring teacher quality in special education is challenging due to the many roles and responsibilities of a special education teacher (Brownell et al., 2009). These include sharing instructional responsibilities with other teachers, variation in student ability level, and teaching across settings (Jones & Brownell, 2014), the need to have evidence-based practices specific to students with disabilities (Holdheide et al., 2013), and the challenges associated with using value-added data to measure student growth (Buzick & Jones, 2015; Brownell & Jones, 2015).

Conclusion

All special education teachers should be evaluated utilizing a high-quality evaluation tool developed in collaboration with administrators and teachers (CEC, 2012). These tools should be based on understanding the diverse roles in the special education profession. Within the literature review, the perspective of the special education teacher has been mostly left out of this process. Limited research on the administrator's perspective has provided insight into the need for professional development and pre-service training to evaluate special education teachers in their varying roles. This study will attempt to gain the perspective of both teachers and administrators and the possible contributions to evaluation practices in Western Pennsylvania.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Students with disabilities perform lower than their general education peers by about 30% on their post-school outcomes and performance standards (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014; Stetser & Stillwell, 2014). To close the achievement gap for students with disabilities, highly effective teachers (Sledge & Pazey, 2013) must provide their instruction. One way to improve teacher effectiveness is with a standardized teacher evaluation model. The adoption of Common Core standards that raise accountability and rigor in classroom instruction and the demand for inclusive practices and rigorous instruction (Friend, 2018) have significantly influenced teacher evaluation and its impact on student success.

This study aimed to examine the perceptions of special education teachers and administrators on the teacher evaluation process used in their schools. The co-investigator asked specific questions to each subgroup of participants on their perceptions of the evaluation models explicitly used in the state of Pennsylvania for teacher evaluation (the Danielson Framework and Differentiated Supervision). The reasoning for questioning their perceptions was to explore if the participants felt that the evaluation process positively influenced instruction and increased student achievement. The co-investigator was able to achieve this understanding by investigating the following research questions:

1. How do special education teachers benefit from using the PDE Danielson Framework and Differentiated Supervision models to evaluate their teaching practice?

2. What do special education teachers in Western Pennsylvania perceive as an effective practice in evaluating teaching effectiveness?

3. How do administrators perceive the benefit of using the PDE Danielson Framework

and Differentiated Supervision models as an effective practice in evaluating special

education teacher effectiveness?

Research Methodology and Design

Limited research was conducted on the perception of special education teachers on

teacher evaluation; of the research that has been undertaken, the majority targeted the

administrator perspective. The researcher used a qualitative approach to compare the perceptions

of special education teachers and administrators regarding the effectiveness of the evaluation

process and its subsequent impact on student achievement. The researcher interviewed teachers

and administrators using a structured questionnaire with a follow-up interview via Zoom to elicit

more information regarding specific questions. The qualitative data was collected using

interview questions, which allowed the participants to describe the phenomenon of special

education teacher evaluation (Giorgi, 2012). The interviews focused on the perceptions of

tenured and non-tenured teachers and administrators, their experiences, and the meaning they

make from the experience itself. This method of in-depth, phenomenological interviewing gave

great power to the participants' stories and allowed them to reconstruct their experiences within

the topic of study (Seidman, 2019).

Using a phenomenological approach to interviewing allowed the researcher to come as

close as possible to understanding the lived experience from the subjective point of view of the

participant (Seidman, 2019). The phenomenological approach emphasized by Schutz and Max

van Manen (1990) reflects on the elements of experience, which become the "phenomena" and

take on meaning for both the participant and the researcher. Asking participants to reconstruct

their evaluation experiences encourages them to engage in an 'act of attention' and consider the

context and role of special education teacher evaluation and its impact on student success. The model of phenomenological interviewing discussed by Seidman (2019) involves conducting a series of three separate interviews with each participant. Interviewing as a "one-shot" process does not allow the interviewer to create context; without this, there is little chance of exploring any meaning of the process (Patton, 2015). The questionnaire used in this study combined the first two interviews with the follow-up interview, allowing participants to reflect on their experiences with teacher evaluation. Steidman (2019) recommends a repeatable and documentable process even under less-than-ideal conditions.

Conceptual Framework

The researcher needed to establish a conceptual framework from the original research questions to create a solid understanding of the perceptions of both special education teachers and administrators in the evaluation process. The keywords evaluation, standards, feedback, professional development, and preparation were coded within the data analysis from the interview questions. To further determine the study of the written and transcribed interviews, the researcher will examine the evaluation process and identify variables used as thematic units. The researcher analyzed these thematic units to determine what role special education teacher evaluation plays in teacher effectiveness and student success.

Participants

The relevant population is all special education teachers in the United States who teach students identified as students with a disability under IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The study's target population is all K-12 public special education teachers and administrators in southwestern Pennsylvania who utilize the Danielson Framework and Differentiated Supervision as the evaluation tool to determine teacher effectiveness. However,

the co-researcher recruited participants from two suburban districts in the southwestern

Pennsylvania region. One is a suburban district located in the southwest area of Pittsburgh in

Allegheny County. The approximate student enrolment is 3,419 students, with 462 students with

disabilities. There are 235 teachers in the district and nine school administrators. The second

recruitment site is in Westmoreland County. The community serves nine boroughs and

townships. The approximate student population is 3,634, with approximately 649 students with

disabilities. There are 197 full-time teachers and six building administrators.

Participant Recruitment

The researcher used convenience sampling through e-mail to local school district

administrators to get permission to send out a letter of invitation (see Appendices D and E) to

special education teachers and administrators at the sampling site. Due to the ongoing COVID-

19 pandemic and social distancing recommendations, the researcher posted for possible interest

in the special education Facebook group (TeachLoveAutism) and encouraged snowballing use to

increase response rates. A growing literature suggests that researchers treat the digital world as a

research site. Using social media platforms relevant to the targeted population, selecting specific

information in recruitment materials to target the audience, and referencing high-profile

members can expand who will participate in a survey (Paulus & Lester, 2021). According to

Seidman (2019), the sample size of participants will be reached with the criterion of sufficiency

and saturation. The researcher reached sufficiency when the number of participants reflected the

range (K-12) and the sites that made up Western Pennsylvania's public-school systems. The co-

investigator achieved saturation when the same information was reported, and the researcher no

longer learned new information about the perceptions of the evaluation process for special

education teachers. However, to ensure the completion of the study on time, the researcher

recruited ten participants in total (five special education teachers and five administrators) across all sites.

<div align="center">**Instrumentation and Procedures**</div>

Instrumentation

Qualitative interviews included a modified version of the Teacher Evaluation Profile (TEP) survey instrument developed by Stiggins and Duke (1988), revised by Rindler (1994), and further edited by Doherty (2009) to gather data about special education teachers and administrators' perceptions of the current methods of teacher evaluation. The survey instrument utilized open-ended responses instead of the original Likert format and encouraged personal and meaningful feedback from individual participants. These questions explored the complex issues of special education evaluation by examining the meaning of the concrete experiences of special education teachers and administrators in Western Pennsylvania. Education Northwest was contacted by e-mail requesting permission to use the Teacher Evaluation Profile. Education Northwest granted permission to use their survey questions for this dissertation.

Interview Procedures

For this study, the researcher contacted two districts and one Facebook group administrator (TeachLoveAutism) to receive permission to share informational letters and the Informed Consent form. Once the investigator received consent, the co-investigator sent an e-mail to the individual participant to thank them for their willingness to participate in the interview process. The co-investigator sent a link within an e-mail to the participants to complete a set of interview questions within a Google form. The Google Form included a request for an audio-recorded follow-up interview. Once the co-investigator scheduled the follow-up interview, she sent a Zoom meeting invitation to the participant. The co-investigator turned off the video for

all Zoom calls to add additional confidentiality between the participants and the co-investigator.

This prevented any body language or facial expressions from influencing any responses from the

participants. At the beginning of the audio-recorded interview, the researcher asked the

participant to reconfirm their consent to participate in the research study. The co-investigator

modified the interview questions (Appendices C and D) from the Teacher Evaluation Profile

originally developed by Stiggins and Duke (1988). The data collection window for the

questionnaire and a follow-up interview was four weeks.

The following guidelines from Thomson and Brinkmann (2009) were considered to

ensure that the follow-up interviews were valid and close to the "lived experience" of special

education teacher evaluation. The guidelines listed by Thomson and Brinkmann (2009) are:

• Allow time for recall,

• Provide concrete cues,

• Use typical content categories of specific memories to derive cues,

• Ask for recent specific memories,

• Use relevant timeline and landmark events as contextual cues,

• Ask the interviewee for a free and detailed narrative of the specific memory (as cited in

Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 52).

Computer-Assisted Interviews

Computer-assisted interviewing has become more widespread with examples like e-mail

correspondence, which allows for asynchronous interactions in time. Chat interviews are another

example where technology allows for an asynchronous, more conversational approach

(Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Computer-assisted interviews have the advantage that the written

text is one of the mediums the researcher and participants will use to express themselves. The

text is also ready for analysis when the respondent has typed it (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Computer-assisted interviewing may also be easier for participants to address sensitive or controversial topics openly. To ensure the online interview offered as much to the participants as the researcher sought, the researcher communicated the importance of interviewing with participant interest and respect despite the distance between them (Seidman, 2019). Computer-assisted interviewing will also offset participant concerns over social distancing and vaccination status during the COVID-19 pandemic. The events of the COVID-19 pandemic required researchers to shift their traditional notions of data and how to make meaning of it to a more virtual interaction as a possible data source. Social media and other digital platforms expand how and where research is conducted (Paulus & Lester, 2021).

Google forms

Participants completed the structured questionnaire with an online form dedicated to special education teachers or administrators. *Google forms* is a free online cloud-based data management tool that is part of the Google suite. There are many advantages to using Google forms, such as no cost and unlimited respondents. Data is also readily available for analysis and will be easy to export into the MAXQDA software chosen for data analysis. Within Google Drive Terms of Service, as of (March 31, 2020), Google Drive allows a user to receive, upload, submit, store, or send content. Any content within the user drive belongs to the user. Google does not claim ownership of any content, including text, data, information, or files uploaded, shared, or stored within the user drive. Files within the individual drive are private unless the user shares them with a collaborator. Information is only transferred outside of Google with consent within Google's privacy policy (dated July 1, 2021). If a participant or researcher uses Google for education or work, the domain administrators will have access to the Google Account. They can

access and retain information, view statistics regarding the account, suspend or terminate the

account, or restrict the ability to delete or edit data within the privacy settings. Google products

include robust security features such as encryption to keep data private while in transit, security

features such as 2-step verification, and access to personal information restricted to only those

Google employees who need it.

Zoom platform

Zoom is one of several examples of collaborative, cloud-based video-conferencing tools

that support online meetings in real-time (Paulus & Lester, 2021). With the continued concerns

and restrictions due to COVID-19, Zoom will allow researchers to conduct individual interviews

in real-time and record and capture their responses. Research conducted by Archibald et al.

(2019) found that participants preferred Zoom compared to in-person interviews, telephone, or

other video-conferencing platforms. Zoom is easy to use and will generate an automatic meeting

ID# specific to the individual. The platform has also increased its security measures by locking

the meeting while securely recording and storing sessions without recourse to any third-party

software. Additional security features include user-specific authentication, real-time encryption,

and the ability to back-up information to online server networks (the cloud) or local drives

(Zoom Video Communications Inc., 2016). Zoom has also enabled new features, such as the

ability for participants to provide consent to being recorded. Users can choose to store recordings

on the host's local device or use Zoom's "Cloud Recording" option (Archibald et al., 2019). The

most recent privacy policy indicates that the platform collects and stores a range of personal

information with users interacting with their service. If a researcher chooses to use the cloud-

based option for recording individual or group interviews, appropriate participant consent should

be obtained before the session.

Data Analysis

The researcher used MAXQDA to conduct the data analysis. Interviews were transcribed and exported from Google forms into the MAXDQA platform. This program offered an additional layer of protection through an internal password system. This program allowed the creation of memos and had a visual tool that enabled the linkages between codes and categories while organizing the data (Oswald, 2017). Once the information was collected, the researcher read through the transcripts and coded the relevant passages. The MAXQDA program was used to retrieve, record, and combine the codes. The coding process allows one to attach keywords to a text segment to permit later statement identification (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) introduced coding, or the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, and conceptualizing data, as part of the grounded theory approach to qualitative research. This approach is significant because it allows one to create immediate short codes and define the experience described within the interview process (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The researcher will follow the steps of meaning condensation developed by Giorgi (1975) to generate a phenomenological-based meaning condensation. First, one will read the interview to get a sense of the whole. Then determine the text's natural "meaning units" and thematize the statements from the subjects' viewpoint as simply as possible. Next, the researcher will interrogate the meaning units regarding the specific research questions and tie the nonredundant themes into a descriptive statement (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Role of the Researcher

This research study was based on the current literature reviews and the gap in the literature supporting the need for quality teacher evaluation tools that lead to effective teaching practice and, ultimately, more successful outcomes for students with disabilities. The researcher

is a current special education teacher who utilizes the Danielson Framework and Differentiated

Supervision as part of the annual evaluation process. As a result of that role in special education,

assumptions or biases may be based on personal experiences in evaluation. The desire to further

one's education and enhance professional development may not be the same as the participants.

Rather than drafting interview questions based on personal experience, the researcher used a

previously published research tool to adjust for personal bias.

Limitations

Limitations may include not having full access to the desired number of participants due

to the demand placed on teachers and administrators during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants may also change their minds about participation in the study, leaving inconclusive

results that would be unavailable for data analysis. Purposeful sampling is convenience sampling

of selected Facebook groups. However, this may lead to snowballing and selecting participants

based on their availability within the region of southwestern Pennsylvania. It is important to note

that non-tenured participants will only speak to the Danielson Framework of teacher evaluation.

In contrast, tenured participants may utilize differentiated supervision or the Danielson

Framework, depending on their district.

Ethical Issues

Before the investigation, permission was obtained from Slippery Rock University's IRB

(Appendix A). There are no identified risks more significant than minimal expectations. Within

the Adult Consent Form, participants may experience some discomfort, such as worry or anxiety

over the potential responses to the teacher evaluation process. The evaluation process in Western

Pennsylvania has become more stressful with the inclusion of the Danielson Framework and

student performance measures. Responses to the initial questionnaire will be anonymous, and

participants were allowed to conduct Zoom interviews without the camera. The co-investigator

allowed the participants to remove themselves from the second level of questioning if they did

not feel comfortable moving on with the interview process.

Confidentiality was maintained with a coded reference for all participants. All consent

forms, e-mails, and interviews are held on a locked and password-protected computer. Password-

protected files were also used within any software program to ensure the confidentiality of all

participant information. According to the IRB regulations, the materials will remain in a

password-protected computer file. There are no paper copies of any participant information.

Summary

This chapter described the methods and procedures used to conduct this qualitative

research. Topics that were discussed included the study's design, the research questions, the

collection of data, the selection of participants, and analysis of the data, quality, verification, and

summary. This research aimed to examine the perceptions and challenges of evaluation of

special education teachers using the PDE Danielson Framework and Differentiated Supervision

models within southwestern Pennsylvania. Data were collected from participants who provided

informed consent and are currently teaching in public school districts.

Chapter 4: Findings

The current study was designed to evaluate the perceptions of special education teachers and administrators in Western Pennsylvania regarding the teacher evaluation process and its potential impact on the success of students with special needs. The research questions designed for this study were as follows:

1. How do special education teachers benefit from using the PDE Danielson Framework and Differentiated Supervision models to evaluate their teaching practice?

2. What do special education teachers in Western Pennsylvania perceive as an effective practice in evaluating teaching effectiveness?

3. How do administrators perceive the benefit of using the PDE Danielson Framework and Differentiated Supervision models as an effective practice in evaluating special education teacher effectiveness?

This chapter analyzed the data obtained as it relates to each of the identified research questions. Using responses from the questionnaire and interview questions, The data highlighted the common themes that emerged from special education teachers and administrators regarding their perceptions of the teacher evaluation process using responses from the questionnaire and interview questions. This information is displayed in a narrative format with tables and figures. As there was some overlap in the participants' responses, this further demonstrated the validity of this study.

Demographic Information on Participants

This study was completed by interviewing n=5 special education teachers and n=5 school administrators in public schools in Western Pennsylvania for a total of 10 participants between the two groups. All participants currently utilize the Danielson Framework-Formal Observation or the Differentiated Supervision model for evaluation purposes.

Demographics of teacher participants

Of the special education teacher participants interviewed (Table 1), n=5 (100%) were female, and n=5 (100%) of the respondents have taught special education for more than ten years. All participants (100%) have been in their current roles for over three years. Three of the five (60%) are teachers in a self-contained classroom, one (20%) is a co-teacher, and one (20%) is a resource/inclusion facilitator.

Of the different forms of evaluations used to evaluate these teachers, one (20%) participated in the *Danielson Framework – Formal Observation*, one (20%) completed a book club study, one (20%) participated in a peer evaluation program, and two (40%) completed action research. The book club study, peer evaluation program, and action research were categorized under *Differentiated Supervision*.

Table 1

Special Education Teacher Demographic Data

Teacher Code	Years as a Special Education Teacher	Years in Current District	Current Role	Form of Evaluation
T03	More than 10	More than 3	Self-Contained	Action Research
T04	More than 10	More than 3	Self-Contained	Peer Evaluation
T02	More than 10	More than 3	Resource/Inclusion Specialist	Action Research
T01	More than 10	More than 3	Self-Contained	Book Club
T05	More than 10	More than 3	Co-teacher	Formal Observation/Danielson Framework

Of the five special education teacher participants, they ranged from three different districts, with three being from the same district. They also ranged in roles from self-contained, co-teacher, and resource/inclusion specialist. The teachers were assigned a code number upon their participation, which is the number associated with all data collected from the Teacher Evaluation Profile (Google Form) and the subsequent personal interview. Research participation was open until there was a minimum of four participants, with no more than five being accepted for participation with the co-investigator. Table 1 provides the demographic data on the special education teachers who did complete the Teacher Evaluation Profile via an online Google Form (questionnaire) and subsequent interview to provide information for the current study.

Demographics of administrator participants

A total of n=5 administrators were interviewed for the study. The same demographic information was asked of both the teachers and administrators in the study. Gender was not collected as part of the Teacher Evaluation Profile for Administrators (Google Form), but administrators who proceeded with the interview could be identified. Table 2 highlights the demographic data of the administrators in the study. Two of the five who participated (40%) were female administrators. Three (60%) were male administrators. All five administrators comprised all grade levels (K-12). Of the administrators interviewed, two (40%) were at the primary level (grades K-2), two (40%) were at the middle school level (grades 6-8), and one (20%) was at the high school level (grades 9-12). One administrator (20%) was in the role for four to six years, while the remaining administrators (80%) have been in their positions for more than ten years. Only one (20%) administrator had been in their current school for less than three years.

Table 2

Administrator Demographic Data

Administrator Code	Years of Experience	Years in Current District	Current Grade Level	Form of Evaluation
A02	4-6 years	0-3 years	Primary (K-2)	All models
A01	More than 10	More than 3	Middle (6-8)	All models
A03	More than 10	More than 3	Primary (K-2)	All models
A04	More than 10	More than 3	Middle (6-8)	All models
A05	More than 10	More than 3	High School (9-12)	All models

Like the teachers, the administrators were from a variety of districts. Out of the five administrators interviewed, two (40%) were from one district, two (40%) were from the second district, and the last one was from another. All were employed in public school districts in Western Pennsylvania. The grade levels also varied. Each administrator was trained and used the *Danielson Framework – Formal Observation* and the *Differentiated Supervision* models for teacher evaluation.

As can be seen in Table 2, the administrators who participated supervised teachers in grades K-12 across all roles of educator. The administrators were also assigned a code number upon their participation. This number was associated with the data collected from the Teacher Evaluation Profile (TEP) administered online using a Google Form (questionnaire) and the subsequent personal interview. Research participation was open until there was a minimum of four participants, with no more than five being accepted for participation with the co-investigator.

Findings

The study found several themes that emerged from both special education teachers and administrators regarding the evaluation of special education teachers in Western Pennsylvania. These themes can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3

Emerging Themes from Special Education Teacher and Administrator Interviews

Themes from Special Education Teacher Interviews	Themes from Administrator Interviews
A background in special education brings more value to the evaluation	Danielson Framework provides value to evaluation process
Different roles in special education make it difficult for meaningful evaluation	Frustration over lack of follow up opportunities
Frustration over lack of evaluation specific to special education	The action plan allows for more teacher self-reflection and autonomy
An increased presence of administration in the classroom	Evaluations often improve procedures, not pedagogy.

Note. The most common areas of discussion that arose from the interviews.

Each question was identified and supported through the interview with additional questions. All findings will be highlighted within this chapter, including direct feedback from teachers and administrators. Due to the supervisory role that administrators play in the evaluation process, there were some different questions asked of the administrators regarding their perception of the evaluation process. Respondents were asked to use a five-point scale to rate questions specific to the impact and value of the current evaluation process in Western Pennsylvania. The Likert scale responses ranged from one to five, with one being the lowest/least value and five being the most/most significant value. The remaining questions were open-ended and followed by a subsequent individual interview to discuss their perceptions of the evaluation process and its impact on teacher effectiveness (Appendix E).

Research question 1:

How do special education teachers benefit from using the PDE Danielson Framework and Differentiated Supervision models to evaluate their teaching practice?

Thirteen questions were used to prompt special education teachers to discuss the benefit they perceived from their evaluation experiences related to Question 1. These questions were broken down into sections within the Teacher Evaluation Profile.

Overall Rating Quality of Evaluation

In Section 2 of the TEP, teachers were asked to rate the quality of the evaluation process used in their system. A rating of one on the Likert scale indicated that the evaluation process was very poor quality. In contrast, a rating of five indicated that they felt the evaluation process was of very high quality. Table 4 shows that two teachers (40%) rated the evaluation system in their school system to be of average quality. The highest number of respondents, three teachers (60%), ranked the evaluation system below average.

Table 4

Special Education Teachers' Perception of the Quality of Evaluation Process

	Role	Frequency	Percent
Very Poor Quality (1)		0	0
Below Average Quality (2)	Resource/Inclusion	1	20
	Self-Contained	2	40
Average Quality (3)	Co-teacher	1	20
	Self-Contained	1	20
Above Average Quality (4)		0	0
Very High Quality (5)		0	0
Total		5	100.00

Teachers were asked to rate the overall impact of the teacher evaluation process on their classroom practices. A rating of one indicated that teacher evaluation had no effect on their professional practice, nor did it change their practices, attitudes, or understanding of their professional role. A rating of five indicated that the teacher evaluation process strongly impacted professional practice, which led to significant changes in their practices and attitudes about teaching in their district. Table 5 shows that 40% (two) of the teacher respondents felt that the teacher evaluation process had an average impact on their professional practice. Of the five respondents, 40% (two) thought that the evaluation process had little effect on their professional practice, and 20% (one) felt that the evaluation process had no impact on their professional practice.

Table 5

Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of the Evaluation on Professional Practice

	Role	Frequency	Percent
No Impact (1)	Resource/Inclusion	1	20
2	Self-Contained	2	40
3	Co-teacher	1	20
	Self-Contained	1	20
4		0	0
Significant Impact (5)		0	0
Total		5	100.00

Teachers were asked to elaborate on the strengths and weaknesses of the current evaluation system with an open-ended question discussing their personal experiences. Among the five teachers interviewed, one mentioned that using the *Danielson Framework* and *Differentiated Supervision* allows administrators to look at the whole teacher. Teacher 04 commented, "The rubric used is fairly easy to fill out. It doesn't take as long as others have in the past to complete."

Responses for weaknesses were similar across all respondents, with a lack of feedback making up three teachers' (60%) responses. Teacher 05 stated, "It's up for interpretation. Each administrator has different expectations for each category. What can be distinguished for one administrator could be needs improvement for another." Teacher 04 shared, "Also when it is only has a range of four possible points, it can be difficult at times to determine which is the best choice."

Attributes of Evaluation Context

Section 3 of the Teacher Evaluation Profile (TEP) asked respondents to rate the attributes of the evaluation context. The questions included the clarity of policy statements and standards communicated for evaluation purposes, the alignment of standards with individual teaching assignments, the sources of performance information, and the time and frequency spent on professional evaluations during the school year.

When asked how the standards were communicated for the evaluation process, the responses varied from an email to a faculty meeting. One respondent shared that there was no communication regarding the expected standards during the evaluation process. However, four of the respondents (80%) did share that there was some email communication about the standards. One respondent (20%) stated that their communication was in-person during a faculty meeting.

Teachers were asked how well the evaluation standards align with their roles as special education teachers. Teachers 03 and 04, who are both self-contained, shared that the standards do not align with their respective roles. T04, who is also self-contained, stated:

    The standards can be difficult for the classroom I have. Some of the paperwork requires
    us to use grade-level standards, but they are often too difficult for the students in my

class. I always try and use the standards that are more easily met by myself with the

students I currently have.

T02, whose primary role is Resource/Inclusion Specialist, stated that the alignment is good. T05

said, "They align pretty well with it."

Table 6 shows the types of performance evaluation sources used during the evaluation

process for each respondent. Many districts in Western Pennsylvania are on a five-year cycle,

which means that teachers participate in the *Danielson Framework – Formal Observation* at

least once every five years.

Table 6

Sources of Performance Information Used During the Evaluation

Source	Special Education Teacher Role	Frequency	Percentage
Self-evaluation	Co-teacher	1	20
Book Study	Self-Contained	1	20
Peer-to-Peer Evaluation	Self-Contained	1	20
Student Performance	Resource/Inclusion	1	20
Measures	Self-Contained	1	20
Total		5	100

In addition, teachers had to identify the number of formal/clinical or informal/walk-

through evaluations for the 2021-2022 school year. As seen in Figure 1, all five teachers shared

that they did not participate in the formal/clinical evaluation process this school year. Two

teachers (40%) had no walk-through evaluations for the school year. However, one teacher

(20%) had one informal evaluation, and two (40%) had more than one informal evaluation

during the school year.
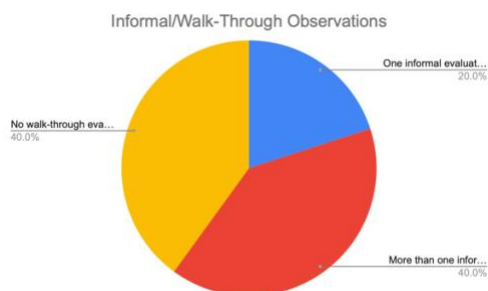
Figure 1. Special education teacher participation in the informal/walk-through evaluation

process.

Attributes of Feedback During Evaluation

In Section 4 of the TEP, teachers were asked to rate the quality and quantity of the feedback they received after the evaluation process. In addition, they were asked to identify the standards referenced in their feedback, the specificity of the feedback, and how the feedback was provided to them during the process. One special education teacher (20%) shared that she had received no input this year on her teaching performance (informal or formal). One (20%) stated that feedback was provided during the five-year formal evaluation cycle. Two teachers (40%) shared that they received feedback after informal/walk-through observations. When asked about feedback, T4 stated:

> During informal observations, we typically meet later that day or week to review any
>
> concerns or what was observed. Most of the informal observations that I had this year
>
> were requested by myself due to behaviors. Typically for formal observations, we meet
>
> within a day or two of the observation to go over how everything went.

In Figure 2, respondents shared their response time after their administrators completed their evaluation. One teacher (25%) reported that feedback was provided within one day of the

evaluation, three teachers (75%) shared that feedback was provided within one week, and one

participant did not respond at all to this question.

Figure 2. Timeframe of feedback from administrators after the evaluation process.

Regarding the standards addressed within the feedback provided by evaluators (Figure 3),

each respondent shared different responses as they relate to the Danielson Framework (FFT).

One teacher (25%) stated that her feedback referenced all four categories within the Danielson

Framework, one (25%) mentioned the Danielson Framework in general, and one (25%)

mentioned the specific categories of professionalism and collaboration. One respondent (25%)

stated that no standards were referenced within the feedback. The final participant left their

response blank.
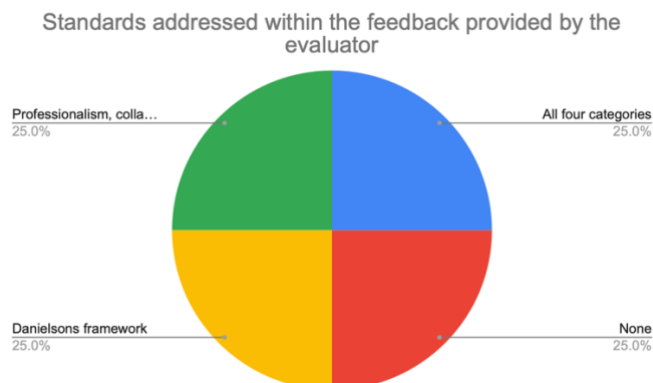
Figure 3. Standards within the feedback provided by the evaluator.

When interviewing the teachers about the specificity of the feedback and how it pertained to their certification area, their responses varied. T03 stated, "The feedback did pertain to my cert; in that, it specified when I used differentiation in the lesson. But it wasn't new feedback; it was just restating what I did in the lesson." T04's statement was the most direct when she stated, "The feedback was not really related to my area of certification. A form is a general form that is used across the county with little room to address much." T05 stated, "Pretty specific. Yes." which was not very informative, and the opposite of T02, who stated, "General info provided."

Finally, the teachers were asked about the nature of the feedback provided to them (Figure 4). Of the four participants who responded, two (50%) stated that their feedback was provided through email. In contrast, the remaining two (50%) used the PAETEP to discuss and respond to the feedback provided by the evaluator.

Figure 4. Nature of feedback provided after the evaluation process.

Open-Ended Responses Regarding Teacher Evaluation

The final question aligned with Research Question 1 occurred during the semi-structured interview and asked teachers to identify and discuss the evaluation model that was of the most value to them in their role as special education teachers. All five respondents answered and, if

needed, were prompted that the models could include the *Danielson Framework – Formal Evaluation* or any of the models within *Differentiated Supervision* (action research, peer-to-peer, book club).

While most of the teachers felt the *Danielson Framework – Formal Evaluation* was the most valuable model, many of the respondents felt that there were more valuable pieces than others. T02 felt that the rubric and framework gave accountability that she did not find to be the same in the book groups. T05 preferred that someone come into her room and provide feedback on what they see in real-time, "they can say…okay, I saw you did this. Maybe we could try this, or I really liked the way you did that, so that's helpful, and when they evaluate, they know what you are doing." The general idea was that it is hard for administrators to meaningfully evaluate their teachers if they never see what happens in their classroom. For example, T04 stated: "I feel like the principals coming in and giving me feedback would be the best observation. Not that it always happens like that."

Only one respondent stated that peer evaluation might be a meaningful option. However, this was only if the observations were made by fellow teachers with a special education background; if not, the specific role the teacher was currently playing in the district. T1 stated:

> I think they could be valuable. Like I think it could be helpful to have somebody come in and critique, but I think I would probably prefer somebody that does the same thing that I do. Like in the past, I've had learning support teachers, and it's been good. Cause it's closer than, you know, like a regular ed teacher. Cause I certainly, but I'm wondering if it should be like a life skills teacher observing the life skills teacher, you know, like, and throughout the whole, and then offering suggestions. I think that might be more helpful as far as actually evaluating teachers.

Research question 2:

What do special education teachers in Western Pennsylvania perceive as an effective practice in evaluating teaching effectiveness?

Eight questions were used to prompt special education teachers to reflect on effective teacher evaluation practice related to Research Question 2.

Attributes of Evaluation Context

Section 5 of the TEP asked respondents to rate the attributes of the evaluation context. The questions included the amount of time spent on the evaluation process, the amount of time allotted during the school year for professional development, the availability and models of good teaching practice, the clarity of the district's belief regarding the purpose of the evaluation, and the intended role/purpose of the evaluation. T04 shared, "It took me longer this year to go through the process because we started using a brand-new system to log everything. Everyone had designated days that they could use to spend on the evaluation and completing all the forms." T01 and T05 spent about one hour and two hours, respectively, while T3 spent three days preparing for her evaluation.

Teachers were also asked to reflect on the amount of time allotted for professional development during the school year. These responses varied based on the individual school district. T04 stated:

> We had a week of professional development at the beginning of the school year. During
> the year, we had early dismissals for the students almost every other month to have PDs.
> Most of the ones on that day were pre-recorded ones that we could do at our own pace.

This response was like the one provided by T05, who stated:

We have five in-service days that are for some type of professional development. We can

also find professional development opportunities on our own and ask the district for

reimbursement.

The remaining respondents shared that professional development was less focused during the

school year. T03 stated, "There are six days reserved for professional development, but there

may or may not be an actual PD scheduled." T02 shared that professional development only took

place during faculty meetings, while T01 stated there was no professional development

scheduled during the year.

When sharing programs and models of good teaching, the responses were similar in that

there was limited to no training specific to special education within each district. T05 stated,

"Not much. Very little is directed towards special education." Other respondents mentioned

training related to state testing but not their specific role in the district. T03 said this in her

response, "There are trainings available on PATTAN, but typically do not pertain to life skills;

other than mandatory PASA testing." T04 shared the most in-depth experience in training:

We have access to training for some of the intervention programs we are able to use. We

also have access to a variety of training on teaching methods, assessments, and disability-

specific training (visuals for students with autism, what autism is, and nonverbal

communication).

However, T02 and T01 did not respond to the availability of any training at all. The respondents

did not share how much of the training through PATTAN, and other agencies were dependent

upon them to arrange on their own time.

The responses about the clarity of the district's belief are varied, with T03 and T02 both

sharing that it is something that they are required to do each year. T01 stated, "It is not clear at

all." T05 stated, "It's up for interpretation depending on the administrator." Only one respondent, T04, had anything to say that referenced the changes since the COVID-19 pandemic:

> It wasn't very clear this year because of the new system and coming back from a year of all virtual learning. They always state at the beginning of the year what the intentions are for the evaluation process, but this year was a little more confusing than others.

Finally, respondents were asked to identify the role/purpose of their evaluations for the year. The term meets state mandates was referenced more than once. T05 shared, "To determine how effective our teaching is." A response from T04 referenced student growth and professionalism, "The evaluation was to measure student growth as well as professional practice/professionalism." The final response from T01 was, "I'm not sure."

Open-Ended Responses Regarding Teacher Evaluation

On the final questions of the survey, which were asked during a semi-structured Zoom interview, teachers were asked to share how they used the evaluation process to improve their practice or effectiveness as a special education teacher, how the evaluation considers their specific role and recommended changes to improve the process within their district.

Teachers reported using self-reflection, feedback, and student performance measures as the most valuable tools to improve their practice and effectiveness as special education teachers. T02 expanded on the idea of self-reflection as she said:

> That's driving what I do, and it also makes me think about it. Okay. Am I implementing this? Am I, do I have good parent communication? Do I have, you know, am I planning appropriately? Things like that. So, I think it makes me just, you know, as a professional becomes aware of something I already knew, but, you know, brings it to the forefront.

The opportunity for feedback was mentioned throughout the research, and T03 mentioned her use of it throughout the year. T03 went on to say:

> Usually, I'll look at their feedback and see what I could change and what we could work on in the classroom. Sometimes it's things that by the end of the year, we're still trying to get to the next step. We always, I try to sit down and look at it, and then we'll meet with my parents or the support team to say, here's what we can try to do instead, and try to gear it for even just to try it out, see if it works, if it doesn't and try to use their suggestions going forward.

T02 expressed the idea that self-reflection is also used to defend what she does in her classroom. If an administrator only comes in sporadically or not at all, then the evaluation becomes punitive, and the subsequent self-evaluation becomes a tool to defend the teacher's classroom practice.

One teacher mentioned using the student performance measure (former SLO) as another tool to reflect on her practice during the evaluation. The student performance measure (SLO) is used as a measure to analyze a student's present level of performance and is aligned to state standards (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014). T04 discussed how she used the SPM as she stated, "that whatever we did this year, that SPM or whatever, seeing the kid's progression, I use that because then I could say, okay, this didn't work with that kid. I'll change it next year."

Throughout the interviews, the respondents described multiple examples of their roles as special education teachers. As mentioned throughout the study, the role of the special education teacher can be varied depending upon the district and the needs of the students. The respondents of this study identified their roles as self-contained (60%), co-teacher (20%), and resource/inclusion facilitator (20%). According to Brownell et al., 2014, special education teacher evaluation is challenging due to the many roles and responsibilities of special education

teachers. Even within the field of special education, there are differing opinions on how the roles of special education teachers should be considered during evaluation. T05 mentioned, "I don't think that the evaluation process is fair across for if you're in a self-contained or you're in a co-teaching position. Cause it's two completely types of positions."

Another teacher described special education teachers' interaction with parents and other teachers as an area that could be more utilized for more meaningful teacher evaluation. T01 discussed the evaluation process earlier in her career, stating:

No, but I will say this back when, way back when the principals used to do the observations, there was a section that was… to be filled out about like how you interact with parents, how you interact in meetings. I always liked that because I was like, yes, that's a little bit better because that's where I could be evaluated better on like, I feel like, you know, I do present myself well in a meeting. I do, you know, and I'd rather be evaluated on that, or how I write an IEP or how I do progress monitoring rather than do I have my anticipatory set. Do I have my lesson together? Do I have my goals and objectives up because that's not, that's not relevant to our teaching?

As Chapter Two mentions, special education teachers are responsible for instructing students with varying academic and behavioral needs. In addition, special education teachers are asked to develop and oversee IEPs, collaborate with general education teachers, demonstrate knowledge of special education laws, oversee paraprofessionals, and engage in ongoing communication with parents (Sledge & Pazey, 2013). The statement shared by T03 reflects on the various levels she may encounter during one class period and the amount of planning required to teach such a diverse group of students effectively. T03 stated, "how the various levels too like we might have lower kids versus the higher." She felt that administrators needed more awareness of students'

demands on the classroom environment. When asked how administrators could address this, T3 expanded with, "So just having more awareness of not all the special ed is going to meet those high standards they want us to. So just taking, maybe adding other little half steps, information, other anything really the day that they do this, but because it's hard, it's really hard."

When asked if they could provide examples or changes to the evaluation process for special education teachers, the teachers had a variety of responses ranging from more training in the evaluation process, using evaluators with stronger backgrounds in special education, and even rubrics or tools specific to special education teachers. T05 reflected on her use of direct instruction and how that looks versus what the Danielson Framework asks for in certain areas. She went on to elaborate:

> I mean, depending on what you're doing, but, um, I think it needs to be more defined based on if you're a co-teacher, if you're in a pull-out situation, if you're in a self-contained classroom, I don't think it's fair that everybody gets evaluated in the same system because everybody's position is different.

With the additional demands and accountability placed on special education teachers to teach to grade-level standards no matter which level of support, the frustration over the evaluation process was evident in the tone of the respondents. One teacher spoke about the behavior of students in her classroom and felt that their engagement and displays of appropriate behavior should play more of a role in effective special education teacher evaluation. T04 mentioned:

> I think really what they should be doing is looking at student responses and maybe just even looking at student behavior, and that's how they, they can gauge how we're doing because, the way the observations are written now, they don't pertain to us at all. I don't think.

As the teachers began to expand on the benefit of evaluators having a background in special education, the comments further reflected their frustration over the evaluation process. For example, T01 stated, "I've never felt that principals observing teachers in fields that they've never taught in were ever valuable to anybody." Teachers commented that they did not hold much value to recommendations to improve their teaching when the observations were by a principal who never taught special education. T01 shared that the process would be more meaningful if someone had a similar background, "it's the setting that I'm teaching in. I think I would prefer it to be somebody that already does that kind of teaching." She further stated:

> …with my room, the way it runs, like you're not going to see a lesson per se, but you're going to see how kids interact, how they can, you know, maneuver how their life skills are, you know we have different levels of what we are observed... I feel like I wouldn't mind a supervisor if that supervisor had some experience in life skills or special ed at least to have that understanding. And yeah, I think that would be more beneficial.

Teachers further reported their frustration over their roles in the regular education class and how those may impact their evaluations regarding an evaluator with a limited background in special education. T04 referenced her general education colleagues, specifically when she shared:

> Yeah, I think it would be great if people had a background in special ed before they tried to evaluate us. And if they looked at the regular ed teachers and what they're not doing for the special ed students, and then, you know, added we're, we're also picking up that piece of, of the teaching day as well. So, it's not just what's happening in our classrooms. It's that 37 fires we're putting out and, and the, um, the adaptations and modifications for other teachers and, and everything else we're doing to support our kids.

There was also some concern that the training for the general evaluation process for special education teachers was lacking due to the varied roles and responsibilities they have within their respective schools. More training on the evaluation tools may give special education teachers a better idea of the expectations and what they mean for teacher effectiveness.

Research question 3:

How do administrators perceive the benefit of using the PDE Danielson Framework and Differentiated Supervision models as an effective practice in evaluating special education teacher effectiveness?

These questions were asked of administrators during the interview related to Research Question 3. They were part of the Teacher Evaluation Profile for Administrators (Google Form) and followed up with semi-structured questions during individual interviews.

Overall Rating Quality of Evaluation

In Section 2 of the TEP, administrators were asked to rate the overall impact of the evaluation process used in their system on teacher professional growth, student learning, student achievement, special education teacher quality, and the annual goals that administrators develop with their teachers. A rating of one on the Likert scale indicated no effect, whereas a rating of five indicated that they felt the evaluation process significantly impacted teachers' professional growth. Table 7 shows that two of the administrators (40%) rated the evaluation system to have an above-average impact on teacher professional growth. Two administrators (40%) at the secondary level rated their evaluation process as having average implications for teacher professional growth. At the same time, one administrator rated the evaluation system to have a below-average impact on teacher professional growth.

Table 7

Administrators' Perception of the Evaluation Process on Teacher Professional Growth

	Role	Frequency	Percent
No Impact (1)		0	0
2	Middle (6-8)	1	20
3	Middle (6-8)	1	20
	High School (9-12)	1	20
4	Primary (K-2)	2	40
Significant Impact (5)		0	0
Total		5	100.00

Administrators were then asked to rate the evaluation process on student learning using the same Likert-scale response as above (a score of one had no impact and a score of five with significant impact). Table 8 shows the results of the impact of the teacher evaluation process on student learning. Most administrators (80%) stated that the evaluation procedure had an average impact on student learning within their schools. One administrator (20%) shared that student learning was minimally impacted by the evaluation process.

Table 8: *Administrators' Perception of the Evaluation Process on Student Learning*

	Role	Frequency	Percent
No Impact (1)		0	0
2	Middle (6-8)	1	20
3	Primary (K-2)	2	40
	Middle (6-8)	1	20
	High School (9-12)	1	20
4		0	0
Significant Impact (5)		0	0
Total		5	100.00

Next, administrators rated the impact of the evaluation on student achievement. These results are seen below in Table 9. These results were the same as those identified in the question above. The same four administrators (80%) stated that the evaluation process has an average

impact on student achievement. One (20%) middle school administrator stated minimal impact

on student achievement.

Table 9

Administrators' Perception of the Evaluation Process on Student Achievement

	Role	Frequency	Percent
No Impact (1)		0	0
2	Middle (6-8)	1	20
3	Primary (K-2)	2	40
	Middle School (6-8)	1	20
	High School (9-12)	1	20
4		0	0
Significant Impact (5)		0	0
Total		5	100.00

Administrators were asked to consider how the evaluation process impacts the quality of

their special education teachers. Table 10 shows the frequency of their responses using the same

Likert Scale. One administrator (20%) shared that the evaluation process had no impact on the

quality of their special education teachers. Four administrators (80%) spanning all grade levels

felt the evaluation process had an average impact on the quality of the special education teachers

within their respective buildings.

Table 10

Administrators' Perception of the Evaluation Process on the Quality of Special Education Teachers

	Role	Frequency	Percent
No Impact (1)	Middle (6-8)	1	20
2		0	0
3	Primary (K-2)	2	40
	Middle (6-8)	1	20
	High School (9-12)	1	20
4		0	0
Significant Impact (5)		0	0
Total		5	100.00

The final question within Section 2 of the TEP asked administrators to rate the overall

impact of the teacher evaluation process on the annual improvement goals they develop with

teachers each year. Table 11 shows the rate at which administrators scored the evaluation process

on teacher goals for the year. One administrator (20%) felt that the evaluation process had little

impact on the goals created by their teachers for the year. Two administrators (40%) felt that

there was an average impact on teacher goals, with the last two (40%) stating there was an

above-average impact on the development of teacher goals within their schools.

Table 11

Administrators' Perception of the Evaluation Process on Teacher Goals for the Year

	Role	Frequency	Percent
No Impact (1)		0	0
2	Middle (6-8)	1	20
3	Primary (K-2)	1	20
	High School (9-12)	1	20
4	Primary (K-2)	1	20
	Middle (6-8)	1	20
Significant Impact (5)		0	0
Total		5	100.00

Rating Attributes of Evaluation

The attributes and standards of the procedures used during the evaluation process were

addressed in Section 3 of the Teacher Evaluation Profile for Administrators. Administrators were

asked to consider the sources of performance information as part of the evaluation, how often

administrators conducted formal and informal/walk-through observations for tenured and non-

tenured teachers and the average length of formal and informal observations.

Even though the administrators interviewed were in different grade levels and districts,

there were similar responses for the sources of performance information that they looked for

within the evaluation process. A02 was most specific in her response with the following

examples aligned to each area of the ***Differentiated Supervision*** and ***Formal Observation***,
"Walkthroughs requiring review of lesson plans and reflection feedback, formal observations
including planning, observation and post reflective meetings, Student Performance measures
with goals aligned to a building goal and differentiated supervision projects including peer
review or book studies." A04 included the use of professional learning communities and artifacts
loaded into the state's teacher evaluation software.

The information obtained in this section included the number of times administrators
spent observing tenured and non-tenured teachers during the year. Table 12 shows the frequency
administrators evaluated tenured and non-tenured special education teachers during the previous
school year or within the five-year evaluation cycle. Only one administrator (20%) observed her
tenured teachers on the five-year evaluation cycle. One (20%) stated that he went in every four
years for the formal observation. Two administrators (40%) indicated that they observed tenured
teachers annually regardless of the required evaluation cycle. Finally, one administrator (20%)
mentioned the use of differentiated supervision as the reason he did not complete a formal
observation of his special education teachers during the year. However, when asked the same
question of non-tenured teachers, the administrators reported more frequent visits to the
classroom, with three of them (60%) stating at least two formal observations each year. The last
two administrators (40%) stated that they completed one formal observation yearly for their non-
tenured special education teachers.

Table 12

Administrator Frequency of Evaluation of Tenured and None-Tenured Special Education Teachers

Formal Observation	Level	Frequency	Percent
Every 5 years	Tenure	1	10
	Non-Tenure	0	0
Every 4 years	Tenure	1	10
	Non-Tenure	0	0
Twice a year	Tenure	0	0
	Non-Tenure	3	30
Once a year	Tenure	2	20
	Non-Tenure	2	20
Differentiated Supervision/ No formal evaluation	Tenure	1	10
	Non-Tenure	0	
Total		10	100.00

Administrators were also asked to consider the number of walk-through/informal evaluations of tenured and non-tenured special education teachers during the school year seen below in Table 13. The frequency of these observations was higher for both levels of teachers, with three administrators (60%) stating that they observed tenured teachers at least once a year and two administrators (40%) stating at least bi-monthly, if not monthly. The frequency was higher for non-tenured teachers, with two administrators (40%) stating that they conducted walk-through evaluations twice a year for their non-tenured teachers. Three administrators (60%) stated that they plan monthly or bi-monthly walk-throughs of their newest special education teachers.

Table 13

Administrator Frequency of Evaluation of Tenured and Non-Tenured Special Education Teachers

Informal/ Walk-through Observation	Level	Frequency	Percent
Every 5 years	Tenure	0	0
	Non-Tenure	0	0
Every 4 years	Tenure	0	0
	Non-Tenure	0	0
Twice a year	Tenure	0	0
	Non-Tenure	2	20
Once a year	Tenure	3	30
	Non-Tenure	0	0
Monthly/Bi-Monthly	Tenure	2	20
	Non-Tenure	3	30
Total		10	100.00

Teacher effectiveness is not only impacted by the number of times that administrators observe their classrooms and teaching practice but is influenced by the amount of time that administrators spend in their classrooms. In the final questions of Section 3, administrators were asked how long they spent observing their special education teachers in the formal observation or walk-through/informal evaluation (seen below in Figures 5 and 6). All administrators reported remaining in the classroom for at least 40 minutes, which one would assume is a single class period within each district. One administrator stated approximately 45 minutes, which could be attributed to the primary grades. The average range for the walk-through/informal observation was 5-20 minutes. However, one administrator stated again that he was in the classroom for about 42 minutes.
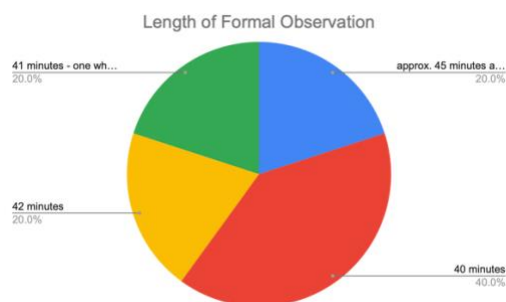
Figure 5. Length of Formal Evaluation
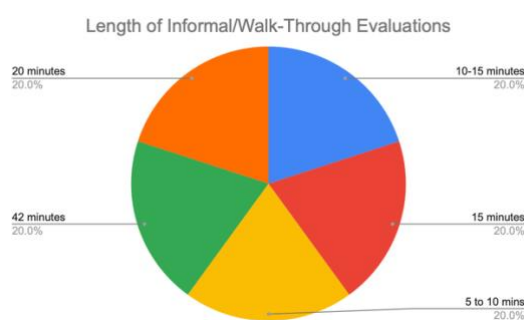
Figure 6. Length of Informal/Walk-Through Evaluations

Attributes of Feedback During Evaluation

In Section 4 of the TEP, administrators were asked to reflect on how they provide feedback, how quickly the feedback is provided, the standards addressed within the feedback, the specificity of the feedback, and how they relay the information back to their teachers. Most administrators (80%) responded within one day to their teachers with evaluation feedback, while one administrator (20%) tried to get feedback within one week. Their feedback was relayed either in-person (80%) or using the PAETEP website (20%). This data is highlighted in Figures 7 and 8 below.

Figure 7. Timeline for Evaluation Feedback

Figure 8. Form of Communication Feedback to Teachers

Within the feedback provided to teachers, most administrators referenced the Danielson Framework, Domains 2 and 3 as those they specifically look at for teacher performance. The feedback used is specific language to the Danielson Framework. Although, in some cases, the feedback may be more specific to the teacher's needs and the situation in their classroom.

Attributes of the Evaluation Context

In Section 5 of the survey, administrators were asked to consider the attributes of the evaluation by reflecting on the amount of time they spend on the evaluation process, the time allotted for professional development for special education teachers, the training programs and models for good teaching practice, the clarity of the districts' belief on evaluation, and the intended role/purpose for evaluation. The responses varied in length when asked about the time spent on the evaluation process. Two administrators looked at the process as a whole; from the time they reached out to the individual teachers and the back-and-forth communication, they

stated that it took four hours to 10 days to complete the process. Three administrators looked at

the observation and feedback process only and remarked that it took from one hour to upwards of

two and a half hours to complete the evaluation process.

Teachers and administrators were asked about the time allotted for professional

development and models for good teaching practice for special education teachers. The

administrators responded similarly to the special education teachers, even though most of the

administrators were not from the same districts as the teachers. A02 stated, "varies based on

building goals, needs of students each year, and data from the past year, PD days are allotted by

Superintendent and Curriculum Director." Two administrators responded with vague references

to a specific number of days allotted by the contract or school calendar, or even district goals. A5

stated, "This varies from year to year, but we tend to give whatever time the special education

director has requested. Typically, special ed teachers will have one session specific to them, but

that may change. Two hours?" One administrator said very little special education training is

provided in her district, but it is based on need.

The administrators rely heavily on their Directors of Special Education or Pupil

Personnel services to determine training and models of good teaching practice for their special

education teachers. Resources from PATTAN are used in addition to general training on the

Danielson Framework for teacher evaluation. There are no specific or standard programs that

local districts use to model what good special education teachers should look like in the

classroom. However, A02 specifically mentions areas of need such as IEP writing and training

on certain behaviors as areas of an identified need for special education training.

All five administrators stated that their district's belief regarding the purpose of teacher

evaluation was provided to teachers through the Act 13 state-mandated training. However,

depending on their perception, the clarity ranged from pretty clear, moderately clear to very clear. Their responses to the intended purpose of the evaluation ranged from opportunities for feedback and professional growth to future needs and goals. A05 summed up what he thought to be the purpose and his role in the following statement:

> The purpose is for teachers to reflect on their teaching as it relates to the standards for good teaching (Danielson). I help to guide them in understanding what the expectations are and how to achieve them. We provide specific, direct feedback to teachers to help them understand where they have hit the mark and where they need to maintain a focus for improvement—self-reflection and immediate supervisor feedback.

Open-Ended Questions During Semi-Structured Zoom Interview

After completing the online Google Form containing the Teacher Evaluation Profile for Administrators, the co-investigator met with each administrator individually to further reflect on the evaluation practices within their schools. The administrators were asked to identify the most valuable model for the evaluation of special education teachers, modifications to the evaluation procedures for special education teachers, and how special education teachers improve their effectiveness using the evaluation process within their district.

Administrators reported the most value in special education teacher evaluation using the *Danielson Framework – Formal Evaluation*. They did mention *Differentiated Supervision* as having some benefits, most specifically the action research component, but the overwhelming response was using the formal model. However, A04 stated, "definitely the formal observation process that a teacher goes through every three years. But at the same time, I still don't think that's very effective."

The importance of having to reflect on their practice as it aligns with the Danielson Framework was noted by A05 when he stated, "I think teachers have to become a little bit more familiar with what they're doing, and they have to more clearly understand their own methodology when they have to explain it to me." A03 also referenced the consistency of the Danielson Framework, "I think it's a really nice way for them to be able to go back even year to year."

Depending on the district and administrator, using evaluation binders and journals was another tool teachers could use to demonstrate their proficiency in the identified categories. A02 included using the student performance measure in conjunction with the formal evaluation as a meaningful way for teachers to reflect on their current practices. The inclusion of the SPM was the only mention of how the evaluation may impact student achievement. A02 stated, "the SPM will get better because it can allow a teacher to really work on something they want to work on. And there are no risks involved, and it's only beneficial to the teacher, which is then beneficial to the student."

Administrators were then asked what they would recommend to improve the evaluation procedures for special education teachers. Each administrator referenced the various roles that special education teachers take on in their respective buildings. They also included the responsibilities regarding IEP paperwork and how that might look in the evaluation process. A04 stated, "I mean, if you think about the responsibilities of a special ed teacher are way more than a regular classroom teacher when it comes to the legality of paperwork." He further expanded on the legalities of IEP paperwork and how that may impact teacher effectiveness when it comes to teacher evaluation through the following statement:

Hey, this is a great goal, but how are you going to measure that? You know, we need to

have concrete, observable data to prove that, and they're receptive to that. You know,

they learn, but they will take the coaching. And in my opinion, they do improve that way.

But do I see our special education staff trying to improve instructionally day in and day

out to become actual better instructors? You know, as far as pedagogy is concerned? No.

Um, the areas I see them improving on are paperwork and the appropriate

accommodations and the special ed side of things, not the actual teaching side of things. I

mean, even though that falls under the umbrella of a teacher.

Another perception to improve the evaluation procedures was to remove the "fear of the

observation." A01 discussed how to remove this fear through familiarity in the classroom. He

stated:

And one of the only ways I've found to do that is to get into the classroom. So, in my

special ed classrooms, for instance, I'm in there every day. So, I usually try to stop by for

breakfast with the kids or lunch with the life skills kids. Um, you know, I visit; I try to

visit just about every classroom every day, just to pop in if I can. So that way, when I

come in for a formal observation, it kind of takes the fear out of the observation because

if you have someone that's uptight or fearful of getting observed, you're not going to see a

good lesson. So, I think there must be some kind of comfort level between the

administrator doing the observation and the teacher that's being observed. So, if you don't

have that relationship developed before the observation, I don't think you will get the best

out of the teacher.

The idea of familiarity also plays into the number of follow-up interactions administrators

have with their special education teachers before and after the evaluation process. A05 stated,

"…following up to help it build and improve the skills you would, um, you would have, you'd have an opportunity to, to see them in the classroom." A04 suggested that making the observation less of a formal process may also improve the evaluation experience for all teachers. Ultimately, the administrators in the study emphasized that the most significant impact would be the ability to get into classrooms more often for a more meaningful experience "it's follow through and follow up." A05 explained:

> I mean, in a perfect world, you know we would, we would always have maybe two to three walkthroughs afterward that are looking at those particular skills to help build. And our goal would be to then give more feedback, to help, not just get our, what we saw, but then get the teachers to think about what they were thinking, did it, did it go the way they thought it would? Um, what were some of the hiccups and why, and, and making notes of that, and, you know, kind of in a sense diary mapping as they go through?

In addition, the administrators in the study expanded on using the Special Education Director or Pupil Personnel Director as a resource when evaluating the special education teachers in their schools. A02 spoke to the tools or methods that are specific to the skills of special education teachers:

> Needs to be almost a separate silo or manual or, or goals for it because I think right now, you know, each building, you know, you and I have different thoughts, and then obviously the primary and everybody else has, but, um, I think it just needs to be coming from the department, um, some systematic ways of, of helping and supporting and also evaluating, um, what we do.

Not only does a Special Education Director know about special education pedagogy, but also an understanding of the students within the classroom of the teacher being observed. A01

spoke to the idea that special education teachers may need different supports to ensure they are

successful in school. He stated, "I always thought it was valuable to have that special ed

coordinator come in as a second pair of eyes, even if I'm the one doing the evaluation." A03

expanded on the importance of including the Director of Pupil Services and stated:

> It depends on the needs and the categories of the students that they are working with and
>
> the type of PD they need. And that's where our director comes into work with the
>
> principals and the teachers to make sure that we are truly providing what they need in
>
> order to, you know, help with the success in the classroom.

The continued use of strategic professional development opportunities continued to be an

ongoing theme throughout all responses. A03 stated it best, "I think that there's just still a little

bit more tweaking that needs to be done to it to really support special ed."

When administrators were asked how their special education teachers could improve their

effectiveness using the evaluation process in the district, the responses were primarily the action

research model of *Differentiated Supervision.* As stated earlier in the chapter, using action

research benefited both teacher and student. A01 said, "And it's done properly, not only will you

get some professional development, but hopefully, you know, in the end, you find some

strategies that help kids learn at a higher level." A02 echoed this response, "I would say the

action research because many times you're growing, and you would learn more through action

research." The administrators shared that student growth and achievement are related to teacher

growth and achievement. A01 further explained:

> So, when they come up with a plan, that's all well and good, but then they have to come
>
> up with supporting data. So, you know, even if it's something as simple as you know, I'm
>
> going to move each of my students up, uh, to F and P levels from the beginning of the

year to the end of the year, I have to have midyear data, and I have to have end of year

data. So, in other words, they're going to have to have some kind of rubric or assessment

tool that they're using to gather the data. And then there are, they're going to gather that

data and put it in a format so I can see whether they're making gains or not making gains.

And then that's where the good questions come in.

So, if you're making gains, what do you think helped you to make those gains? And if

you're not making gains, why aren't you making gains? So that's one of the good things

is, is I think what helps them grow is that they must gather the data and show me the

proficiency. I think those conversations and showing the data is really where the teacher

starts to grow. Because, you know, if you're trying something that's in your plan and it's

not working and your mid-year data showing this not working well, then that's where you

can start tweaking things a little bit and maybe making adjustments so that we can see

some growth.

Another strategy for special education teachers to improve their effectiveness was more

self-reflection after the evaluation or student performance measures are complete for the year.

A05 felt that the use of reflection was a way to improve the efficacy when he stated, "I always

feel like the more you're thinking of reflecting one, your practice, you know, the better, and when

doubt, you're talking with other folks who are doing the same thing we have… that context of the

discussion, it gets the teacher to think about what they could do differently to hit those

standards."

Summary

The literature review has shown a gap in the research on special education teacher and

administrator's perception of the evaluation process and their impact on teacher effectiveness for

students with disabilities. This study was designed to investigate the perceptions of special

education teachers and administrators regarding the evaluation process in Western Pennsylvania

using the ***Danielson Framework – Formal Observation*** and ***Differentiated Supervision***. The

study was broken into two parts: the Teacher Evaluation Profile for Teachers and the Teacher

Evaluation Profile for Administrators, an online Google Form (questionnaire) with a follow-up

interview with each respondent.

  Data were analyzed by position (special education teacher and administrator). Responses

from the Teacher Evaluation Profile for Teachers were negative, with an overall tone of

frustration and disenchantment. Teachers expressed a desire to have more training on their

evaluation and be more specific to the role they play within the building or district. According to

the teachers, the evaluation process is more of a formality with little corrective feedback on their

classroom experience. The teachers expressed a greater frustration over the evaluation process in

general; one specific theme was when they were evaluated by administrators with no knowledge

of special education. In addition, they felt that the *Danielson Framework – Formal Observation*

did not identify specific criteria for their varied roles as special educators.

  Additional themes emerged that included a lack of evaluation tools aligned to special

education in general and a desire for an increased presence of administration in the special

education classroom. However, even with these concerns, they still believed there was great

value in the observation process. Still, they did not express much about being responsible for

their professional development or expanding on their knowledge to improve their effectiveness

as special educators.

  According to the administrators, the most important theme to emerge was the significant

value in the evaluation process using the *Danielson Framework – Formal Observation*. The

framework provides each teacher with a rubric, i.e., clear expectations that can be used for future reflection during and in subsequent years. For the most part, the responses from the administrators were more positive and more constructive for improving the effectiveness of special education teachers in their buildings. Another emerging theme was that effective evaluation led to improved procedures, not pedagogy, but most (60%) of the administrators were firmly in favor of using the Director of Special Education to assist in observations and recommendations for professional development. Several administrators believed that the use of action research had a more significant impact on the effectiveness of special education teachers because of their ownership in their professional development and the effect it may have on students with disabilities in their classrooms. The final theme to emerge from the administration was their frustration over the lack of follow-up opportunities in the classroom and with individual teachers. Further discussion of these themes and findings, conclusions, and recommendations will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter 5: Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions

This chapter summarizes the current study on the perception of special education teachers and administrators on teacher evaluation in Western Pennsylvania. This chapter also addresses the limitations and implications for further research consideration, as well as recommendations for current practice by both special education teachers and administrators and potential future research.

Summary of the Study

Recent policy changes in general and special education have increased pressure on school leaders and educators to prepare all students for successful post-school outcomes. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) mandated a specific set of coordinated activities that included employment, continuing education, adult services, and independent living for all students with disabilities. Studies by Johnson and Semmelroth (2014) and Stetser and Stillwell (2014) have shown that fewer than 30% of students with disabilities meet the same performance standards as their general education peers. In addition, studies continue to suggest that students with disabilities are not receiving instruction with evidence-based practices aligned with their learning needs (Johnson et al., 2019). To improve those gaps and improve academic outcomes for students with disabilities, they must have teachers who are highly effective at research-based instructional practices (Sledge & Pazey, 2013). The research continues to support the effectiveness of observation systems for improved instruction and student academic outcomes. However, there is limited evidence that these systems improve special education instructional practices and outcomes for students with disabilities (Johnson et al., 2019).

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of special education teacher evaluation by special education teachers and administrators to determine if the group perceived

how the use of teacher evaluation improved teacher effectiveness and its impact on academic outcomes for students with disabilities. Using a phenomenological research approach, the participants completed the Teacher Evaluation Profile for Educators and Administrators with a follow-up interview online using the Zoom platform. The results were transcribed and entered the MAXQDAS software to assist in analyzing the data to identify the emerging themes. Manual coding was used to aid in the trustworthiness of the data and followed the steps developed by Giorgi (1975) to generate phenomenological meaning. The meaning units were compared to the specific research questions and tied into descriptive statements (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015).

As seen in the data, five special education teachers and five administrators in five school districts in Western Pennsylvania participated in this study. Overall, the findings from the survey were favorable. Data were analyzed by position (special education teacher and administrator). Primarily, the responses reflected a high frustration from the special education teachers. Teachers commented that there was little value to the observation with principals with no special education background. Managing student behaviors and varied special education responsibilities were other areas highlighted by teachers and reflected their frustration over the evaluation process. When the teachers were asked to rate the overall quality of the evaluation system, three teachers (60%) rated the system to be below average. The responses from the administrators were more positive than those from the special education teachers. When the administrators were asked to rate the overall impact of the evaluation system on teacher professional growth, four participants (80%) rated the evaluation system as having an average or above-average impact on their teachers.

Three overarching research questions guided the study, and multiple themes developed through the survey responses and open-ended questions during the individual interviews. This

research will help inform special education teachers and administrators as they grow and

implement meaningful evaluation procedures for special education teachers and guide their

improvement to impact educational practices for students with disabilities. The guiding research

questions used for this study consisted of the following:

　　1. How do special education teachers benefit from using the PDE Danielson Framework

　　and Differentiated Supervision models to evaluate their teaching practice?

　　2. What do special education teachers in Western Pennsylvania perceive as an effective

　　practice in evaluating teaching effectiveness?

　　3. How do administrators perceive the benefit of using the PDE Danielson Framework

　　and Differentiated Supervision models as an effective practice in evaluating special

　　education teacher effectiveness?

　　The significant findings included the value of the Danielson Framework – Formal

Observation and Differentiated Supervision as they related to the evaluation of special education

teachers. Overall, the consensus from the special education teachers was that they found more

value in the Formal Observation out of the options they could utilize for their annual evaluation.

However, the value was not in the detail of the framework or its alignment with special

education roles and expectations. It was found to be more valuable to special education teachers

due to its specificity and clear expectations in the rubric. The administrators also found value in

the Formal Observation to aid in their evaluation of special education teachers. However, they

felt there was greater value in using action research, *Differentiated Supervision* for special

education teachers to improve their teaching effectiveness. Interestingly, the special education

teachers reported limited value to *Differentiated Supervision*, citing the lack of peers to partner

with for peer evaluation and book clubs that did not apply to their certification area as roadblocks. None of the teacher participants mentioned seeking professional development opportunities or topics independently of the district's required expectations.

Another significant finding from the administrators was the idea that special education teacher evaluation, as it is currently practiced, does more to improve special education procedures, not pedagogy. Many administrators mentioned using the direction of the Student Services Director to plan professional development, which was often aligned with compliance measures. Only one administrator specifically mentioned using professional development to improve classroom management or teaching practices for students with higher support needs.

Both teachers and administrators mentioned the need to look at special education evaluation more holistically. One administrator said that the evaluation could be broken down into multiple segments, allowing him to see the various roles or instructional practices the teacher may utilize within the classroom. The special education teachers felt they should be observed based on classroom management, interactions with parents, IEP writing, and instruction.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1:

How do special education teachers benefit from using the PDE Danielson Framework and

Differentiated Supervision models to evaluate their teaching practice?

An increased presence of administration in the classroom

Teacher observation continues to be the primary means of teacher evaluation in national

school districts. Most districts in Western Pennsylvania utilize the models of Formal Observation

and Differentiated Supervision. Research conducted by Lawson and Cruz (2018) found that

classroom observations provide valuable evidence for administrators and teachers to monitor and

improve the teaching practice of general educators. The time administrators spent in classrooms

shared in this study largely depended on teacher experience (non-tenured vs. tenured).

Before this study, the research lacked the perception of how special education teachers felt about

administrators' presence in their classrooms. A theme that emerged and appeared in multiple

interviews was a more significant presence of the administration. The frustration which emerged

from the teacher's perspective about the observation process was the one-shot observation that

only lasted 10-15 minutes once or twice a year. Participants mentioned that there was limited to

no relevant feedback on their evaluation, with the information provided aligned to the general

standards of the Framework for Teaching (FFT). Per Vannest and Hagen-Burke (2010), special

education teachers only spend 16% of their time on instruction, which means that a more

consistent administrator presence in the classroom is essential for teachers to receive a valuable

and relevant evaluation experience.

The data from this study suggests that not all teachers experience the same level or

amount of administrator interaction before their annual or cyclical observations. Administrators

and special education interactions may occur during IEP meetings, discussing behavioral issues

and managing their students' overall education program. Administrators may perceive that a

special educator's success in these areas equals effective instructional practices in the classroom.

The importance of administrator presence in the classroom was noted in the findings of Chapter

Four. Suppose administrators can find and make the time to get into the classroom and interact

with the students in special education. In that case, this could change special education teachers'

perceptions in the building. Administrators would have a more realistic perspective of what the

students in those classrooms can do and, ultimately, more realistic expectations regarding the

evaluation and recommendations for teachers to improve their instructional practices.

Research Question 2:

What do special education teachers in Western Pennsylvania perceive as an effective practice in

evaluating teaching effectiveness?

The administrator's background in special education brings more value to the evaluation

process.

School administrators have a variety of backgrounds and professional experiences before

taking over as building leaders. Many school administrators gain knowledge of special education

through their own experiences or required professional development. According to Steinbrecher

(2015), this lack of background knowledge makes it difficult for administrators to provide

effective feedback to special education teachers. Several teachers mentioned that their

administrators had no background in special education and preferred that they know more about

what to expect in a special education classroom. Much like the research found in the literature

review, the teachers stated that administrators might see multiple learning styles in teachers'

classrooms while managing behaviors and paraprofessionals simultaneously. The IRIS Center

(2013) noted that a special education teacher's job might be fragmented based on the teaching and clerical tasks that happen throughout the day.

Research conducted by Lawson and Knollman (2017) coincided with the teachers' concerns that certain administrators with less background in special education required more support and information when evaluating their classrooms versus those with more background knowledge. Teachers stated that administrators often had different expectations for each category of the Danielson Framework (FFT), and what one perceived as distinguished may differ from another evaluator. Research has found that principals receive little pre-service or in-service training in special education and may not be required to complete coursework before certification (Wakeman et al., 2006). This highlights the need for additional training in the Framework for Teaching (FFT) as it applies to all areas of special education. Districts could train and require that administrators reference the FFT supplements for special education teachers when conducting observations. In addition, administrators should be required to complete a certain number of professional development courses in special education. Attending professional development training with general education and special education teachers gives district administrators a perspective of what those teachers see and their current needs in the classroom. Administrators can use this data to increase their background knowledge in special education.

Different roles in special education make it difficult for meaningful evaluation.

Overwhelmingly, teachers said that the different roles in special education make the evaluation process less valuable for them. One teacher stated that she felt self-contained roles were different from co-teaching. As stated by Johnson and Semmelroth (2014), special education teachers work in varying conditions, support students with individualized goals, and work with a heterogeneous population. Due to these different conditions, special education teachers see their

evaluation as unfair compared to their general education counterparts. One even stated her preference that general education teachers be evaluated solely based on how they interact and instruct their special education students within the classroom.

This theme relates closely to those referenced earlier in the discussion. A lack of background knowledge in special education plays a critical role in the frustration felt by the teachers during their evaluation because of the different roles in their building. Suppose administrators do not understand the difference between inclusion, resource, and self-contained. In that case, it is almost impossible for them to take a framework designed for general education teachers and apply it to these roles. Holdheide (2010) surveyed districts that used teacher observations as the primary part of the evaluation process. He found that more than half (56%) of the respondents modified the observation protocol to reflect the role and skill of the special education teacher. This data supports the special education teachers' perception of this study that standard observation protocols, in this case, the *Framework for Teaching* (FFT), are not an accurate representation of the roles and functions of special education teachers. Special education teachers feel that administrator training on their roles and responsibilities would provide more value to the evaluation process.

Frustration over lack of evaluation specific to special education

The emerging theme of frustration over the lack of evaluation tools specific to special education grew out of the previously mentioned theme of special education teachers' roles in their schools. According to survey responses, multiple teachers discussed their roles and how those individual roles could be evaluated based on the different responsibilities. If special education teachers improve their effectiveness as classroom teachers, they need to experience meaningful evaluation that applies to their job responsibilities. One teacher shared that the grade

level standards she was required to teach were inappropriate for her students. Still, her

administrator was looking for her to instruct to that level during her annual observation. The

research clearly states that students with disabilities benefit from instruction that is explicit,

systematic, and individualized (Morris-Matthews et al., 2021). The use of the FFT has been

found to have limitations when evaluating special education teachers, specifically around

instruction, due to its constructivist view of learning (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014).

The findings from this emerging theme are consistent with the current literature review

and research established by Holdheide et al. (2010) that effective teacher evaluation systems for

special educators should include a framework that defines effective teaching, utilizes standard

assessment data, align with professional development opportunities, and incorporate evidence-

based practices in instruction. If special education teachers are going to improve their teaching

quality, then their evaluations need to apply to a wide range of scenarios in special education.

Boise State University and the Idaho State Department of Education have developed an

evaluation system grounded in the Danielson Framework to evaluate high-quality instructional

techniques in various teaching contexts. RESET, or Recognizing Effective Special Education

Teachers aims to connect these instructional techniques to improve student performance and

outcomes. Johnson (2015) developed 25 rubrics using the key elements of various evidence-

based practices. Lawson and Cruz (2017) further examined these rubrics identifying limitations

that school administrators may experience in their understanding of instructional practices in the

special education classroom. Their study found that peers were more reliable administrators,

supporting the need for specific evaluation tools for special education teachers. If districts use

specific evidence-based practices, at the very least, administrators should be trained on those

practices, which would assist with any needed modifications to district-approved observation tools (FFT).

Research Question 3:

How do administrators perceive the benefit of using the PDE Danielson Framework and Differentiated Supervision models as an effective practice in evaluating special education teacher effectiveness?

Danielson Framework provides value to the evaluation process.

Much like the special education teachers within the study, administrators found the Danielson Framework – Formal Observation to have the most value when observing the special education teachers within their buildings. However, one administrator stated that the FFT is still not the most effective for his special education teachers. Another shared that the FFT could use more tweaking before it becomes most effective for special education teachers. One administrator identified Domains 2 and 3 as the most important when evaluating the special education teachers in his building. This was seen in the research conducted by Jones and Brownell (2014), where states and districts chose to eliminate Domain 1 of the framework, which covers planning and preparation. Earlier in the findings, it was mentioned that special education teachers spend, on average, 16% of their time on instruction. The elimination of Domain I could impact those that spend significantly more time on planning and preparation due to the high support needs of their students. To ensure that administrators utilize the Danielson Framework effectively, they need a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the teacher and what is required within each domain to be effective.

Frustration over the lack of follow-up opportunities

Most of the administrators in the study expressed their frustration over the lack of follow-up opportunities after formal class observations and walk-throughs. One administrator spoke about the "fear of the evaluation" and how he makes time each day to get into his special education classrooms, especially the life skills class, where the teacher's responsibilities may vary significantly from those of an inclusion or resource teacher. Creating a level of comfort between the teacher and the observer generates trust and better teacher outcomes. Multiple studies highlighted the lack of special education background knowledge in the literature review. Several administrators in the study mentioned using the Special Education Director to supplement their evaluations, especially if special education was not their primary area of expertise. Even those with some background said there was a need for more systematic ways of supporting special education teachers within the district.

The action plan allows for more teacher self-reflection and autonomy.

One emerging theme that administrators focused on was using action planning to improve their effectiveness within the evaluation process and as classroom teachers. One administrator talked about effective action planning, how it could be used for professional development for the teacher, and an opportunity to identify educational strategies that would improve student outcomes. *Action research* is defined by McCutcheon and Jung (2001) as the inquiry that teachers use to improve their practice in the classroom. Bulterman-Bos (2017) stated that teachers could use action research to develop professional knowledge and then act based on what they have learned. The administrators in the study felt that action research was the only category under Differentiated Supervision that encouraged teachers to make instructional changes.

The Formal Observation (FFT) or the walk-through allows the administrator to see these changes in practice.

The practice of action planning for evaluation may need further review based on the differences in perception between administrators and teachers within this study. The administrators looked upon it to drive effective professional development opportunities, while the teachers remarked that finding options that applied to them was challenging. The importance of action research in its true form should be taught to teachers through professional development opportunities and within the context of Differentiated Supervision. Sharing the model presented by Sullivan and Glanz (2000) that includes a focus, data, analysis, and interpretation followed by action creates a mindset for school and classroom improvement. Administrators need to hold teachers accountable for the knowledge gained and its application.

Evaluations often improve procedures, not pedagogy.

Despite the focus of the study being on teacher effectiveness in improving student outcomes, most administrators shared a similar thought about the responsibilities of IEP paperwork and its role in teacher evaluation. Administrators are highly aware of the legalities around IEP paperwork and the differences between those of regular education teachers. One administrator stated that special education teachers accept redirection and assistance when writing their IEPS and improve those areas because of their evaluation. However, he said they do not improve their pedagogy. The teachers do not always reflect on their classroom practice. According to administrators, another area to enhance pedagogy was to use the student performance measures implemented through Act 13 (PDE, 2020). One administrator stated that the SPM was low risk and could only improve teacher practice, which would benefit both teacher

and student. District administrators and Special Education Directors should also look more

closely at training in evidence-based practices for special education teachers.

Limitations

The co-investigator recognizes that the results of this study may not generalize to all

districts in Western Pennsylvania due to the limited number of participants and each district's

decision to use the Danielson Framework and Differentiated Supervision Models for evaluation.

The co-investigator has provided detailed descriptions and examples of the context and

participants so that readers can judge the study's generalizability. In addition, the investigator

assumed that all participants were open and honest in their responses to the survey and interview

questions and that the survey instruments answered what they intended to measure. Limiting this

study to one geographical location (Western Pennsylvania) and the small sample size may also

limit the findings of this study.

The primary sampling was convenience sampling with snowball participation;

participants were selected based on availability and employment location (recruitment letters).

Using only available participants or within the recruiting districts may have limited the responses

to participants who may be biased and therefore chose to participate. It may mean that

generalization may not occur. As the same district employed multiple participants as the co-

investigator, this could also impact the results and responses provided by the participants. The

methodology was not seen as a limitation of the study.

Implications and Recommendations

Implications of the findings

The impact of the results highlights that there continues to be a need for multiple

considerations when evaluating special education teachers. Professional development, including

continued training on the evaluation process and evaluations specific to the roles of the special

education teachers within the school system, would benefit all teachers regardless of their

position in the school. With the data that exists, including the results of this study, administrators

may better understand where to improve the evaluation process for special education teachers.

The findings highlight the main areas that both teachers and administrators feel they need to

improve the evaluation process, teacher effectiveness, and the outcomes for students with

disabilities. Tables 5 and 7 highlight differences in perceptions between administrators and

special education teachers as to the overall value of the evaluation process as it is currently

implemented in each district. The implications clearly show there is some value in the Formal

Observation process. Still, administrators need more time in special education classrooms and

support from their Director of Special Education to better observe and evaluate special education

teachers.

Special education teacher perceptions of the evaluation process

Special education teachers expressed more value from the Formal Observation due to the

clear expectations and the rubric (Danielson Framework) provided to measure teaching

effectiveness. However, each special education teacher stated that there were negatives to the

FFT for special education teachers. To improve the evaluation process, school administrators

should provide more explicit training on the Danielson Framework (FFT) and what that may

look like in the special education classroom. The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE)

has supplemental materials that align with each of the domains within the framework of what

effective special education teachers look like, regardless of their role. Many districts throughout

the United States have aligned the Danielson Framework to practices specific to special

educators and include specific examples for each subcategory. The current research supports

using these observation instruments as effective ways to evaluate teachers. More specifically,

those made for special populations, including the Recognizing Effective Special Education

Teachers (RESET), were designed to measure the implementation of evidence-based practices

for students with disabilities (Crawford, Johnson, Moylan, Zheng, 2019) to provide special

education teachers with more actionable feedback in their instruction.

Differentiated Supervision puts the responsibility on the special education teacher to take

on a more active role in their evaluation. However, the teachers in the study mentioned topics

irrelevant to their position or peers who were not in their field as roadblocks to a successful

evaluation experience. Multiple participants highlighted the lack of a specific evaluation tool for

special education teachers. However, the desire for alternate evaluation measures did not

necessarily align with how well they taught the students in their classroom but more with their

additional responsibilities as case managers (IEP writing, parent communication, collaboration).

Administrator perceptions of the evaluation process

Although administrators thought they had a solid understanding of the Danielson

Framework – Formal Observation process, there were multiple instances when they stopped and

began to reflect on how effective it was when evaluating special education teachers. The various

roles and responsibilities of the special education teachers in their buildings, the lack of time to

get into special education classrooms, follow-up after observations, professional development

constraints, and the need for support from Special Education Directors became reoccurring

themes throughout the interviews. Several administrators spoke about breaking up the

observation into parts or opportunities for more time in the classroom or IEP meetings.

Even though the administrators mentioned the need for possible changes or support to improve

the effectiveness of special education teacher evaluation, there were no specific references to

what that might look like besides using the FFT. One administrator did include the use of the

Danielson Framework scenarios as one way of improving his evaluation of the special education

teachers in the building. However, there were no other administrators that mentioned the tool.

Even though all administrators mentioned using the Special Education Director as a

resource for professional development or evaluation, the effectiveness of that role appeared to

vary by district. Most administrators appeared to see special education teachers as effective if

their paperwork complied. One went so far as to say his teachers improved their procedures, not

their pedagogy.

Recommendations and Future Research

The importance of this research was to assess the perceptions of special education

teachers and administrators of the evaluation process for special education teachers, the

implications for teacher effectiveness, and the effect on academic outcomes for students with

disabilities. Not all administrators have the same background, if any, in special education other

than the pre-service or in-service training provided within the district. Special education teachers

have varying roles and responsibilities within their schools. The administration does not always

share expectations for evaluations and effective teaching in the same way in each district. Even

with Act 13 (PDE, 2021) implementation and the PAETEP website, special education teachers

reported inconsistencies in their understanding of their evaluation and what their administrators

were looking for as effective teaching practice. While this study was conducted in Western

Pennsylvania, the need for professional development or coursework for administrators in special

education can be applied to all areas of Pennsylvania. Clear expectations and professional

development opportunities in evidence-based practices for special education teachers are also

necessary to improve the post-school outcomes for students with disabilities.

The research and analysis of this current study will be beneficial in addressing several concerns with special education teacher evaluation. Identifying the need for professional development for building administrators in all areas of special education will lessen the frustration felt by special education teachers when they are observed. Administrators should encourage special education teachers to take on more ownership in their professional development topics for the Differentiated Supervision model. Building and district administrators should consider professional development opportunities for compliance and evidence-based practices for special education teachers.

Future research can build upon this study by enhancing the interview questions, specifically in the areas of professional development for both administrators and special education teachers. The questions could be more specifically targeted to professional development topics that would improve teacher and evaluator effectiveness. One limitation of this study was the lack of questioning to follow up on why the teachers felt action research was not valuable. Still, the administrators found it to be an opportunity to make the most changes to their teaching practice. A future study could focus more on professional development opportunities, how they improve teacher effectiveness in the classroom, and the subsequent impact on the academic success of students with disabilities. Further research could also examine teacher motivation and its role in professional development and student success.

Another possibility is to change the study from qualitative to quantitative and increase the number of teacher and administrator participants. Additional open-ended questions could be included to create a mixed-methods study that would allow for clearly defined ratings and personal perceptions of the special education teacher evaluation process.

Conclusions from the Current Study

Before this study, the research lacked in sharing the perceptions of both special education teachers and administrators within the evaluation process. This study aimed to address that literature gap by interviewing special education teachers and administrators across multiple districts, varying grade levels, and roles as special educators. The importance of this study is not only to continue the development in this field of research but to use the data to develop additional strategies to improve the evaluation process of special education teachers and ultimately improve outcomes for students with disabilities in their classrooms. As seen in the data, special education teachers and administrators face similar frustrations with teacher evaluation. This study emerges as another step for future research and a plan of action to improve teacher effectiveness and improve the outcomes for students with disabilities. As of the 2020-21 school year, 7.2 million, or 15% of all public-school students, are eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (NCES, 2022). With the upward trend in the students served under IDEA in public schools, the need for effective special education teachers continues to be a priority for administrators.

When working as a special education teacher, it is presumed that teachers have been trained in evidence-based practices that effectively meet the needs of all students with disabilities. In addition, it could be argued that the primary focus for special education teachers is the education of students with disabilities (Eisenman et al., 2011). Unfortunately, depending upon state licensure and school district, special education teachers may teach only one type of disability or those with multiple disabilities. They may be in a support setting or in a general education classroom. The instruction they provide may be remedial, developmental, or strategic, depending on the needs of the students (Friend, 2018). Special education teachers have

additional demands such as IEP meetings, writing reports, testing, data collection, and

scheduling which present additional challenges to their effectiveness in the classroom (The IRIS

Center, 2013).

One could also assume that administrators are trained to recognize and evaluate those

practices as they happen in the classroom. However, after years of research, there continues to be

a gap in administrator pre-service and in-service training in special education. Rodl et al. (2018)

proposed that the lack of training for administrators has implications beyond classroom

observation and impacts high-stakes decisions (tenure and retention) and low-stakes decisions

such as professional development and placement.

Concerning the research conducted, there is still little change in practice in some districts.

Special education training for administrators varies by program, and individual school districts

dictate professional development needs. The Danielson Framework for Teaching (FFT)

continues to be utilized in conjunction with Formal Observation and Differentiated Supervision

as the primary evaluation means in Western Pennsylvania. Even with the changes adopted by

PDE (2020) in Act 13, special education teachers are evaluated based on IEP goals or PVAAS

scores for tested subjects, student performance measures, and their observation and classroom

practice.

With the increased numbers of special education students within public school districts,

special education teachers and administrators need to evolve and find new ways to educate

themselves on the academic and behavioral needs of the students in their buildings. We cannot

expect that the students enrolling today have the exact needs as those who enrolled in the past.

The COVID-19 pandemic, online instruction, and economic hardships are changing the needs of

all students, but students with disabilities are being impacted the most. Special education

teachers must seek out professional development opportunities. Administrators must ensure they are visible in the classroom and recognize the needs of the students and their teachers. Educators and administrators must take on more responsibility to improve their practice and post-school outcomes for students with disabilities.

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Appendix A: Consent to Participate

Approved
5/16/2022
—————————
Slippery Rock University
Institutional Review Board

SlipperyRock
University
of Pennsylvania

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Study: Special Education Teacher and Administrator Perception of the Teacher Evaluation Process in Western Pennsylvania

Principal Investigator: Dr. Toni Mild, Assistant Professor, toni.mild@sru.edu

Co-Investigator: Amanda White, arw1005@sru.edu or (412) 596-0391

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, at any time, without penalty. To participate, you must be a special education teacher or school administrator currently working in a school district in Western Pennsylvania.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. The information shared may help special education teachers and administrators in the future. You will not receive any direct benefit from participation in this study.

Details about this study are discussed below. You will have the opportunity to print and/or save a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study, please refer to the contact information listed above.

Important Information about the Research Study

Things you should know:

- The study aims to learn about the various perspectives special education teachers and administrators have on the evaluation procedures in Western Pennsylvania and their impact on teacher effectiveness. In no way is this study to cause conflict between teachers and their administrative supervisors, but rather to discuss possible solutions or suggestions to improve or enhance the current evaluation procedures. Upon completing this research, recommendations to enhance or strengthen evaluation practice will be provided based on the teacher and administrator feedback.
- If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete a Google Form questionnaire about the evaluation process pertaining to your role (teacher or administrator). This will follow up with a brief Zoom interview.
- Each interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes but could be shorter based on the time it takes to respond to the evaluation profile.
- Risks or discomforts from this research include sharing personal experiences about your evaluations as a special education teacher or administrator of special education teachers.
- The study will potentially benefit special education teachers and administrators as they continue their practice in the classroom or within the school system.

- Taking part in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and you can stop at any time.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research project.

What is the Study About, and Why are We Doing it?

The study aims to learn about the various perspectives special education teachers and administrators have on the evaluation procedures in Western Pennsylvania and their impact on teacher effectiveness. In no way is this study to cause conflict between teachers and their administrative supervisors, but rather to discuss possible solutions or suggestions to improve or enhance the current evaluation procedures. Upon completing this research, a list of recommendations to enhance or enhance evaluation practice will be provided based on the teacher and administrator feedback.

What Will Happen if You Take Part in This Study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a two-part interview process. You will be asked to review and sign the Consent Form. Once there are at least four special education teachers and four administrators, the study will be closed to future participants. Your participation will include:

- Once you agree to participate, you will receive a Google Form that will include the Teacher/Administrator Evaluation Profile for you to complete. This should take about 20-30 minutes.
- This will follow up with an individual interview where you answer three additional questions from the principal investigator (researcher).
- Interviews will be conducted using Zoom ® applications online and audio recorded to be transcribed by the principal investigator. Participants will be asked to keep their videos off to add an additional component of confidentiality.
- You will be asked questions about your perceptions, feelings, and experiences regarding the teacher evaluation process in Western Pennsylvania.
- All data collected will be anonymous and kept secure with the principal investigator until the study is complete and submitted (up to three years based on IRB protocol). Once approved for submission, the data will be deleted.

How Could You Benefit From This Study?

Although you will not directly benefit from being in this study, others might benefit because future recommendations to improve or enhance the teacher evaluation process may be shared within participating school districts.

What Risks Might Result From Being in This Study?

You might experience some risks from being in this study. Due to the discussion of the sensitive topic of teacher evaluation (performance measures), there may be some emotional discomfort during the interview process, such as anxiety, worry, frustration, or anger over the evaluation process of special education teachers. All interviews will be anonymous, and the principal investigator will maintain the confidentiality of all participants. Participants are encouraged to locate a private location for the interviews, and the principal investigator will do the same. Even though the principal investigator can identify all study participants within the recruitment process, consent form signing, and interview process, participants will complete the Evaluation Profile anonymously. Participant confidentiality will be maintained during all subsequent stages. Names and information provided will not be shared with school administrators and other parties. The interview will ask about their attitudes and experiences regarding the teacher evaluation process. Information that may identify them will not be asked during the interview process. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time.

To avoid the risk of being criticized for investigating a potentially sensitive topic, this study is approved by all parties who have authority for such approval. All parties are aware that the principal investigator is independent in her work and is not expected to share sensitive data with anyone. There may be uncommon or previously unknown risks. You should report any problems to the researcher.

How Will We Protect Your Information?

To ensure privacy:
- All records will be assigned a number (a T for teachers and an A for administrators, i.e., T01 will represent teacher participant number one) used in all correspondence and the data presented. There will be no identifying information used. Once the Zoom ® interview is scheduled, the principal interview will set up the meeting using the identified number given.
- The file that links the participants' names with the numbers assigned will be kept in a separate folder which will be password protected, as will the document itself, to ensure additional security.
- Only the principal investigator will have access to the individually identifying data and documents.

What Will Happen to the Information We Collect About You After the Study is Over?

Participants will not be identified in any report or publication about this study. Although every effort will be made to keep the research records private, there may be times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of such records, including personal information. If disclosure is ever needed, all steps allowable will be taken to protect the privacy of personal information. Interviews will be audio recorded using Zoom ® so that they may be transcribed as needed and coded for data about the study. All recordings will be kept in a locked file on a personal

computer drive accessible only by the researcher. Recordings and evaluation profiles will be held for up to three years, as per IRB protocol, and then digitally destroyed. No paper copies of any recordings or questionnaires will be produced.

What Other Choices Do I Have if I Don't Take Part in this Study?

If you choose not to participate, there are no alternatives. You do not have to participate, and you can stop at any time.

Your Participation in this Research is Voluntary

It is totally up to you to decide to be in this research study. Participating in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you decide to withdraw before this study is completed, your data will remain anonymous and kept secure with the principal investigator (up to three years based on IRB protocol). Your participation may be terminated if, at any time the integrity of the data is compromised, or the risk of your participation outweighs the benefits of your participation in the study.

Contact Information for the Study Team and Questions about the Research

If you have questions about this research, you may contact
Principal Investigator **[Dr. Toni Mild, toni.mild@sru.edu]**
Co-Investigator: **[Amanda White, arw1005@sru.edu and (412) 596-0391].**

Contact Information for Questions about Your Rights as a Research Participant

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

Institutional Review Board
Slippery Rock University
104 Maltby, Suite 008
Slippery Rock, PA 16057
Phone: (724)738-4846
Email: irb@sru.edu

<u>Your Consent</u>

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. I will give you a copy of this document for your records. I will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about, and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. A copy of this signed Consent Form has been given to me.

_____   _____   _____

Printed Participant Name   Signature of Participant   Date

By signing below, I indicate that the participant has read and understands the details in this document and has been given a copy to the best of my knowledge.

___Amanda White_____   _____   _____

    Printed Name   Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

Photo/Audiotape/Videotape Release Form:

I request the use of audiotape (Zoom recording) material of you as part of my study. I specifically ask your consent to use this material, as I deem proper, specifically, for my research as it relates to my dissertation study. Regarding the use of your voice in audiotape (Zoom recording), please check one of the following boxes below:

☐   I do…

☐   I do not…

Give unconditional permission for the investigators to utilize audiotapes (Zoom recording) of me.

_____   _____   _____

Print Name   Participant Signature   Date

PLEASE NOTE: Should you choose not to allow your voice to be used, we can still benefit from your **inclusion as a research study participant.**

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Special Education Teacher and Administrator Perception of the Teacher Evaluation Process in Western Pennsylvania

Dear Educator,

My name is Amanda White, a special education teacher in Pennsylvania. I am currently pursuing my doctoral degree at Slippery Rock University. My dissertation will examine the perceptions of special education teachers and administrators on the teacher evaluation models used in school districts in western Pennsylvania and their impact on teacher effectiveness and achievement of students with disabilities.

I am writing to request your participation in my research. The website administrator/school superintendent gave me permission to conduct my study at your site. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and there are no consequences for deciding not to participate. The study consists of an online questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The entire interview should take no more than 45-60 minutes. The questionnaire is confidential, and you may decide not to answer any question(s) and may withdraw from the research at any time without penalty.

Please read the included consent form. By signing the online consent form, you consent to participate in this study and acknowledge that you are 18 or older, the minimum age to participate in this study.

Your participation in the survey is voluntary, and all responses will be kept confidential. No personally identifiable information will be associated with your answers to any reports of this data. The Slippery Rock Institutional Review (IRB) has approved this questionnaire and subsequent semi-structured interview. Should you have any comments or questions, please feel free to contact me at arw1005@sru.edu or (412) 596-0391. If you have questions as a research participant, you may contact the SRU IRB at irb@sru.edu or (724) 738-4848.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Amanda White
Slippery Rock University

Doctoral Candidate

Appendix C: Teacher Evaluation Profile for Teachers

I plan to set up this questionnaire on Google Forms. The document lists the instructions, questions, and answer options I will provide. The actual formatting will be somewhat different due to the nature of Google Forms.

In the state of Pennsylvania, teacher evaluation may include the following procedures:

- The Danielson Framework (rubric)
- Classroom observations
- Meetings with teacher evaluators (pre-and post-observation)
- Peer evaluation – Differentiated supervision
- Action research – Differentiated supervision

When reference is made in the following questionnaire, it may encompass any of the procedures followed for teacher evaluation within your school district. Please follow the instructions carefully and set aside about 20-30 minutes to provide clear and complete responses.

Overview

This form will allow you to describe in detail the most recent experience with teacher evaluation in your school district. Your responses will be combined with those of other teachers to create a picture of the perceptions of teacher evaluation for special education teachers. This questionnaire aims to determine how the teacher evaluation process can positively influence teacher effectiveness and success for students with disabilities. Your honest responses are essential and will remain anonymous.

This questionnaire was designed to be comprehensive in scope. It is comprised of open-ended responses to generate a clear picture of the teacher evaluation process and its impact on students with disabilities.

Instructions

Please reflect on your most recent experience with the evaluation process in your school district. Consider the entire evaluation process, including planning for evaluation, observations, or other procedures and feedback to guide your responses to the following questions.

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. How many years have you been teaching?
   - o 0-3 years
   - o 4-6 years
   - o 7-10 years
   - o More than 10 years
2. How many years in your current district?
   - o 0-3 years
   - o More than 3 years
3. What is your current teaching assignment?
   - o Self-contained
   - o Resource
   - o Inclusion
   - o Co-teacher
   - o Other _____
4. What was the date of your most recent teacher evaluation?
5. What form of evaluation did you use (Danielson Framework, peer evaluation, action research)?
   - o Formal Observation (Danielson Framework)
   - o Peer Evaluation
   - o Action Research
   - o Other _____

Section 2: Overall Rating

6. How would you rate the overall quality of the teacher evaluation process in your district?
7. How would you rate the overall impact of the evaluation on your professional practice (changes in your teaching practices and understanding of the teacher/learning process)?
8. What would you consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of the current evaluation system?
   a. Strengths:
   b. Weaknesses:

Section 3: Rating Attributes of Evaluation

Consider the attributes and standards (criteria) of the procedures used during your most recent evaluation to respond to the following questions.

9. How were the standards communicated to you for your evaluation?

10. How were the standards provided to you?

11. How do the standards align with your individual teaching assignment?

12. What sources of performance information were considered as part of your evaluation?

   o Observation of classroom performance

   o Meetings with evaluators

   o Classroom artifacts

   o Student performance measures

   o Peer evaluations

   o Self-evaluation

13. How often did you receive a formal/clinical observation during the most recent year?

   o One evaluation

   o More than one

   o No formal evaluation

14. How often did you receive an informal/walk-through observation during the most recent year?

   o One informal evaluation/walk-through

   o More than one informal evaluation/walk-through

   o No walk-through evaluations

Section 4: Attributes of Feedback During Evaluation

15. How often did you receive formal feedback after each evaluation (formal or informal)?

16. How quickly did you receive feedback after each evaluation?

   o Within one day

   o Within the week

   o Other _____

17. Which standards were addressed within the feedback provided by the evaluator?

18. How specific was the information provided within the feedback? Did the feedback pertain to your certification area?

19. What was the nature of the feedback provided after the evaluation?
    - In-person
    - Email
    - PAETEP website

Section 5: Attributes of the Evaluation Context:

Consider the attributes and standards (criteria) of the procedures used during your most recent evaluation to respond to the following questions.

20. How much time did you spend on the evaluation process, including your time and that of other participants?

21. How much time is allotted for professional development during the school year?

22. What training programs and models of good teaching practices are available to you as a special educator?

23. How clear was the district's belief regarding the purpose of the evaluation?

24. What was the intended role/purpose of the evaluation?

Section 6: Additional Questions (Semi-Structured Zoom Interview)

25. Of the practices utilized in your district for teacher evaluation, which model is the most valuable in your role as a special education teacher?

26. How do you use the evaluation process to improve your practice or effectiveness as a special education teacher?

27. How does the evaluation take into consideration a special education teacher's specific roles and responsibilities during the school year?

28. Thinking about your experiences with the evaluation process, what changes do you think need to be made for special education teacher evaluation?

Appendix D: Teacher Evaluation Profile for Administrators

I plan to set up this questionnaire on Google Forms. The document lists the instructions, questions, and answer options I will provide. The actual formatting will be somewhat different due to the nature of Google Forms.

In the state of Pennsylvania, teacher evaluation may include the following procedures:

- The Danielson Framework (rubric)
- Classroom observations
- Meetings with teacher evaluators (pre and post-observation)
- Peer evaluation – Differentiated supervision
- Action research – Differentiated supervision

When reference is made in the following questionnaire, it may encompass any of the procedures followed for teacher evaluation within your school district.

Overview

This form has been designed to allow you to describe in detail the most recent experience with teacher evaluation in your school district. Your responses will be combined with those of other teachers to create a picture of the perceptions of teacher evaluation for special education teachers. This questionnaire aims to determine how the teacher evaluation process can positively impact teacher effectiveness and success for students with disabilities. Your honest responses are essential and will remain anonymous.

This questionnaire is designed to be comprehensive in scope. It comprises open-ended responses to generate a clear picture of the teacher evaluation process and its impact on students with disabilities. Please follow the instructions carefully and set aside about 20-30 minutes to provide clear and complete responses.

Instructions

Please reflect on your most recent experience with the evaluation process in your school district. Consider the entire evaluation process, including planning for evaluation, observations, or other procedures and feedback to guide your responses to the following questions.

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. How many years have you been an administrator?
    - o 0-3 years
    - o 4-6 years
    - o 7-10 years
    - o More than 10 years

2. How many years in your current district?
    - o 0-3 years
    - o More than 3 years

3. What is your current grade level assignment?
    - o Primary (K-2)
    - o Elementary (3-5)
    - o Middle (6-8)
    - o High School (9-12)

4. What form of evaluation does your district use (Danielson Framework, peer evaluation, action research) to evaluate teachers?
    - o Formal observation (Danielson Framework)
    - o Peer evaluation
    - o Action Research
    - o All of the above
    - o Other _____

Section 2: Overall Rating

5. How would you rate the overall impact of the teacher evaluation process on teacher professional growth?

    1- No impact   5 – Significant Impact

6. How would you rate the overall impact of the teacher evaluation process on student learning?

    1 – No Impact   5 – Significant Impact

7. How would you rate the overall impact of the teacher evaluation process on student achievement?

       1 – No Impact.   5 – Significant Impact

8. How would you rate the overall effect of the teacher evaluation process on the quality of the special education teachers in your district?

       1 – No Impact.   5 – Significant Impact

9. How would you rate the overall impact of the teacher evaluation process on the goals that you develop with teachers each year?

       1 – No Impact   5 – Significant Impact

Section 3: Rating Attributes of Evaluation

Consider the attributes and standards (criteria) of the procedures used during your most recent evaluation to respond to the following questions.

10. What sources of performance information were considered as part of your evaluation (i.e., observation of classroom performance, meetings with evaluators, classroom artifacts, student performance indicators, peer evaluations, self-evaluation)?

11. How often did you conduct a formal/clinical observation for tenured special education teachers during the most recent year?

12. How often did you conduct an informal/walk-through observation for tenured special education teachers during the most recent year?

13. How often did you conduct a formal/clinical observation during the most recent year for non-tenured special education teachers?

14. How often did you conduct an informal/walk-through observation during the most recent year for non-tenured special education teachers?

15. What is the average length of a formal observation?

16. What is the average length for an informal observation?

Section 4: Attributes of Feedback During Evaluation

17. How often do you provide formal feedback after each evaluation (formal or informal)?

18. How quickly do you provide feedback after each evaluation?

19. Which standards do you most often address within the feedback provided after the evaluation?

20. How specific was the information provided within the feedback?

21. What was the nature of the feedback provided after the evaluation?

Section 5: Attributes of the Evaluation Context:

Consider the attributes and standards (criteria) of the procedures used during your most recent evaluation to respond to the following questions.

22. How much time did you spend on the evaluation process, including your time and that of other participants?

23. How much time is allotted for professional development specifically for special education teachers during the school year?

24. What training programs and models of good teaching practices are available to special educators in the district?

25. How clear was the district's belief regarding the purpose of the evaluation?

26. What was the intended role/purpose of the evaluation?

Section 6: Additional Questions (Semi-Structured Interview via Zoom)

27. Of the practices utilized in your district for teacher evaluation, which model is the most valuable in your role as an evaluator of special education teachers?

28. What would you recommend to improve the evaluation procedures for special education teachers?

29. How do special education teachers improve their effectiveness using the evaluation process in your district?

Appendix E: Semi-structured Interview Questions Script

Special Education Teachers:

1. **Survey question number 25** asked, **"**Of the practices utilized in your district for teacher evaluation, which model is the most valuable in your role as a special education teacher?" Responses may include formal observation, peer-to-peer observation, or action research.

Based on the participant's response, the researcher will follow up with questions for further clarification.

2. **Survey question number 26** asked, "How do you use the evaluation process to improve your practice or effectiveness as a special education teacher?"
Responses may include professional development, work with peers within the building/district, or no change.

Based on the participant's response, the researcher will follow up with questions for further clarification.

3. **Survey question number 27** asked, "How does the evaluation take into consideration a special education teacher's specific roles and responsibilities during the school year?"

Based on the participant's response, the researcher will follow up with questions for further clarification.

4. **Survey question number 28** asked, "Thinking on your experiences with the evaluation process, what changes do you think need to be made for special education teacher evaluation?"

Based on the participant's response, the researcher will follow up with questions for further clarification.

School Administrators

5. **Survey question number 27** asked, "Of the practices utilized in your district for teacher evaluation, which model is the most valuable in your role as an evaluator of special education teachers?

    Responses may include formal observation, peer-to-peer observation, or action research.

Based on the participant's response, the researcher will follow up with questions for further clarification.

6. **Survey question number 28** asked, "What would you recommend to improve the evaluation procedures for special education teachers?"

Based on the participant's response, the researcher will follow up with questions for further clarification.

7. **Survey question number 29** asked, "How do special education teachers improve their effectiveness using the evaluation process in your district?"

Based on the participant's response, the researcher will follow up with questions for further clarification.

General Probes
    a) Would you be able to give me an example of that?
    b) Could you tell me more about that?
    c) What does that look like in your experience?

Thank you so much for your time. The information that you have shared through the evaluation profile and your time today is essential in helping me explore how special education teachers and administrators view the evaluation process.

Appendix F: Permission to use Teacher Evaluation Profile (TEP)

Permission to use TEP

JJ Jeff Jones <Jeff.Jones@educationnorthwest.org> 👍 ↩ ↩ → …
Tue 1/21/2020 3:41 PM
To: White, Amanda R

You are welcome to use the TEP for your study as long as you credit Education Northwest.

Thanks,
Jeff

From: jeff.jones@educationnorthwest.org <jeff.jones@educationnorthwest.org> on behalf of Amanda White via Education Northwest <jeff.jones@educationnorthwest.org>
Sent: Monday, January 20, 2020 10:00 AM
To: Jeff Jones <Jeff.Jones@educationnorthwest.org>
Subject: Permission to use TEP

<<EXTERNAL>>

Category: General Information

Your Name: Amanda White

Your Email: arw1005@sru.edu

Message:
I am currently working on my dissertation in the area of special education teacher evaluation and I am interested in using the "Teacher Evaluation Profile (TEP)" in my study. My focus is on teacher perception of the evaluation process so I would only be utilizing the TEP for teachers as an instrument in my study.

Could you please tell me who to contact in your organization? Thank you.

Alternate email: mandy.rwhite@gmail.com