A Qualitative Research Study on the Impact of Administrative Support and Access to

Culturally Responsive Tools Among Teachers Serving At-Risk Populations

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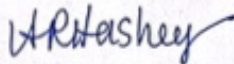
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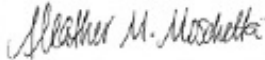
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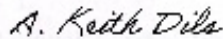Dissertation Committee Chair

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Dedication

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Abstract

This qualitative research study analyzed open-ended survey responses from teachers and administrators regarding perceptions of the support administrators provide for culturally responsive practices and addressing the needs of at-risk and underserved populations. For purposes of this research study, the teacher group included educators who have an impact on the day-to-day functions within the classroom environment: paraprofessionals, assistants, and related service providers. Building-level principals, assistant principals, and central office administration including superintendent, assistant superintendent, curriculum supervisor, and special education supervisor(s) were included in the administrator group. Responses from both groups were reviewed separately and comparatively to determine whether there were similarities and differences between teachers' perceptions of the supports provided by administrators and administrators' perceptions of the supports they provide. Qualitative data were reviewed and evaluated to provide an analysis aligned with the study's research questions. Participants were from a diverse group of professionals across Pennsylvania. Survey responses maintained full confidentiality of the participants for protection from any potential negative consequences or outcomes from their participation in the research project. A comprehensive review of the literature was completed to provide comparative data to complement the study results and analysis of individual survey responses. The overall outcome of the study is dependent on and limited based on the participant sample size and diversity of the participant environments.

Keywords: administrator, confidential, correlation, culturally responsive, diversity, hand-coding, survey-based perception, participant, professional development, qualitative research study, retention, support, systematic inequalities, teacher

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Teachers perceive support from their supervisors as the most important factor in their internal commitment to their schools. Creating a fair environment is noted as one of the first actions that supervisors must take so that teachers feel that their contributions are valued. One component of a fair environment is including teachers in the decision-making process, and teachers respond positively to such involvement (Nayir, 2012). When teachers feel that their voice is heard, they are more likely to advocate for important concerns. Bradley-Levine (2021) reviewed teacher-led advocacy through the lens of ethical leadership. Foster (1989, as cited in Bradley-Levine, 2021) concluded that ethical school leaders assume the responsibility of taking an interest in social issues as they relate to public school, community, world, and pursuing change at all levels. There is strong evidence that teachers act towards social change when they are led by ethical leaders because their leaders model positive change behaviors. Teacher perceptions of support from their leaders affects their level of organizational commitment (Nayir, 2012).

A key role of school administrators is their responsibility for the continuity of all systems in the school, the foremost of which is the education of the students. School principals should provide structure and support to help teachers strengthen their practice through effective professional development. The exchange of information and ideas in professional learning provides teachers and students the opportunity for new experiences in the classroom (Karacabey, 2020). Unfortunately, many teachers assert that administrators do not provide support for meaningful teacher professional development, individual self-advocacy development, or teacher autonomy (Balyer et al., 2017). Too often administrators set organizational objectives that teachers are expected to commit to, but they do not always provide the support needed for

teachers to internalize and meet these objectives. For teachers to internalize the organizational

goals, they must perceive organizational support. When they feel supported, teachers will

commit to and put in effort to achieve the objectives of the school. Research from Ernst (2012)

found both moderate and significant relationships between teachers' identification of their own

organizational commitment and their perceptions of organizational support.

Administrative support can be viewed in various capacities (Ernst, 2012). A study by

Okeke and Mtyuda (2017) looked at teacher perspectives on job dissatisfaction. Maslow's

Hierarchy of Needs was considered in determining motivations that influenced teacher behavior,

specifically dissatisfied workers leaving for other positions or considering a different career path

(Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017). Data collected included informal observations and examination of

school documents, school records, attendance registers, and teacher record books. One of the

needs that the data revealed as not being met was safety. Additionally, teacher well-being and

social transformation were found to be correlated. The researchers concluded that administrators

could support teachers by creating and maintaining a safe environment and fostering a sense of

well-being through the culture and climate of the school. To address these concerns, however,

the school and teachers' needs must be a priority for the principal (Karacabey, 2020).

Teacher retention is an important factor for student success, which can also be influenced

by administrative support. Retention of teachers of color is especially important when

considering the findings from a study by Farinde et al. (2016), which suggests that there is a

black teacher shortage and that highly qualified black teachers are uniquely positioned to teach

black students because of their level of cultural understanding of their students' home and

community life. A study of students with exceptionalities in Catholic schools by Bradley-Levine

(2021) reports from research by Collay (2010), which found that when teachers share similar

cultural backgrounds or educational experiences as their students, the teachers, as well as students, become motivated.

Retention rates are reported to be lower among black teachers than those of their white teacher peers (Farinde et al., 2016). From a historical context, black teachers evolved from emancipation and segregation to entering and remaining in the education profession with the goal of directly contributing to the advancement of the collective black community. Demographic data on teacher majorities reveal that teaching is a white female-dominated profession, with a disproportionately lower black female population relative to representation of our nation's classrooms. Farinde et al.'s (2016) study examined salary, teacher workload, and school conditions, all of which are factors related to teacher retention. Salaries are often noted as a reason why teachers leave the profession. Retention is also noted to be affected by teacher workload. Additional influences over teachers' decisions to remain in the classroom can include conditions such as student behavior, resources, administrative support, influence over decision-making, and collegiality (Farinde et al., 2016).

Retention of teachers working with students with the greatest need, including students living in poverty, students with exceptionalities, and students of color, is critical. Society marginalizes children with exceptionalities (Bradley-Levine, 2021) as well as students of color. Ernst (2012) reports in her study that administrator support is important in teachers' use of real-world learning experiences, such as environmental-based education (EBE), to foster inclusion of all students within the population of the school. In an EBE environment, core subject areas are integrated with sources of real-world learning experiences and those relevant to the student population. A variety of instructional approaches, such as place-based education, are used. When encouraging administrator support for EBE, professional development, including mentoring,

observations, conferences, and self-study, as well as reducing the obstacle of safety/liability concerns appears to be of importance (Ernest, 2012). School administrators can use contractual agreements to compel teachers to engage in the important free and appropriate education of students with exceptionalities. Sanctioning teachers refusing to meet needs of students with exceptionalities can support both educators and students (Bradley-Levine, 2021). However, this practice does not apply universally to all schools, as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) does not apply the same to Catholic schools as it does public schools (Taylor, 2005, as cited in Bradley-Levine, 2021). Regardless, educators maintain a moral obligation to provide the best education possible to their students. Attracting and retaining high-quality teachers and providing them with the resources they need to engage students and raise achievement must be a primary goal of school administrators.

Purpose

In the educational arena, teacher support takes on many forms. Teachers' perceptions of acceptance and lack of support can vary across different educational settings and environments. The purpose of this research project was to assess teacher perceptions of administrator support and the extent to which administrators provide teachers with culturally responsive resources. The study sought to determine the impact of these factors on teachers' decisions to remain in their position and/or in the profession. Data were collected via review of literature and results from an online open-ended survey of teachers and administrators in school districts located in Pennsylvania during the spring semester of the 2022-23 academic school year. The participants are from diverse backgrounds, educational environments, and geographical areas. This allowed the research to provide evidence from a broad range of knowledge and experiences across various academic settings and grade levels. To protect the privacy and job security of the

individuals, strict methods of confidential data collection were used to record and present research. The data collection and reporting process did not identify the participant or specific school district/region or educational entity used to assist in determining the impact of administrative support or lack of support and teacher reactions to having or not having access to culturally responsive resources resulting in teachers looking for other jobs, directly causing teacher turnover or dissatisfaction in the workplace.

Research Questions

To support the research and collect appropriately focused data, three broad research questions were developed based on data and conclusions from a pilot study completed by the researcher for a course taken through Slippery Rock University in partial fulfillment for the Doctor of Special Education Degree (Smith, 2018). These questions were posed for the purpose of this research project and dissertation:

1. What are teacher beliefs, expectations, and perceptions of how their administrator should support them?

2. What are appropriately culturally responsive approaches that teachers should have knowledge, appropriate supports, and access to so effective education outcomes can be achieved for all student populations?

3. Are there correlations between teacher motivation, teacher retention, and student achievement?

Methodology

A sampling plan is defined by Tracy (2013) as the design for how to choose the sources or participants for a study. For this study, the sample consisted of participants recruited from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade teachers across various disciplines and administrators serving

diverse roles throughout varying geographical areas within Pennsylvania public schools. Data collection for this qualitative study employed an online open-ended survey format. Participants could voluntarily elect to participate in the survey by anonymously responding to the questions in writing using Google Forms. Those who responded were asked to type and submit written responses to a series of 10 online open-ended survey questions. Participants' identities were kept confidential; individual responses did not reveal any personally identifiable information that would link a participant with a particular educational entity. The format of the online open-ended survey approach is supported by Tracy (2013) in that participants are to be provided a list of questions presented in the same order and with the same wording to provide confidential responses to be reviewed and analyzed by the researcher. Alternative methods of participating in the survey were not provided. This consistent data collection method allowed for comparing data from across varying diverse subgroups and geographical areas. This written narrative approach was feasible considering the dynamics of the population and geographical distance between the subjects and the researcher. Findings from the data collection will be presented in the research report.

After collecting all the responses, the researcher reviewed, grouped, broke down, and analyzed the responses to provide results. During this process, the researcher read the transcriptions thoroughly and in their entirety, with the goal of understanding the data and providing a comparative analysis of the participants' responses. The general design of the research project and best practices for appropriate approaches to data analysis are consistent with the best practices recommended by Tracy (2013). The researcher read and reviewed the data multiple times and coded similar themes for an in-depth understanding of feedback, details, comparisons, and conflicts. A hand-coding approach, rather than a computer-aided approach,

was appropriate since the data are based on open-ended written survey responses to the research

questions are expected to be thorough and detailed. The researcher determined that review of the

data, based on the online open-ended survey format, would be most effective using a manual

approach for data analysis. Conclusions from the analysis and recommendations were considered

and presented as applicable.

Hypothesis

It was expected that the review and analysis of data gathered from online written open-

ended survey responses from teachers and administrators across grade-level and demographically

diverse academic settings would provide evidence that teachers feel that administrators can

provide more support and more efficient access to appropriate culturally responsive resources in

serving all student populations, the lack of which directly leads to teachers seeking other jobs

and impacting turnover in educational institutions. The qualitative study presents in-depth

findings on the topic based on analysis of the responses from the sample population. There was

an expected assumption that administrators and teachers would differ in their perceptions of the

support that teachers feel they receive in the school setting. The survey responses present

subjective independent views.

Limitations

Utilization of a specific target group within a certain geographic location with a certain

population was a limitation for the study. The researcher attempted to overcome this limitation

by recruiting a diverse sample group, which intended to provide generalized data by sub-groups

for analysis and potentially broadening the overall outcome of the study. Another possible

limitation was the lack of long-term research on the impact of technology-integrated instruction

because of most classes being transferred online during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

pandemic (Wong, 2020, as cited in Zhao & Song, 2021) on participant perceptions of support. It was assumed that there would be limited post pandemic research from administrators and teachers regarding teacher support. Review of any possible limitations may suggest need for further research.

Definitions

The terms are listed and defined below to support the reader in application of the purpose, methodology, and outcome of the study. These terms are broad by definition and application, and definitions are presented to provide common terminology for the study context.

Administrator is defined as one who leads, especially in business, school, or government affairs. Principal is a term used interchangeably with administrator in the study. Building-level principals, assistant principals, and central office administration including superintendent, assistant superintendent, curriculum supervisor, and special education supervisor(s) are members of the administrator group in this study.

When something is *analyzed,* the information or data is viewed to provide an accumulated view or opinion which can be used towards achieving a comparative result.

Students identified as a member of an *at-risk* group are predicted to lack individual or components necessary for success.

Confidential refers to data collection in which the researcher knows identifying information that could reveal a participant's identity or employer but does not reveal any identifying information when reporting the results. Instead, the researcher assigns a pseudonym or a code to each participant and paraphrases responses with information that could reveal identity or employer. Confidentiality protects participant identities and maintains ethical standards and ensures that risks are minimal, and no harm comes to a participant.

Correlation refers to a relation existing between things where variables tend to vary, be associated, or occur together in a way not expected on basis of chance alone.

Culturally responsive practices are designed to meet needs of individuals from varying backgrounds and experiences.

Culturally responsive resources are instructional strategies, materials, and academic assessments aligned with specific individual groups that are identified as, but not limited to English Language Learners (ELL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) students.

Diversity is defined as the condition of having or being of differing elements. The study refers to diversity as a means to discuss differences between people and situations.

The term *hypothesis* refers to an assumption that is made to draw out and test its logical or empirical consequences.

Informal observations are expected to supply measurable objective feedback in the classroom setting providing opportunities for regular acknowledgement of effective staff performance improvement towards effective subjective performance assessments.

When the quality of something is not equal or even, *inequality* exists in social, resource distribution, or opportunity disparities.

When something is *open-ended,* it is spontaneous and unguided responses are permitted.

Creating a *perception* is a feeling or belief identifying or defining how something is looked at for the development of an opinion which can be formed based on available knowledge or facts.

A *pilot study* is an unpublished research study conducted for the purpose of educating in the general process of research methodology.

Schools are expected to supply ongoing training and personal growth opportunities for staff which is referred to across educational environments as ***professional development*** and is considered to be meaningful when individuals can apply skills learned to daily activities towards achievement of the performance expectations outlined in their specific job description.

Related service providers are certified individuals (speech therapist, occupation therapist, physical therapist, and school psychologist) in the classroom who provide specific observations, assessments, and supports to students and teachers in the academic setting based on individual student's needs.

Retention is the act of retaining which is to continue to have or keep in one's possession or power. In this study, retention refers to teachers choosing to remain in their positions.

A group of individuals selected from a larger group or population for a specific purpose as in research is referred to as a ***sample population***.

Support is defined simply as to aid or help. The study addresses administrative supports provided to teachers based on perceptions drawn from the data.

When an environment provides different opportunities for successes relative to the community served, ***systematic inequalities*** exist.

A ***target group*** is a specific identified selection used in a research study.

A teacher is defined as one whose occupation is to instruct. Teachers in this study are inclusive of educator groups that have an impact on the day-to-day functions within the classroom environment: classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, assistants, and related service providers.

Students considered as being part of an ***underserved population*** are assumed not to be privileged in having necessary curricular, materials, and appropriate supports as other groups.

Conclusion

The review of literature relative to support the study will be documented in Chapter 2. This information will support the background, basis, and purpose of the research study. It will be a foundation for the methodology of the data collection, analysis, and conclusions of the study.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Introduction

Teachers report perceptions of administrative support differently than administrators' self-evaluation of the supports they provide to teachers, as Karacabey's (2020) study found. Administrators conclude that appropriate supports are in place, while teachers assess the assistance they receive from administrators more negatively (Karacabey, 2020). Culturally appropriate support is particularly necessary in schools with large non-white and low socioeconomic status (SES) populations, but teachers often report a lack of culturally responsive training and curricular materials. Culturally appropriate supports and interventions should begin at the preschool level. Early intervention at the preschool and elementary levels, especially for students who struggle academically, can reduce achievement gaps and is appropriately identified as a worthwhile investment.

Each individual student comes from a unique background and home life. Some young students are concerned with whether they are going to get a meal at home, hence unable to focus on academics. Even though poverty and growing up in low-income families does not necessarily cause poor academic achievement, it does impact at-risk students' success. Family structure, race, ethnicity, country of birth, parents' education, parents' employment, and communities in which they live are significant factors contributing to at-risk student success. While these circumstances create an uneven playing field and often contribute to achievement gaps, administrators can foster environments that overcome these issues by providing teacher in-service trainings and professional development opportunities that equip educators with the resources and tools to promote opportunities for student success (Kostelnik & Grady, 2009).

This qualitative research study is intended to provide background knowledge while addressing needs and challenges administrators and teachers are faced with to identify and implement culturally responsive educational opportunities across environments. Research will be analyzed through comparisons of teachers' and administrators' online written open-ended survey responses. The population for this comparative process will include results from across varying demographic and cultural environments within school populations in Pennsylvania.

This literature review is intended to provide the foundational support for the background, basis, and purpose of the research study. Relevant studies related to a student's legal right to an appropriate education, cultural responsiveness, systematic inequalities in education, the importance of teacher professional development, factors impacting teacher satisfaction and retention, and change management are synthesized to form the basis for this study.

Special Education Law and Inclusion Classrooms

Amid the widespread teacher shortage plaguing the United States, there is a particular deficit in special education teachers, including those appropriately supported and qualified to meet the needs of students targeting high-poverty populations, resulting in schools offering incentives to candidates with special education certifications so that schools can fulfill their legal requirement to meet the educational needs of the students (Bettini et al., 2022). Special education teachers have unique and varying needs for support from their administrators. First and foremost, they need advocacy to secure the necessary external funding to support the diverse and complex needs and the special education services required to educate students with individual education programs (IEPs). Administrators must work collaboratively with the local district's federal programs coordinator to navigate the federal funding avenue, allocating money identified under IDEA. These funds are to provide special education services in schools. Funding should also be

allocated in the annual budget for teacher professional development and collaboration.

Prioritizing the professional needs of teachers and funding appropriately is a supportive role of

administrators (Bradley-Levine, 2021).

Under IDEA, students are entitled to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in

the least restrictive environment (LRE). For many students, their diverse needs are met through

classroom inclusion. This is an opportunity for a general education teacher and a special

education teacher to partner and work collectively to meet the needs of individual students. The

general education teacher works collaboratively with the special education teacher to deliver

appropriate instruction to all students (Bradley-Levine, 2021). Offering accommodations to

students with exceptionalities creates a supportive environment for access to on-grade-level

content in the general education classroom through differentiated strategies (Bradley-Levine,

2021). Centering on the individual student needs, interests, and talents of students, especially

those with special needs, develops positive relationships and engages student learning in a

stimulating, supportive climate. Every student should have the opportunity to reach the

educational learning objectives, and inclusion classrooms provide the environment for it (Bochis

et al., 2020).

As students with learning difficulties often exhibit behavior challenges, IDEA also

requires that the inclusion teaching team distinguishes between inappropriate behavior and

behaviors that are a manifestation of a student's disability. Appropriately addressing behaviors

ensures that discipline does not impede the teacher from achieving educational outcomes because

the behaviors are not problematic to the teaching process (Bochis et al., 2020). To make

inclusion classrooms work effectively, Bradley-Levine (2021) identified the need for more

administrative support for successful inclusion practices across educational environments, with

the goal of transforming overall school culture. Unfortunately, inclusion is often not an option in higher poverty schools due to low access to special education teachers; therefore, self-contained classroom settings for students with IEPs are more prominent in lower-poverty schools. A prominence of self-contained classrooms correlates to decreased buy-in to an inclusion model from teachers, thus limiting access to on-grade-level resources. By comparison, students in lower-poverty schools have an increased chance of being included in the general education classroom. Regardless, the IDEA law mandates that students in high-poverty schools have the same legal right to the LRE as students in low-poverty schools. Ultimately, it is every school's responsibility to create the appropriate educational environment and hire and retain special education teachers to support suitable classrooms for students with disabilities (Bettini et al., 2022).

Cultural Responsiveness: Meeting Student Needs

Implementation of culturally responsive strategies is dependent on meaningful, actionable professional development in cultural responsiveness. Professional development is one of the most important supports administrators provide that impacts teacher effectiveness (Shogren et al., 2018). Culturally responsive practices have been found to positively impact student outcomes, especially among students of color and those living in poverty.

Various studies have reported on the impact of culturally responsive practices on student outcomes. Shogren et al. (2018) studied the impact of race-ethnicity and disability on self-determination, which is a key goal of disability policy, in students of varying racial and ethnic backgrounds, both with and without disabilities. The authors used a self-determination inventory to survey 20 groups of students and draw comparisons among disability groups (i.e., no disability, learning disabilities, intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, and other health

impairments) and ethnicity (i.e., white, African American/black, Hispanic/Latino, and other).

When comparing racial/ethnic groups, the results revealed that, regardless of race or ethnicity,

there were no significant differences in self-determination between students with learning

disabilities and students without disabilities. However, students with all other types of disabilities

(autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disability, and other health impairment) showed lower

self-determination than their peers with learning disabilities and no disabilities. When comparing

the mean self-determination scores among groups, white students without disabilities and white

students with learning disabilities had the highest self-determination scores. However, students

with autism, intellectual disabilities, and other health impairments in the black, Hispanic/Latino,

and other ethnicity categories scored higher than white students with the same disabilities. The

second research question in this study examined the effect of socioeconomic status on self-

determination. Scores were significantly lower for students eligible for free and reduced lunch

across all disability and race-ethnicity categories (Shogren et al., 2018).

It was the first goal of Shogren et al. (2018) to determine if differences existed in self-

determination scores in adolescents with and without disabilities of varying racial-ethnic

backgrounds. Assessing personal characteristics that impact students' post K-12 success, such as

self-determination, is an important first step in establishing culturally responsive approaches to

serving diverse students in today's schools and classrooms. Examination of intersectionality of

disability, race-ethnicity, and free and reduced-price lunch status (as proxy for socioeconomic

status) to provide direction for future practice was Shogren et al.'s (2018) second goal. The

study's findings are important for identifying interventions needed to develop students' self-

determination (Shogren et al., 2018). One strength of this study was that it included respondents

across varying categories, but the authors suggest that more work is needed to explore the

intersectionality of personal and environmental factors that lead to differences in self-determination so that schools can develop appropriate interventions.

There will continue to be disparities in self-determination scores as well as other educational outcomes for adolescents with disabilities, those from diverse racial-ethnic backgrounds, and those impacted by poverty. These marginalized student populations, who benefit most from culturally responsive instructional practices and curricula, unfortunately, are less likely to receive them. The disparities found by Shogren et al. (2018) must be addressed across groups of students scoring lower on the self-determination student report in order to close achievement gaps.

Systematic Inequalities Across Education

Shogren et al. (2018) concluded that an interactive effect of restricted opportunities, financial resources, and lack of culturally responsive supports for self-determination leads to inequalities. A lack of a diverse teaching staff can also contribute to inequalities in schools. Bianco and Marin-Paris (2019) cited from United States Department of Education (2016): "The critical shortage of a diverse teacher workforce is nothing new. Researchers have been exploring this topic and calling for more diversity in the teacher workforce across disciplines for decades" (p. 38). Researchers have repeatedly asserted that administrators must address the shortage of qualified quality teachers and identify personnel to meet the diverse needs of students. Not only must administrators hire quality teachers to fill vacancies, but they must also put forth effort to retain their current staff. Addressing the retention of quality teachers and addressing turnover in school environments is a key role of administrators. Especially in schools that serve diverse student populations, teachers' sensitivity to children's cultural contexts and developing culturally responsive practices should begin when working with young children. Teachers can effectively

use their own as well as their students' personal cultural experiences to understand their class

and create a baseline for students to engage with others across cultures. Furthermore, teachers

who have similar backgrounds and experiences to their students serve as role models, and these

connections have shown positive correlations with student achievement (Kostelnik & Grady,

2009).

Inadequate teacher preparation to work in underserved schools is another common

systematic inequality in education. It is not uncommon for teachers to feel inadequately prepared

or not qualified to reach students in culturally responsive ways; however, this issue can be

addressed through teacher mentoring. When veteran teachers share strategies with newer staff, it

fosters greater culturally responsive competence (Zaffini, 2015). Teachers are expected to

connect learning and instructional decision-making to influencing students' academic outcomes

(Kostelnik & Grady, 2009). Efficient learning occurs when teachers make academic connections

through real-life examples. Another powerful way that teachers connect with students is by

establishing relationships with students because students learn to trust their teacher's skills and

competence (Bochis et al., 2020).

Okeke and Mtyuda (2017) noted a chronic absence of resources in rural school settings;

consequently, teachers are forced to share resources across schools. Overall, this practice can

cause the curriculum not to be appropriate for teacher instruction or student learning. Other

issues related to under-resourced schools include large class sizes, discipline issues due to

overcrowding in classrooms, and poor salaries, all of which administrators are faced with

(Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017). Effective classroom management is important to create high

academic, effective, and social outcomes, as well as a productive teaching and learning process,

as supported in a study of 375 Greek secondary education teachers. The study assessed their

perception of satisfaction or dissatisfaction in their professional environment (Koutrouba &

Michala, 2017). In addition to discipline issues, concern for adequate facilities impacts a

teacher's ability to foster positive learning environments, especially where schools are unkempt,

buildings are dilapidated, grass is tall, shrubs are overgrown, and schools overall are visibly

unappealing (Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017). Another inequality that is frequently found in low-income

schools is a lack of merit appointments to senior posts as noted in Okeke and Mtyuda's (2017)

qualitative case study. The participants in the study complained that district-wide officials lacked

knowledge and ability to help teachers and provide adequate professional development, which

teachers attributed to decreased student achievement in state passing rate requirements (Okeke &

Mtyuda, 2017).

Teacher Professional Development and Training

Expansion of quality educational results in schools through teacher empowerment was

explored through research by Balyer et al. (2017), which primarily focused on school

administrators' roles in empowering teachers. The objective of this qualitative study was to

supply recommendations for decision-makers and senior administrators by providing in-depth

knowledge on the role of administrators in teacher empowerment through administrative

decision-making, professional development, improving teachers' status, developing teacher self-

efficacy, improving teachers' autonomy, creating social attractiveness, trustworthiness,

communication, and employing teachers in some administrative positions through analysis of

school administrators' roles (Balyer et al., 2017).

Empowerment is coupled with environmental changes; thus, continuous professional

development becomes necessary and inevitable for teachers as training becomes insufficient in a

few years. Teachers need to maintain a knowledge base that can keep up with the day-by-day

changes in teaching methods (Karacabey, 2020). Özdemir (2020) identified professional

development as an important key to motivating teachers in the school environment. Renewing

and strengthening professional knowledge is a constant for teachers. Administrators can support

teachers by providing current information that they can use to create and open innovations for

the systems they establish in schools. Teachers in the study emphasized that they want to

contribute to the school's vision and mission; therefore, administrators must take steps to ensure

that teachers participate in professional development that contributes to the efficiency of the

overall educational process and successful student academic outcomes (Karacabey, 2020). Job-

embedded professional development can be provided in creative ways, in addition to in-service

trainings, within their own school environment through coaching and mentoring (Bradley-Levine

(2021).

     Overall, most teachers in the survey group from Balyer et al.'s (2017) research study

identified that their administrators took their recommendations into consideration through

empowerment in decision-making, but the data did demonstrate opposing opinions. In the areas

of improving status, professional growth, self-advocacy, and autonomy, some felt supported

across these specific categories while others did not (Balyer et al., 2017). A different perspective

was presented from the findings of Okeke and Mtyuda's (2017) research study, in which teachers

identified lack of recognition from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and insufficient

agency support as significant sources of dissatisfaction and contrary to teacher expectations upon

appointment. Disengagement eroding the quality of teaching and learning in schools created by

dissatisfaction, especially dissatisfaction with professional development, is a cause for concern

(Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017).

Findings from Ernst (2012) indicated that EBE integrates learning through real-life experiences from kindergarten through 12th grade. The effectiveness of this approach depends on professional development that assists in understanding and implementing integrated curricula across the school system. Decades of research has stressed the importance of administrators in supporting teacher performance in the classroom through professional development. Administrative support is especially critical in the delivery of EBE program goals, objectives, and strategies. Increased support from administrators in creating EBE serves to strengthen teacher motivation in the implementation of the program (Ernst, 2012). Results from Ernst's (2012) research study ranked administrative support of teachers establishing EBE and creating environmental literacy as more important than other factors. Professional development can be used to address safety/liability, which is one of the strongest obstacles to supporting EBE. The level of administrative support is a factor in overall strength when implementing EBE (Ernst, 2012).

Factors Impacting Teacher Satisfaction and Retention

Positive and negative feelings among teachers are present in various studies across the literature, even though there is a lack of one single scientific definition of teacher job satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Koutrouba & Michala, 2017). Across educational environments, "Resentment festers when teachers lack control over the basic elements of their jobs and when they feel undervalued or unappreciated" (Kostelnik & Grady, 2009, p. 228). Salary and pay are factors influencing teachers' intentions to remain in the classroom, but these elements did not influence job satisfaction in Farinde, Allen, and Lewis' (2016) study. Koutrouba and Michala's (2017) study stated that "moreover, for a majority of the participants job dissatisfaction is connected to the lack of time for accomplishing curricular objectives," especially when teachers

felt compelled to put in time to prepare for the next day's instruction at home. On the other hand, greater satisfaction and positive school-wide perception is achieved when teaching strategies and curricula are consistent over many years which fosters professional confidence and students' internalization of knowledge learned (Koutrouba & Michala, 2017).

Teachers across early childhood environments become burned out from long hours, low pay, and a lack of respect for what they do. It is estimated that 20 to 40% of early childhood educators leave the field. Administrators are responsible for managing this turnover across grade levels by globally supporting teachers in all environments. Across all grade levels, having a supportive, committed, and knowledgeable administrator is at the top of the list as a factor that would make teachers remain in the profession (Kostelnik & Grady, 2009). Teacher advancement and compensation are two important factors when studying teacher retention (Farinde et al., 2016). "There is both a moderate and significant relationship between teachers' internalization commitment and sub-dimensions of organizational supports such as organizational justice supervisor support and organizational rewards and job conditions" (Nayir, 2012, p. 110). Teacher salaries and expansion of advancement opportunities should be addressed through school board policies, according to the results of Farinde et al.'s (2016) study. Demonstrating support for the advancement of black teachers at the district level would contribute to an overall decrease in educator turnover (Farinde et al., 2016).

Teachers report three conditions that contribute most to professional job satisfaction: (a) when they are included in decision-making and (b) when they interact on an individual level with parents, students, and community members, and (c) when they are supported by mentoring, attending orientations, and professional development programs (Koutrouba & Michala, 2017). Okeke and Mtyuda (2017) found that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which is a theory of

motivation influenced by human behavior, applies to teachers as well as students. When the physiological needs of teachers are met, teachers have fewer other needs and can more easily reach professional self-actualization. When applied to educators, the theory asserts that when teachers are satisfied and supported by administrators, their work will be higher in quality and result in greater student and school outcomes (Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017).

Education: Pre and Post Pandemic

Jones et al. (2021) noted that our society's educational process was tested like no other time in history when schools closed due to the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Loss of instructional time, as well as the benefits of school mental health supports was of significant concern because some students experienced family members getting sick or even dying from COVID-19. While the pandemic caused some industries to shift their employees to work from home, some students had parents who served the community as a frontline worker. Those students had to navigate remote instruction on their own without parents at home. Students experienced challenges accessing resources, causing gaps in attendance and achievement. Gaps that resulted in learning loss are most significantly concerning among primary and elementary students because of the foundational skills taught at the elementary level (Jones et al., 2021). During the pandemic, schools remained accessible as possible to the community as a resource (Nadeem et al., 2022), but not all families were able to take advantage of the resource for various reasons.

In addition to challenges for students and teachers, administrators also experienced difficulties, as they were required to balance providing guidance to staff, addressing community needs, recommending distance learning tools, managing personnel needs, and ensuring that students received healthy foods during the school day. The constantly changing and unknown

nature of the pandemic, coupled with community pressures, created unprecedented administrator challenges. Overwhelming tasks for school and district leaders surged as they fought to manage the pandemic on a local level across several semesters and multiple school years (Nadeem et al., 2022). Even though remote instruction was challenging to deliver with struggling technology and disruptions in learning, the expectation was for students to receive opportunities for best educational outcomes through remote instruction and online assessment of student knowledge (Singer-Freeman et al., 2020). Serving students with disabilities proved especially challenging, as schools were compelled by IDEA law to meet students' needs, but providing the required and necessary supports remotely was sometimes impossible (Jones et al., 2021).

Not to any surprise, the preliminary literature on pandemic learning loss identifies disparities among student impact due to inequality in school systems. The disparities directly correlate to cultural racism and the disadvantages that already existed in schools before the shutdowns (Jones et al., 2021). The overall impact of COVID-19 remains unclear (Nadeem et al., 2022) because, at the time of this study's literature review, not enough time had passed to conduct any longitudinal research. Preliminary studies indicated that students suffered a significant loss from the lack of in-class instruction across all educational environments when online learning became the norm for all schools. Lack of resources, funding, and cultural and racial awareness became more evident during this transition, especially in schools where students are already less likely to achieve academically. These inequalities were amplified by school closures and caused greater challenges for students and teachers across all disciplines and grade levels in underserved schools (Jones et al., 2021).

For teachers, the stress of remote teaching took a toll. Preparing for class took more time than before, as reported by 85% of the teachers in Jones et al.'s (2021) research study. Following

the shift to remote teaching after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers reported

higher work-related anxiety issues, workload stressors, and overall work-related mental health,

including burnout, exhaustion, and cynicism. Teachers who struggled to teach remotely

increased student vulnerability to inequalities across educational environments. Individual

experiences of students, teachers, and communities are critical factors in assessing the impact

COVID-19 created in academic achievement (Jones et al., 2021) because perceptions vary

among demographic groups. Overall, it was reported by school staff in Jones et al.'s (2021)

research that there was a substantial negative perception among educators of shifting to remote

learning, resulting from challenges in learning environments, student disengagement, educator

roles, and societal pressures. Initially, parents who worked from home and balanced

responsibilities of educating their children, caring for their households, and managing their own

workloads created empathy towards teachers. However, that empathy was short-lived when the

disruptions to the academic process extended. The pandemic created an environment that

impeded opportunities for staff to connect with parents creating an environment lacking support

for student academic success. When schools began reopening, the impacts of school closures

became apparent, with greater inequalities among black families compared to white families. The

concept of colorblindness among our society and educators increased challenges during COVID-

19 (Jones et al., 2021).

Implementing Change Across Education

Early childhood teachers, as well as all teachers, matter in making a difference in

children's lives. It is an important role of the principal to ensure that teachers feel empowered to

positively impact student growth. The role of the early childhood teacher and teachers at all

grade levels must be viewed as important. The principal's function is critical to provide

knowledgeable leadership to achieve program excellence. Programs cannot be left to function on their own (Kostelnik & Grady, 2009). Principals and administrators support good teaching by having clear performance standards and competencies (Kostelnik & Grady, 2009) and fostering a positive overall school climate (Bear et al., 2014). Supporting early childhood teachers is demonstrated by:

- keeping them involved in planning and school conversations;

- treating them as teachers at other grade levels;

- active involvement in recruitment of teaching personnel;

- adopting policies that consider situations that may occur in elementary grades;

- advocating for developmentally appropriate practices;

- encouraging the exploration and use of diversified teaching strategies;

- providing professional development activities that addresses the cycle of learning;

- supporting childhood practices through ongoing feedback, classroom visits, and observations; and

- recognizing and rewarding effective teaching (Kostelnik & Grady, 2009).

Special education teachers must be included as well, as their jobs are dependent on coordination across environments in the school with supports of colleagues and administration (Bettini et al., 2022). O'Connor (2016) asserted that teacher practices to increase student learning through high instructional expectations are shaped by administrators who are skilled in change management. It is the tremendous responsibility of administrators to provide support, training, environment, and context in which teachers can implement research-based instructional practices that address individual student needs by identifying the end goal (O'Connor, 2016). Providing resources to address discipline issues impeding instruction, identifying clear expectations, and

delivering instructional feedback, as determined by the research of Bettini et al. (2022) encourages an environment for positive educational opportunities. The lack of resources and commitment of qualified special education teachers in high-poverty schools is noted in the research of Bettini et al. (2022) as creating an opportunity gap. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) intended to reduce such deficits by requiring equity plans to be developed at the state level. At the local school level, more detailed feedback on inequities can be determined by teacher surveys and addressed in schools' strategic plans (Bettini et al., 2022).

Without strong educational leadership, teachers are often expected to transform misaligned priorities and limited professional development training into effective and cohesive instructional practices. Conversely, when they are provided with a clear vision of what effective instruction should look like in every classroom, teachers can benefit from collaboration and aligning resources towards the same instructional improvement goal (O'Connor, 2016). Teachers, administrators, and others involved in the educational process need to work together toward the same end goal of instructional improvements (O'Connor, 2016). O'Connor (2016) addressed various areas necessary to create change in teacher practices. In the school setting, principals must be the messenger, motivator, monitor, and muscle (the Four M's), systematically and consistently impacting classroom instruction. For principals to be successful as leaders of their school, they must appropriately and effectively delegate duties that they do not necessarily have to perform personally. Then, they can focus their efforts on creating the best environment possible for teaching and learning, which may require their own professional development and training (O'Connor, 2016).

As leaders, principals are expected to provide the tools for achieving great instruction in their school. These tools include staff training on specific days allocated on the school calendar

for professional development. Professional development not only includes training, but also includes time to analyze data, plan, and collaborate with peers (O'Connor, 2016). O'Connor (2016) cited data that supports the steps necessary to provide effective classroom instruction in the classroom. However, one limitation of the data is that it focused on special education and was limited in the diversity of the samples (O'Connor, 2016).

Summary, Limitations, and Future Research

Various factors influence students having access to high-quality schools. Low socioeconomic status, diversity of students, and racial-ethnic backgrounds correlate with the availability of resources in schools that are identified as underprivileged. When schools must address the myriad of problems that afflict marginalized populations, it often decreases a school's ability to provide great instruction (Shogren et al., 2018). Another issue is that schools often do not make conscious efforts to recruit and retain a diverse teaching staff. In Farinde et al.'s (2016) study, black teachers were deterred from teaching in high-poverty schools by low-paying teaching jobs and would expect increases over time, even though they did not select the career based on high-paying salary. The small sample size of black teachers participating in the study was a limitation because the participants were not representative of all black female teachers but was a necessary criterion for participation (Farinde et al., 2016).

The study by Shogren et al. (2018) was limited to self-determination scores, not other educational outcomes. A similar model of comparing student success rates across disability, racial/ethnic, and socioeconomic groups can be applied in further research. Additionally, Shogren et al. (2018) identified a need to explore the intersectionality of personal and environmental factors that should be considered in determining the most effective instructional practices for students. The review of inequalities, including a lack of culturally responsive

supports, financial resources, and the effect of restricted opportunities is demonstrated through the research of Shogren et al. (2018). Continuing to study the impacts of systemic inequalities experienced by diverse youth and youth impacted by poverty is necessary based on the results from this research. Disparities in access to resources that disproportionally affect some students should be further addressed to extend the results from this research (Shogren et al., 2018).

The research study by Bettini et al. (2022) consistently presents constraints due to availability of information in the database, including but not limited to:

- certifications;

- professional development;

- comparisons over time;

- self-contained models used for service delivery;

- student disability; and

- key socioeconomic indications as parent education (Bettini et al., 2022).

Further studies with more complete data sets would further contribute to the research base on supports and opportunities that high-poverty schools can provide to their students.

Limitations, issues with the study, and data collection impacted the results of academic inequalities and outcomes from the study by Jones et al. (2021); therefore, evaluation of racial equity and connections with teachers in education will benefit from additional research.

The COVID-19 pandemic created trauma in educational environments for teachers and students, and students who were most impacted were those who were traditionally underserved even before the pandemic. Now more than ever before, schools need the resources, and teachers need the support to address the disparities among environments across diverse groups (Jones et al., 2021).

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Introduction

The foundation for this research study was based on a pilot study completed by the researcher as a doctoral candidate and student at Slippery Rock University Pennsylvania during the 2017-2018 academic school year. Results from the study concluded a need for further research due to limitations of the sampling size and target group. This research study expanded the sampling size, geographical demographics, and diversity of the subjects to collect data from a different group. The hypothesis was posed to provide an in-depth analysis of data results that were be compared between the two groups: teachers and administrators. The hypothesis predicted that administrators and teachers would differ in their perceptions of the support that teachers feel they receive in the school setting. The results and implications of this research study directly and indirectly correlated to existing literature research on the topic.

Research Questions

To support the research and collect appropriately focused data, three broad research questions were developed for the purpose of this dissertation:

1. What are teacher beliefs, expectations, and perceptions of how their administrator should support them?

2. What are appropriately culturally responsive approaches that teachers should have knowledge, appropriate supports, and access to so effective education outcomes can be achieved for all student populations?

3. Are there correlations between teacher motivation, teacher retention, and student achievement?

Research Design

This qualitative research study conducted during the 2022-2023 academic school year targeted teachers and administrators to analyze their perception of delivery of supports within the school environment across disciplines, grade levels, and demographic communities. Teacher perceptions were collected via open-ended online survey, and administrators' views were collected as a self-evaluation measure and for comparison to the opinions of their staff on the school and district levels. The teacher surveys gathered qualitative perception data on whether teachers feel that their administrators support them, how they support them, and uncover needed supports in their educational setting to meet learning objectives in the classroom.

The data collected to address the research questions were based on perceptions, which are subjective in nature; therefore, the online survey consisted of open-ended questions, to which participants responded in writing for analysis purposes. Perception data came directly from teachers based on their experiences in the schools and from administrator responses reflecting on the support they provide to their staff. Analysis of patterns from teacher and administrator survey responses that signify common behaviors and beliefs were consistent with the qualitative design used in Balyer's et al. (2017) study. Participants will be chosen based on a purposeful sampling method. Level of support, lack of support, and suggestions for better support were discussed to answer the study's research questions. The main goal of the study was to assess whether teachers feel fully supported by their administrators or whether there need for change. Consistently structured open-ended survey questions were asked of each respondent across varying academic settings and grade levels. The results of the qualitative study were developed from in-depth analysis of responses from the teacher and administrator survey participants.

Sampling Technique

The researcher used a purposeful sampling technique, targeting K-12 teachers and administrators from selected K-12 public schools in Pennsylvania. Targeted schools serve students from a variety of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. To answer the research questions for this study, the researcher collected open-ended survey responses of teachers and administrators from schools in Pennsylvania. Conclusions were drawn from data gathered, reviewed, analyzed, and discussed from online open-ended survey questions developed to align with the research questions. Tenure, environments, disciplines, educational settings, and communities were broadly represented in the group surveyed. Expressively, the participants are from diverse backgrounds, educational environments, and demographics. Data collection was based on primary research and a small sampling size of teachers and administrators in two (3%) approved participating local education agencies out of 68 (10%) school districts, intermediate units, and/or charter schools from a random sampling of 706 (100%) of total Pennsylvania LEAs. Sampling size and methods were adjusted to present an in-depth analysis of participants' written responses. Participant identities were confidential, so their responses do not provide individual connection to any prior or current school or district. Thus, participation in the study in no way jeopardized or caused harm to their current or future employment or opportunities for advancement.

Data Collection

The data collection requested respondents to provide written responses to 10 open-ended online survey questions. Tracy (2013) supports the data collection process of collecting participant responses to a list of open-ended survey questions in the same order and wording with the expectation of receiving confidential responses for review and analysis by the

researcher. The researcher collected individual data from individual written online survey responses from teachers and administrators for comparative analysis of teacher and administrator perceptions of the levels of support teachers receive, appropriate culturally responsive resources provided to teachers, and whether teachers need additional support. The study's broad scope of participants warranted a narrative approach for questions and responses to support the research study (Tracy, 2013) to support or reject a general hypothesis. Data collection methods did not record names or any identifying information to protect the participant from retaliation or consequences in any manner.

Tracy (2013) supports appropriate practicality relative to time and available resources; thus, for efficiency purposes, the researcher offered participants an opportunity to respond to the online survey questions in writing using Google Forms. Direct individual feedback was critical to the outcome of the study. Using this method created detailed information that can provide diversified responses to increase quantity of responses while being manageable for efficient analysis. Evidence and data collection were based on 10 online open-ended survey questions for teachers and administrators.

Teacher Open-Ended Online Survey Questions in Google Forms

Teacher surveys were conducted using the following 10 open-ended questions.

1. Describe the support you receive from your building or district administration and if you feel this support is sufficient for you to provide quality education to your students.

2. Does the support that you receive from your administrator foster an effective learning environment in inclusive classroom settings? Please explain.

3. Explain how at-risk populations are supported in your educational environment and if you feel this support is inclusive for successful educational outcomes.

4. Relative to culturally responsive practices and resources, do you feel that you are well prepared to deliver education in a positive manner for all students? What additional training and support would benefit you and your students?

5. How effective is the communication, training, and professional development provided by administrators in your school? How do these factors impact your assessment of administrative support?

6. What is the area that you feel the need for the most significant support? Does this area impede delivery of successful lessons in the classroom? How can administrators address this area? Please elaborate on specific issues.

7. Do you feel that your opinions are considered and valued in the school's mission of creating a successful educational model? Please explain.

8. How important is one-on-one feedback and performance evaluations to you for personal professional growth? What do you need to continue to develop as an effective educator? Explain.

9. Have you ever considered leaving education or looking for a new position elsewhere? How does administrator support impact your decision to stay in your current position or seek other employment?

10. Do you generally feel supported by your administrator? If so, what factors impact this impression? If not, what can you suggest that administrators do to increase the support in schools and clarify teacher perceptions of administrative support? What is

the most important area that you feel an administrator should provide the most

support for a successful school climate?

Administrator Open-Ended Online Survey Questions in Google Forms

Administrator surveys were conducted using 10 online open-ended questions that were

similar to those asked of teachers but reworded to assess the administrators' perceptions of the

support they provide to teachers. For comparative analysis, an alignment between teacher and

administrator survey questions enabled the researcher to assess similarities and differences

between each group's perceptions of administrative support.

1. Describe the support you provide to teachers and if you feel this support is sufficient

    for teachers to provide quality education to their students. Identify if this support is

    based on your own evaluation or based on teacher feedback.

2. Does the support that you provide to teachers foster an effective learning environment

    in inclusive classroom settings? Please explain.

3. Explain how you provide support for teachers to meet the needs of at-risk populations

    in your educational environment and if you feel this support is inclusive for

    successful educational outcomes.

4. Relative to culturally responsive practices and resources, do you feel that your

    teachers are well prepared to deliver education in a positive manner for all students?

    What additional training and support would benefit your teachers and students?

5. In your perception, how effective is your communication, training, and professional

    development that you provide to teachers in your school? How do you think these

    factors impact your teachers' assessment of the support you provide?

6. What is the area that you feel teachers need the most significant support? Does this area impede delivery of successful lessons in the classroom? How can you and other administrators address this area? Please elaborate on specific issues.

7. To what extent do you consider and value your teachers' opinions in the school's mission of creating a successful educational model? Please explain.

8. How important is one-on-one feedback and performance evaluations to your teachers for personal professional growth? What do you provide to teachers to continue their development as effective educators?

9. Do you often deal with teachers who are considering leaving education or looking for a new position elsewhere? How do you think administrator support impacts teachers' decision to stay in their current position or seek other employment?

10. Do you generally feel that you support your teachers? If so, what factors impact this impression? If not, what can you suggest that you and other administrators do to increase the support in schools and clarify teacher perceptions of administrative support? What is the most important area that you feel administrators should provide the most support for a successful school climate?

Data Analysis

Diverse data collected from responses to consistent open-ended questions were reviewed, broken down, grouped, analyzed, and interpreted by the researcher to provide thorough responses to the research questions and draw conclusions from the study. There should be a step-by-step process to review and sort every response to categorize the data based on a clear understanding of the feedback, details, comparisons, conflicts, and validity for creating the outcome from the study for the reporting phase (Tracy, 2013). The researcher employed an

inclusive method for reading the transcripts in their entirety, coding the responses into themes, and comparing teacher responses to administrator responses to effectively understand the data to provide detailed study results. Reading the data and re-reading is defined as the data immersion phase (Tracy, 2013). A second level of data review clarified participant responses to the open-ended survey questions. During the subsequent data review, the researcher coded similar themes for an in-depth understanding of feedback, details, comparisons, and conflicts. A hand-coding approach, rather than a computer-aided approach, was appropriate since the data were from open-ended survey-based questions. The responses to the research questions were expected to be thorough and detailed.

The next step in the research process was to provide an efficient report of the analyzed data. It is a professional expectation that the data analysis be structured in accordance with best practices as noted in Tracy's (2013) study. A critical part of the data analysis and reporting process is confidentiality, including non-disclosure of individual participant's personal information, ensuring that responses are presented in a manner that participants' responses are not connected to a specific question, or providing any information that will connect the participant with any individual educational entity. A determination was made by the researcher if there was enough data to provide knowledgeable suggested outcomes or if there are limitations, recommendations, or a need for future research-based on the data available from the study.

Discussion

Overall, the intent of the study was to provide results from the collection of qualitative data on the impact of administrative support and access to culturally responsive tools among teachers serving at-risk populations. Subjects had an opportunity to provide their professional opinions based on their own perceptions and experiences of the levels of support provided by

administrators in teaching strategies, available resources, and the delivery of quality education across academic environments, including inclusive settings and supports for at-risk populations.

Preparedness for efficient and effective delivery of culturally responsive instruction was analyzed through responses from study participants, as well as acknowledging general gaps impeding instruction to determine methods for closing these gaps. The study addressed the impact and importance of effective communication, training, and professional development, with the goal of assessing administrative support in schools and identify areas of significant need for supports for successful instruction and opportunities for best possible student outcomes. Most importantly, it was necessary to conclude if teachers feel that a successful education model is dependent on consideration of their opinions across schools and districts.

Results and Limitations

Approach to the data collection process provided narrative data that was thoroughly evaluated to provide outcomes from the survey responses relative to the initial research topic: *A Qualitative Research Study on the Impact of Administrative Support and Access to Culturally Responsive Tools Among Teachers Serving At-Risk Populations*. The data were from different opinions of teachers and administrators based on individual experiences and perceptions. Data were analyzed in accordance with Tracy's (2013) best practices, reviewing data in levels. The overall research study was hypothesized to be limited due to the subjectivity of the responses, a small sample size, and the constraints of including only educators in Pennsylvania. These limitations may impact the development of conclusive generalizable outcomes. In an attempt to overcome these limitations, the researcher intended to collect data from demographically diverse study participants from a variety of school types. Finally, the

study's data and conclusions were compared to existing literature on teacher perceptions of

administrative supports to correlate and generalize this study to other similar research.

Chapter 4 – Findings

Introduction

Scientific research is defined as the method of finding a solution to a particular problem. Qualitative research is a broad approach of collecting data using human subjects to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions for the purpose of generating non-numeric data that gives participants a voice by enhancing involvement of everyone related to the study through empowering experiences (Pathak et al., 2013). This qualitative research study was designed to analyze perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding culturally responsive classroom supports from two perspectives: how teachers feel they are supported by their administrators, and administrators' self-assessment of the supports they provide to staff serving at-risk and underserved populations in pre-kindergarten through 12th grades across varying demographic and geographical educational settings in Pennsylvania. Since teachers are more likely to advocate for important concerns when they feel their voice is heard (Nayir, 2012), the aim of this study was to reveal those voices and provide recommendations to school leaders on supporting culturally relevant teaching practices.

The data for this qualitative research study was collected using an online survey in which participants composed anonymous responses to 10 open-ended questions provided by the researcher through an electronic link to a Google Form. Each participant was assigned a code to protect participant identities and confidentiality of individual responses to minimize participant risks. Personal information of participants was not collected, and the researcher had no direct communication with any of the participants through the data collection process.

The data is based on primary research from a small sample of educators and administrators representing two approved participating educational institutions that agreed and

were approved to participate in this research study. The participating educational institutions

represent approximately 3% of the randomly selected 68 schools recruited from 706 total

Pennsylvania LEAs. When research is based on primary data, sample size and methods are

expected to be adjusted to present an in-depth analysis of participants' responses in the final

study report. Sampling size for the research study's online survey is not based on prior work;

therefore, it would not be appropriate to use methods with predetermined minimum and

maximum number of participants to calculate sample size based on confidence interval with

margin of error based on specific population proportions and a numeric sampling size. Therefore,

this method was not used to determine sampling size for this qualitative research study.

The groups identified for the study, teachers and administrators, were selected to collect

and record data from all individuals with an impact on the day-to-day functions within classroom

environments. Two separate surveys were administered, one for teachers and one for

administrators, to collect, align, and compare data for the purpose of analyzing, developing

conclusions, and providing recommendations for presentation in the final dissertation report. The

teacher group includes educators who serve in the capacity of classroom teachers, classroom

paraprofessionals, assistants, and related service providers. Building-level principals, assistant

principals, and central office administrators including superintendents, assistant superintendents,

curriculum supervisors, and special education supervisors, are included in the administrator

group. Although Jones et al.'s (2021) study, "Experiences and Perceptions of School Staff

Regarding the COVID-19 Pandemic and Racial Equity" concluded that stress took a toll on 85%

of teachers surveyed, there is an assumption that educational research during this period is

limited and survey responses demonstrating impacts from this era will need independent,

appropriate, and thorough analysis. The current study is intended to highlight general

administrative successes in supporting teachers and provide assistance in identifying professional

development opportunities. The conclusions and recommendations that will be presented in

Chapter 5 are presumed to be the study's benefits that will contribute to the body of research on

school leaders' support for educators working with underserved student populations. The data

collection process began with identifying participants for the study.

<div align="center">**Review of Data Collection Methods**</div>

Recruitment

Pennsylvania public educational school entities were invited to voluntarily participate in

the study by email sent from the researcher to the leader of 68 local education agency (LEA)

leaders. Recruitment was from a random selection of 27 charter schools, 15 intermediate units,

and 26 school districts representing 68 of 706 total Pennsylvania LEAs as accessed from the

Pennsylvania Department of Education's (PDE) website. This recruitment sample represents

approximately 10% of the educational entities across the state's diverse geographical areas, and

approximately 3% of the invited LEAs accepted the invitation to participate in the study. There

were no specific guidelines or method of inclusion or disqualification for being invited to

participate.

Once an LEA's leader agreed to participate and granted the researcher permission to

survey its teachers and administrators, the LEA leader was asked to forward an email they

received from the researcher to their staff as an invitation to voluntary participation in the survey.

Since specific consent forms were not required for this qualitative research study, a participant

information letter was included as an email attachment outlining the study's purpose, process to

participate, use of the data collected, potential benefits to participants, withdrawal from the

study, protection of individual personal information, contact information for the research study

team or IRB, and disclosure of possible participant risks (which could include discomfort in providing objective feedback and/or psychological or emotional stress when responding to questions that request sensitive responses), and procedures for voluntarily participating in the survey.

Participants were provided links to online mental health resources and supports in the participant information letter to address potential risks or psychological harm that may result from their participation in the survey, although personal or punitive harm was not anticipated from participants' honest responses to questions assessing whether they receive appropriate supports from their administrators. Protecting the participants from the risk of breaches in confidentiality contributes to the minimal level of risk for individual participants. The online anonymous method for collecting survey responses maintained confidentiality and protected participants' privacy. Raw data from the Google Form is not accessible by any person other than for the purposes of this research study as outlined in the application approved on June 1, 2023, by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Slippery Rock University.

The procedure set up by the researcher used an online survey platform for data collection that did not track individual demographics descriptors or personal identifiers as part of the process to protect participants from possible negative outcomes resulting from their participation in the survey. Once participant populations were identified, the researcher began collecting the research data using an electronic method that enabled access to participants outside the geographic areas of the university campus, maintaining strict methods of confidentiality. The total number of responses received included seven teachers and three administrators from two LEAs. Teacher participants were coded as T1, T2, etc., and administrator participants were coded as A1, A2, and A3 for the presentation of findings. Based on the participant responses to

survey questions, the researcher concluded that participants are generally identified as educators with classroom and itinerant experience ranging from entry level educators graduating from traditional four-year teacher certification programs to more experienced professionals with experience levels ranging from 24 to 30 or more years serving in regular education and special education positions, including general education and world language classroom environments, and included students from pre-kindergarten through 12th grades.

For purpose of demographic recruitment distinctions, participating entities are being identified as entity 1 and entity 2. Entity 1 was specifically an intermediate unit geographically located in western Pennsylvanian serving 27 primarily rural school districts in three counties and operates one school for students with complex disabilities. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2022), this intermediate unit employs approximately 90 teachers, 12 classroom aides, and five administrators. Entity 2 was an independent public charter school in suburban southeastern Pennsylvania employing nearly 25 educators and eight school/district administrators based on 2021-2022 staffing from official district level data reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (2022).

Survey

The researcher provided an electronic link to submit anonymous responses to the open-ended survey questions using a Google Form and expressed to participants that it was expected to take 15-20 minutes to provide written responses to the 10 online questions. Data collection and privacy of the participants created a safe, secure environment to participate and respond to the questions honestly and openly. The Google Forms survey platform collected online written responses to the survey questions and created a spreadsheet of the data, which the researcher began reading and coding for themes at the conclusion of a 10-day response window. Tracy

(2013) supports the process of collecting participant responses to a list of open-ended survey questions in the same order and wording with the expectation of receiving confidential responses for review and analysis by the researcher. Utilization of this method offers opportunities to increase the quantity of diversified responses to efficiently manage analysis of evidence obtained during the data collection process (Tracy, 2013).

Findings

Research Questions

The findings of the study are presented to answer the three research questions:

1. What are teacher beliefs, expectations, and perceptions of how their administrator should support them?

2. What are appropriately culturally responsive approaches that teachers should have knowledge, appropriate supports, and access to so effective education outcomes can be achieved for all student populations?

3. Are there correlations between teacher motivation, teacher retention, and student achievement?

Seven teachers and three administrators from the two participating schools with varying geographical and demographic identifiers responded to the online survey. Overall review of participants' written responses to the 10 online open-ended survey questions indicates that some teachers feel that they receive fully sufficient support in providing quality education to their students, while others reported only minimal support from their administrators. Likewise, some administrator responses indicated that they felt they provided adequate support, while others recognized that teachers needed more support. Coding of written survey responses revealed a range of two to five themes from the teacher group and the administrator group for each research

question. Table 1 summarizes the themes from teachers and administrators for each research

question, as well as which participants' responses revealed each theme.

Table 1

Participants Who Expressed Each Theme

Themes by Research Question	Participants Who Expressed This Theme
RQ1	
Educator Theme 1: The Importance of Communication and Collaboration	T1, T2, T4
Educator Theme 2: Administrators' Knowledge and Availability	T1, T2, T3, T4, T6
Educator Theme 3: Professional Development	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6
Educator Theme 4: The Impact of Supports in Effective Inclusive Learning	T1, T2, T4, T6, T7
Educator Theme 5: The Importance of Itinerant Teachers	T2, T3
Administrator Theme 1: The Importance of Communication and Collaboration	A1, A2, A3
Administrator Theme 2: Professional Development and Layered Support	A1, A3
Administrator Theme 3: Creating a Positive School Climate	A2, A3
RQ2	
Educator Theme 1: Impact on School Environment	T2, T4, T6
Educator Theme 2: Understanding Population Served	T1, T3, T7
Educator Theme 3: Instructional Opportunities	T1, T4, T6, T7
Educator Theme 4: Culturally Responsive Professional Development	T4, T7
Educator Theme 5: Student Behavior Management	T1, T4, T6, T7
Administrator Theme 1: Impact on School Environment	A1, A2, A3
Administrator Theme 2: Understanding Population Served	A2, A3
Administrator Theme 3: Educating Teachers to be Culturally Responsive	A1, A2
Administrator Theme 4: Self-Care Fosters Equity	A1, A2
RQ3	
Educator Theme 1: Empowering Teachers through Feeling Valued	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5
Educator Theme 2: Passion for Teaching	T1, T2, T7

Administrator Theme 1: Effects of Teachers Feeling Valued	A1, A3
Administrator Theme 2: Importance of Retaining Teachers for Academic Achievement	A1, A2

Teacher Participant Group

Research Question 1

Through data analysis and coding of survey questions assessing teacher perceptions of how their administrators should support them, five themes emerged. These themes included (a) the importance of communication and collaboration, (b) administrators' knowledge and availability, (c) professional development, (d) the impact of supports in effective inclusive learning, and (e) the importance of itinerant teachers.

Theme 1: The Importance of Communication and Collaboration. It is reported in the survey data collected that teachers feel that their administrators can support them through effective communication and opportunities for collaboration. Participant T2 explained that dialogue exists between administrators and staff, even though it may have taken time to develop that rapport. Participants T1and T2 recognized their building administrators as being supportive, responsive, encouraging, and approachable, as well as allowing them to be creative in providing quality education to their students. Creativity can be useful when shared among peers to support building initiatives. Overall, teacher participants attributed their perception of support to their administrators' encouraging them to do their best and listening to their ideas. In response to survey question 1, T1 wrote, "I always feel that if I have an issue I can talk to my admin about it." Likewise, T2 shared, "My administration is very supportive and encouraging about purpose and quality of education I provide," and wrote, "although it may have taken a second for him to realize, we do our best work with autonomy and creativity." Relative to survey question 5, T1 wrote, "I think we communicate well." Similarly, T2 wrote, "Honestly, communication, even in

how is your family is vital," whereas T4 expressed, "Communication is typically very clear and repeated, so everyone knows what they are required to complete."

  Theme 2: Administrators' Knowledge and Availability. The second theme that emerged was that teachers felt their administrators could support them by sharing their knowledge and being available. Unfortunately, participant T1, T3, and T6 expressed that there are instances where staff perceives a lack of administrators' understanding of the general service structure necessary to ensure positive educational outcomes for all students. It was noted by participant T4 that administrators do their best to support the staff assigned to their building. Lack of environmental support around special education students' needs and shortage of administrators' availability are factors contributing to teachers feeling that appropriate supports are not being provided, as expressed by participants T2, T3, and T4.

  Participant T2 expressed that while there is direct supervisor support, other supervisors are not as supportive, and in their specific role they feel that principals and supervisors in other schools foster a supportive environment. One teacher participant, T3, indicated that their student service department is publicly recognized for providing excellent student services. Participant T4 expressed that in some environments teachers feel supported but acknowledge that administrators are spread thin with the demands of their administrative role and responsibilities. In response to survey question 10, T2 stated feeling that their direct supervisor and other buildings provide support; however, expressed other administrators "don't have a clue or really care as long as I don't create waves." Specifically, T6 wrote, "The administration has limited knowledge of special education and tend to dismiss our needs or suggestions." Finally, T4 shared, "it is clear that administrators are spread thin with their number of roles and

responsibilities." Additionally, T4 felt that "Hiring more administration or sharing responsibilities will help admin be more available for their staff."

Theme 3: Professional Development. The written response from participant T1 notes autonomy as a factor in evaluating the level of support received from administrators to provide quality education to students. Responses from seven participants revealed administrators not providing adequate professional development opportunities across academic settings, which is also a perpetual problem cited in research that finds administrators do not identify needs for and provide meaningful professional development, individual self-advocacy, or teacher autonomy (Balyer et al., 2017). Peer collaboration, time to analyze data, instructional planning time, and availability regularly designated to attend training should be included in the professional development plan and opportunities offered in schools (O'Connor, 2016).

Administrator evaluations of teachers' performance is a factor in identifying professional development needs across the educational environment. The impact of one-on-one feedback and performance evaluations for professional development to continue developing as an effective educator were rated as being very important by 29% of the survey respondents, where 14% felt it was somewhat important. Alternatively, solely representing 14% of the population, T6 stated, "I need freedom to plan for the instruction that I feel will serve my students best." In response to survey question 4, T4 wrote, "the more resources the better!" T5 felt that "Ongoing training for culturally responsive practices to keep current" was an important PD need. However, participant T1 wrote, "I also like observing colleagues and their teaching." Participant T3 felt, "if I ever feel unprepared I often look for professional development to expand my knowledge." It is equally important that T6 stated, "I would like additional training in behavior management." In response

to survey question 8, T1 wrote, "It is very important," and "there is always room to improve,"

despite identifying themselves as a veteran teacher with over two decades of experience.

The survey presented a confidential forum for teachers to express their feelings about the

importance of one-on-one feedback or performance evaluations relative to personal professional

growth, and their needs to continue developing as an educator. It is unfortunate that participant

T2's response to survey question 8, stated having feelings of a supervisor who viewed "personal

growth as a threat," but this can be a reality for some teachers in their entity's setting. T3 wrote,

"I prefer ongoing open dialogue throughout the year with constructive criticism," whereas a

different response was presented by T5, who stated that performance evaluations "can be very

subjective, depending on who is the evaluator." Alternatively, T6 stated they are somewhat

important, lending to the statement, "I would like more professional development opportunities."

Theme 4: The Impact of Supports in Effective Inclusive Learning. It was determined

that teachers perceive that positive relationships between students and administration are a

reflection of administrators fostering an effective learning environment. From review and

analysis of written responses to survey question 2, 57% felt that their administrators provide

support fostering effective learning environments in inclusive classroom settings. Participant T1

noted autonomy as a factor in evaluating the level of support received from administrators to

create an environment for providing quality education to students; however, T4 recognized

students' positive engagement and interactions with administration contributing to the creation of

observably good relationships between students and administrators in their educational

environment.

In response to survey question 2, T6 felt that support received from administrators does

foster effective learning in inclusive classroom settings, but contrarily felt, "there is opportunity

for more support in Special Education." Analysis of T2's response revealed that having the

ability to use individual professional best judgment practices in inclusive classrooms within

school building environments and settings is directly correlated to administrators fostering

effective learning through teacher empowerment. Additionally, T2 wrote, "Yes. He is very

supportive in meeting my needs and allowing me to use my best judgment." T4 felt, "The

teachers and students all seem to have good relationships with the administration," expressing

that an effective learning environment exists in inclusive settings. Likewise, T1 responded, "Yes,

the support that we all receive helps us meet the needs of our students"; however, participant T7

felt differently. This participant responded in writing, "I foster my own learning environment."

With this in mind, it could be interpreted that T7 was intentionally implying that administrators

do not foster effective learning environments; therefore, building-level administration is faced

with the challenge of evaluating and determining whether their leadership practices and supports

are sufficient to meet individual students' needs in inclusive classrooms. It is equally important

to determine if T7 fully demonstrated being a team player. The outcome of this determination

can directly impact overall morale among peers, the school's culture and climate, and create

other potential issues for leadership.

     Theme 5: Importance of Itinerant Teachers. Participants T2 and T3 stated that

itinerant teachers' roles are critical contributing factors to fostering effective culturally

appropriate learning environments and achieving quality academic outcomes among at-risk

student populations. Considering the specialized role of an itinerant teacher's specific roles,

responsibilities, and identification of the physical location of the educational environment, their

opinions on classroom support can be subjective dependent on the structure of their position and

resources. In response to survey question 2, T3 stated, "Educators serve as itinerants and travel to where the students are located." Odom et al. (1999), as cited in Meers (2021), explained:

> Itinerant teachers travel to provide services to students with disabilities. Instead of functioning as traditional classroom teachers, itinerants visit children on their caseloads in a variety of settings: homes, early childhood centers, schools, and caregiver locations. Itinerant services denote the location where the services are provided as opposed to the nature of the services themselves. (p. 1654)

Research Question 2

Through data analysis and coding of survey questions assessing teacher perceptions of appropriately culturally responsive approaches that teachers should have knowledge, appropriate supports, and access to so effective education outcomes can be achieved for all student populations, five themes emerged. These themes included (a) impact on school environment, (b) understanding population served, (c) instructional opportunities, (d) culturally responsive professional development, and (e) student behavior management.

Theme 1: Impact on School Environment. Participant T6 expressed that team approaches to instruction where general education teachers and special education teachers partner in delivery of classroom instruction supports creating an effective school culture. Similarly, T4 felt that an effective learning culture is created through general education and special education teachers teaming approaches to instruction. Participant T2 shared that the philosophy of an administrator can challenge positive academic achievement opportunities, depending on the appropriateness of supports provided to meet the needs of the population served in the school. In spite of the fact that participant T2 may not agree with administrators' philosophies in supporting at-risk populations achievement of successful inclusive educational

outcomes, the review of data collected in the study revealed that, overall, participants felt that administration is addressing the students' needs. Additionally, T2 expressed that excessive supports can lead to over-dependency on these supports, which impacts the school's climate. Participant T6 expressed the need for appropriate curriculum programs to create an efficient instructional partnership between general education and special education teachers to provide effective classroom instruction. Review of participants' responses concluded that when teachers provide instruction across various buildings or districts, discrepancies exist that impact educational outcomes.

In response to survey question 3, participant T6 responded, "We need a lot more supports for these students. We do not have the curriculum programs we need. The general education teachers need to partner with the Special Education teachers to provide more in-class support." Likewise, T4 wrote, "Spanish is a required class for IEP students, yet there is never any push in help or special education teachers who are even conversational in Spanish to assist their students." Furthermore, T2 wrote, "What I find to be the most successful, school admins that allow for collaboration of teachers, counselors, my role and theirs. These are admins that trust their staff and know their students."

Theme 2: Understanding Population Served. Survey responses focused on the academic benefit of teachers understanding their student population. Teachers who have unique job responsibilities where they teach and support students outside of a traditional classroom setting have roles that are more centered on real-life responsibilities and challenges. Such teachers are assessed from different perspectives than the standardized curriculum-based classroom. Conversely, when teachers do not understand the population they are serving, it can negatively impact teacher support. Participant T3 wrote that they are lacking knowledge of the

full demographic composition of the at-risk population served. Therefore, they were unable to

comment on supports that their students need and felt impeded in the process of delivering

culturally responsive instruction to meet students' needs. T3 wrote, "Unfortunately, I don't know

enough about the full composure of all the at-risk populations served so cannot comment." It was

identified by participants T1 and T7 that alternative instructional practices were used to support

students in achieving successful educational outcomes. T6 stated that they are starting to support

at-risk populations. In response to survey question 3, T7 wrote that at-risk populations are

supported "by small group and special education teachers." Similarly, T1 wrote, "we have small

group instruction and tutoring groups that work well to meet out student's diverse needs."

      Theme 3: Instructional Opportunities. Participants commented on both positive and

negative aspects of instructional opportunities teachers are able to provide. Participant T6 stated

that curriculum resources are limited in their educational setting; therefore, limitations to

providing effective culturally responsive inclusive instruction also exist. Participants T1 and T7

stated that working with students in small groups can provide supports towards achieving

positive educational outcomes for all student populations. Participants T1 and T7 identified the

need for professional development that can be utilized in the classroom in order to empower

teachers to provide better opportunities for students. T4 identified teamwork as a contributor to

meeting the needs of at-risk students and creating the best instructional opportunities across

content areas. Teamwork is also necessary to improve educational opportunities when class sizes

are large, especially classes with large percentages of students with individual education

programs (IEPs) that are expected to complete the same required on-grade level coursework as

students included in the regular education population with appropriately established benchmarks.

In response to survey question 3, T4 wrote, "The IEP ratio is about 50%, sometimes more, in

Spanish classes, and the students have minimal support." Alternatively, T1 shared, "We design our instruction so that we are able to deal with these issues."

Theme 4: Culturally Responsive Professional Development. The fourth theme was that administrators should make culturally responsive resources and professional learning available to teachers. Participant T7 wrote that ongoing training in culturally responsive practices is necessary to keep providing effective educational opportunities for positive student outcomes. In response to survey question 4, T7 wrote, "ongoing training for culturally responsive practices to keep current." Similarly, participant T4 identified benefits from staff reading books as part of professional development activities which can help teachers expand their personal knowledge and understand different cultures. Book studies that increase teacher knowledge of culturally responsive teaching can benefit the classroom environment and create an engaging school climate that aligns and transfers across the educational entity. Secondly, T4 stated that establishing school-based assemblies where teachers and students can receive the same culturally appropriate message can be an overall benefit in delivering culturally responsive education and achieving positive educational outcomes.

Theme 5: Student Behavior Management. Participant T4 stated that teachers who are knowledgeable of various cultural environments and differences better understand who their students really are. This understanding leads to culturally appropriate classroom behavior management that does not disrupt classroom instruction or impede an environment conducive to achieving educational outcomes. Participants T4, T6, and T7 commented on challenges teachers are faced with in providing unilateral instruction for all students in the educational learning environment such as managing behaviors, and navigating various language barriers with minimally appropriate support in classes where demographics can include 50% of the student

population requiring IEP accommodations. T1 identified reading and math as content areas with a continuing need for the most significant supports and pointed out that often in classrooms with low academic achievement, behavior challenges also exist. Similarly, participant T6 focused on the benefits for special education students and those who are below grade level receiving additional supports across academic settings and educational environments to decrease behavior management issues in the classroom, so teachers can focus on delivering curriculum-based instruction and supporting students to achieve grade-level benchmarks and goals. T7 felt that administrators can support classroom behavior issues by addressing disruptive behaviors with consistent consequences. In response to survey question 6, T4 expressed, "Having one teacher manage behavior issues while trying to hit certain markers in the curriculum is difficult."

Research Question 3

Through data analysis and coding of survey questions assessing whether there are correlations between teacher motivation, teacher retention, and student achievement, two themes emerged: (a) empowering teachers through feeling valued and (b) passion for teaching.

Theme 1: Empowering Teachers Through Feeling Valued. Participant T2 and T4 reported feeling that administrators are receptive to conversations and felt that their opinions are valued by their administrators. Review of the literature connected teachers' satisfaction to overall teacher motivators, teacher retention rates, and ultimately concluded that student achievement benefits from consistent supportive teachers. However, not all participants expressed positive comments about feeling valued. Participant T3 expressed feeling that they had no intent of implementing ideas and suggestions when opinions and feedback from administrators discouraged them from offering input and making suggestions. Participant T1 expressed an opinion that permanent staff's opinions are valuable in contributing to the school's mission and

successful educational environment; but are less likely to be considered in the same manner for teachers in an interim role within an educational entity, which disconnects them from the culture and can negatively impact student learning. Participant T2 felt that administrator transparency when making decisions regarding instruction will assist staff to understand administrative decisions. Likewise, involving the teaching faculty in those decisions creates an environment for empowered leaders, more satisfied staff who can teach students to their full academic potential, and leaders who teach the knowledge to lead better by not following blindly. Review and analysis of survey data indicated that participants felt that teachers are an important part of the school's leadership in managing student outcomes. In response to survey question 7, T1 wrote, "we all work together and our opinions are highly valued." Similarly, T4 wrote, "When I've raised concerns with administration, I do feel that I've been heard. The issue is that we don't always have the resources to address the issues." Participant T5 stated, "I have no involvement in decision-making as a substitute per diem."

Theme 2: Passion for Teaching. In their survey responses, several participants discussed their intrinsic motivation for teaching as their reason for persisting through challenges and remaining in the teaching profession. Participant T1 stated that they would not be happy doing anything other than teaching. This statement directly demonstrated a clear correlation to the passion necessary for effectively supporting at-risk students in inclusive settings, and where there are opportunities for successful educational outcomes in schools. Participant T2 expressed considering leaving the profession for reasons other than assessment of administrative supports they receive. Factors affecting participant T2's decision to stay in the profession include personal reasons, family needs, benefits, time off, and having supportive administration considerate of job flexibility with autonomy, while resilient coworkers does add ease to continue investing in the

education system. However, the challenges of the profession sometimes surpass the passion for

teaching. Participant T7 responded "yes" to having considered leaving the profession because of

increasing difficulty in doing the job and insufficient pay for work expected. In response to

survey question 9, T7 acknowledged, "being an educator gets more difficult every year and the

pay is insufficient for the amount of work we have to do." Despite these points presented by T7,

participant T1 stated, "I am not happy doing anything but teaching."

Teacher Recommendations

Overall, data collected from the online surveys reported that teacher participants feel that

they do receive support from their administrators. To support the study's research questions,

teachers were asked to provide recommendations to strengthen administrative support and

teacher access to culturally responsive tools to support at-risk student populations. The following

three suggestions emerged from teacher participants:

1. Ensuring that staff feels heard, hiring additional administrators, and coordinating

   administrators sharing responsibilities so they are more accessible to staff are

   teachers' suggestions of how administrators can increase support in their schools and

   clarify how teachers perceive administrative support.

2. Listening and creating perceptions that staff's ideas and suggestions are valued

   instead of being dismissed is identified as an important key area where administrators

   have opportunities for increases in supports that will directly encourage positive

   school climates.

3. Administrators demonstrating limited knowledge of special education services is a

   factor contributing to teachers not feeling supported because they do not feel that

   their administrators understand their needs to provide effective culturally appropriate

academic achievement opportunities to at-risk student populations which presents

opportunities for professional development across roles.

Teacher Survey Conclusion

Collecting the teacher group's written feedback from the open-ended survey questions

was an essential part of the research study. The data was also reviewed and compared to the

responses from comparable questions asked of the administrator group. An individual and

cumulative review of both groups provides a more thorough analysis to respond to the study's

goals for compiling the findings and outcomes of the research study. The comparative analysis

will be presented in Chapter 5.

Administrator Participant Group

Ensuring the achievement of program excellence based on knowledge and leadership is a

critical function of building-level administrators according to Kostelnik and Grady (2009). To

assess administrators' perceptions of the support they provide to teachers, online surveys were

conducted using 10 open-ended questions that were reworded to maintain similarity to those

asked of teachers. Three administrators from the two participating schools responded to the

online survey. The researcher anticipated that administrators would have more positive

perceptions of themselves than those provided by teachers.

Research Question 1

Research question 1, from an administrator perspective, examined what supports

administrators perceived they should provide to teachers. In response to this research question,

three themes emerged, including (a) the importance of communication and collaboration, (b)

professional development and layered support, and (c) creating a positive school climate.

Theme 1: The Importance of Communication and Collaboration. Participants A1 and A2 stated the importance of efficient and effective communication with staff, which they demonstrate through providing various supports such as training opportunities, observation feedback, department meetings, and educator resources. Sharing disaggregated data with educators and including them in goals and action plans that support the full student population were stated by participant A3 as being two important methods of supporting teachers through communication and collaboration. Participant A2 indicated that it is necessary to send emails with information to staff and to respond immediately to calls and texts even after hours or on days not scheduled to work. Secondly, it was shared by A1 that when it is impossible to schedule one-on-one meetings with teachers, there can be benefit from soliciting staff feedback in groups or through surveys, which can assist in collecting and acting upon teacher's opinions, beliefs, expectations, and perceptions of how administrators should support them.

Theme 2: Professional Development and Layered Support. Participant A1 acknowledged that it is critically important to provide teachers with one-on-one feedback, pre-observation discussions, and opportunities for reflection. Participant A3 views reflection as an important opportunity for teacher professional growth, which is important for personal career development and advancement. Participant A1 discussed the benefits of teachers receiving layers of support, including coaching, induction, and mentoring. Participant A3 further perceived that there are other mandates surrounding safety and security becoming school priorities, which creates barriers to administrators' opportunities for fostering consistent and effective communication with staff at the building-level and to offer meaningful professional development in schools.

Theme 3: Creating a Positive School Climate. Participant A2 stated that offering tangible supports to students can foster positive classroom educational outcomes. A3 felt that building-level administrators' success and achievement in providing support aligning with teacher beliefs, expectations, and perceptions is mostly manifested by turnover rates. In exit interviews, this administrator seeks to assess if teachers are leaving for similar positions or for other reasons not related to the quality of administrative support. A review and analysis of survey data concluded that administrators must hold themselves accountable for the school climate in their building and for teachers' perceptions of administrative support.

Research Question 2

Research question 2, from an administrator perspective, examined what culturally responsive approaches administrators perceive teachers should have knowledge of, access to, and support for all student populations to achieve effective education outcomes. In response to this research question, four themes emerged, including (a) impact on school environment, (b) understanding population served, (c) educating teachers to be culturally responsive, and (d) self-care fosters equity.

Theme 1: Impact on School Environment. Of the administrators participating in the online survey 100% acknowledged providing teachers knowledge of culturally responsive approaches and appropriate supports was necessary for achieving effective educational outcomes for all student populations. Participant A3 reported practices that targeted supports promoting equity, inclusion, and belonging, whereas participant A1 felt that providing training at various levels was necessary to provide education and supports in inclusive practices across educational settings and environments. Participant A2 reported having used technical assistance to support

appropriate implementation to remove barriers so students remain in their district of origin. All of these factors revealed by participants have an impact on the school environment.

Theme 2: Understanding Population Served. It is the belief of participants A2 and A3 that teachers need the training outside of the traditional four-year certification programs to be able to understand their specific school population. Participant A2 feels this is important because new teachers often enter the workforce without being prepared to remove personal bias, impeding their understanding of the populations served. In turn, this implicit bias limits teacher receptiveness to creating a supportive environment that addresses the needs of students and families of all demographic and geographical statistics, especially at-risk and underserved populations.

Participant A2 stated that teachers should receive training to understand cultures among families experiencing poverty to better serve these high-risk populations without creating stereotypes based on personal opinions, experiences, and biases. A2 wrote, "choices made by families experiencing poverty should not be looked at as poor choices." Additionally, A2 pointed out that their school's cultural competency trainings do not address working with families in poverty. Participant A3's opinion was that providing data regarding performance needs of at-risk populations promotes inclusivity because subsequent goals and action plans are designed to impact the entire student population.

Theme 3: Educating Teachers to be Culturally Responsive. The study by Shogren et al. (2018) states that culturally responsive professional development should result in actionable and meaningful implementation of culturally responsive strategies to create outcomes that positively impact students, especially those who are living in poverty. Participant A1 stated that all educators can benefit from tiered training in providing culturally responsive and inclusive

instruction in classrooms. Such tiered training can support A2's perspective: supports require appropriate implementation and removal of barriers to providing culturally responsive education across settings.

Theme 4: Self-Care Fosters Equality. It is the opinion of participant A2 that teacher self-care fosters open-mindedness, which will benefit students. A2 continued, stating that judgmental and discriminatory attitudes can be combatted through connecting with families and understanding the impact poverty has on student learning, engagement, and successful graduation. Teachers with a positive mindset are better equipped for this. Participant A1 explained a direct correlation between self-care and social and emotional learning (SEL) delivery. Self-care is not selfish but is more of an act of kindness for your learners and yourself equally. SEL is defined by O'Connor (2017) as the process by which children and adults learn to understand and manage emotions, maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Healthier classrooms where learners perform better academically, socially, and emotionally are derived from happy, healthy teachers (Gallagher, 2020). Quoted from an article written by Gallagher (2020): "Working out what is important to do right now and letting go of the other stuff, for now, can be helpful if you are able to make peace with not doing everything" (p. 68). Understanding the concept of equity and implementing equitable practices which are fair for all students, including those with academic and physical needs, can be achieved through conversations, evaluations, and implementation of policies and procedures to effectively achieve a positive school culture/climate that meets expectations for successful educational outcomes.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 examined administrator perceptions of any correlations between teacher motivation, teacher retention, and student achievement. In response to this research

question, two themes emerged: (a) effects of teachers feeling valued and (b) importance of

retaining teachers for academic achievement.

Theme 1: Effects of Teachers Feeling Valued. Participant A1 concluded that teacher

turnover is an issue of high importance currently in school and determined that teachers want to

feel valued as critical stakeholders. It is the view of participant A3 that a successful educational

model can be created by soliciting staff opinions and views in the process of creating school

improvement and comprehensive plans, and valuing teacher input into these plans serves as a

method of encouraging job motivation.

Theme 2: Importance of Retaining Teachers for Academic Achievement. Participant

A3 feels that administrative support is critical when teachers are faced with career decisions

relative to staying in their position, even though participant A1's opinion is that it may not be

enough in a society where teacher turnover is currently a major and ongoing problem in schools.

Participant A2 felt that "Administrators' support in training, counseling, and providing a positive

and welcoming climate can make a huge impact" in the rate of teacher turnover in schools.

Administrator Recommendations

Collectively, this study's sample of administrators unanimously expressed that they

provide teachers with supports in various ways. Supports administrators identified that they

provide included professional development, training, feedback, evaluations, and one-on-one

support. To support the study's research questions, administrators were asked to provide

recommendations to strengthen the support they provide to support at-risk student populations.

Administrators' responses indicated the need for additional and more comprehensive training

across the LEAs represented in the study. It was the recommendation of administrators that

teachers can better support students' needs through proper culturally responsive instruction in

inclusive settings, by better understanding their student population in schools, and through training beyond typical four-year college certification programs that will prepare them for classroom realities. To meet students' individual educational needs and to foster opportunities for all students to achieve positive academic outcomes, administrators recommended focusing on approaches to appropriately support students who are identified as being at-risk, facing poverty, or in underserved populations.

Administrator Survey Conclusion

Presenting a comparative analysis in Chapter 5 of the survey data collected from administrators' written responses to the open-ended survey questions is a critical factor in making determinations and drawing conclusions and aligning with the teacher group's open-ended online written survey feedback. This information will be used to collectively provide an analysis for compiling the findings and determining outcomes from the research study. Overall, the review and analysis of survey data collected reinforced that administrators contribute to establishing an effective school climate, supportive to all students by empowering teachers in response to their voices. This creates a positive school climate with a collaborative team of classroom leaders.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings from anonymous open-ended survey responses from seven teachers and three administrators from two participating LEAs. The themes presented for each research question summarized the teachers' and administrators' perceptions of supports provided by administrators, the perceived supports necessary to appropriately teach all populations of students, and factors impacting teacher motivation, teacher retention, and student achievement. Feedback from both administrators and teachers created a forum to compare each

group's opinions from self-analysis of the supports that they feel are provided. This comparative

analysis will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to assess teacher perceptions of administrator support and the extent to which administrators provide teachers with culturally responsive resources. The researcher sought to analyze whether educational outcomes have been impacted by school and district level administrators' perceptions of how they support teachers in pre-kindergarten to 12th grade classrooms. Administrators' perceptions of the support they feel they provide to their teachers will be compared to teachers' perceptions of the support they receive from administrators. Both groups' perspectives of teachers having the necessary tools to provide appropriate culturally responsive instruction, fostering effective learning environments to achieve positive educational outcomes for all student populations will also be compared. The researcher's goal was to create a forum for new research extending and benefiting from the pilot study (Smith, 2018) completed by the researcher as referenced in the previous chapter. A review of the literature established the foundation for a theoretical research approach for this qualitative study. The researcher hypothesized that participant independent and subjective responses to the survey questions will supply evidence that teachers feel that administrators can provide more support and more efficient access to appropriate culturally responsive resources in serving all students in inclusive classroom settings. Furthermore, it was predicted that teacher and administrator perceptions will provide differing opinions in regard to the supports received across educational entities. Teacher turnover is a factor expected to impact the delivery of effective culturally responsive education in classroom settings across educational entities.

Research Questions

Research questions were developed to focus on the delivery of effective educational opportunities and inclusive practices for achieving positive student outcomes in culturally responsive settings. This research project used human subjects' views, teachers and administrators to respond to three research questions:

1. What are teacher beliefs, expectations, and perceptions of how their administrator should support them?

2. What are appropriately culturally responsive approaches that teachers should have knowledge, appropriate supports, and access to so effective education outcomes can be achieved for all student populations?

3. Are there correlations between teacher motivation, teacher retention, and student achievement?

Approach to Selecting Participants and Collecting Data

Entities taking part in the survey were recruited from a random sample of 706 school districts, intermediate units, and charter schools, representing approximately 10% of Pennsylvania's LEAs based on the Pennsylvania Department of Education website. Two of the entities (3%) accepted the invitation to participate in the research study. Participants used an online survey format, Google Forms as a forum to provide open and honest opinions, anonymous, and feedback regarding their beliefs, expectations, and perceptions of the supports they feel are provided to them by their administrators. Qualitative data in the form of written survey responses was collected from teacher and administrator written responses to the 10 online open-ended survey questions noted in Chapter 3. A process of multiple reviews was used to

develop an appropriate comparative dialogue presented in the final written dissertation study report.

Findings

Teacher Participant Responses

Study results revealed that small group instruction, tutoring, support for special education teachers in particularly managing behaviors, and team approaches were noted as successful methods in meeting the needs of diverse students in schools, especially when regular education and special education teachers are afforded opportunities to work collaboratively as partners in the delivery of efficient classroom instruction (Bradley-Levine, 2021). The study by Balyer et al. (2017) explored expanding quality education in schools through teacher empowerment. It was the opinion of teachers participating in the survey that culturally appropriate learning can be supported when teachers are empowered by their administrators to use their creativity and best judgement in the delivery of quality instruction, whereas having time to plan for lessons would be a significant benefit. In the study by Jones et al. (2021), 85% of teachers reported that preparing for class takes more time than before, and stress from remote teaching during the pandemic was taking a toll on teachers. Most teachers taking part in the survey responded to feeling that their administrators do foster effective learning environments across educational settings.

It was determined from analysis of the survey responses that overall opinions of teachers varied significantly when asked if they felt that appropriate levels of supports are being provided by their administrators, specifically in inclusive classroom settings for fostering culturally responsive practices to meeting the needs of at-risk, underserved, and diverse populations across classrooms, schools, and community settings. Marsico (2022) said that large class sizes,

behaviors, and percentage of students with IEP accommodations presents teachers with challenges in achieving quality educational outcomes for all students.

Research Question 1

Teachers shared in the survey responses that communication and collaboration are necessary components to administrative support. Participants in the teacher group shared concerns that administration displays limited knowledge of services provided to create fully supportive environments. Responses from both teachers and administrators indicated that administrators bear the burden of providing professional development, feedback, and supports to teachers so they may achieve positive educational outcomes in inclusive classrooms in compliance with the legal expectations of providing FAPE in the LRE under IDEA, as supported by Bettini et al.'s (2022) study. Teacher participants presented in their survey responses that positive relationships between administration, teachers, and students has a significant impact on effective inclusive learning. A number of the teachers also felt that their immediate supervisor can be more supportive of the uniqueness of their role as itinerant teachers across inclusive classroom settings. To achieve effective inclusion in classrooms, there is a need for more administrative support to move toward the goal of transforming overall school culture (Bradley-Levine, 2021).

Research Question 2

It was shared in teacher participant survey responses that the overall school environment is positively affected by collaborative approaches to instructional delivery to all students in inclusive settings in which regular education and special education teachers partner in the classroom, creating an effective learning environment. Bochis et al.'s (2020) study states that the opportunity for reaching educational learning goals should be available to every student through

inclusive classroom instruction. Learning is effective when teachers establish relationships with students by making academic connections to real-life experiences (Bochis et al., 2020) linking learning and instructional decisions that influence students' academic outcomes (Kostelnik & Grady, 2009).

Data collected from teacher participants' survey responses showed that the administrative support they receive is appropriate in meeting students' needs towards the achievement of successful inclusive educational outcomes. Teachers felt that when administrators have culturally appropriate knowledge and provide culturally responsive resources, it contributes to the supports necessary for teachers to understand the population served. Teachers indicated that limited curriculum resources impede the achievement of positive educational outcomes in inclusive settings, as supported by Okeke and Mtyuda (2017). Veteran teachers can contribute to culturally responsive competence by sharing strategies with newer staff (Zaffini, 2015). It was noted by teachers in their responses to the survey questions that the school climate benefits from professional development aligned with appropriate culturally responsive practices. Teachers felt that more supports are needed to manage behaviors in the classroom environment across academic settings. When instruction is not impeded by problematic student behaviors, teachers can more easily create an environment for effective instruction and achievement of positive educational outcomes across academic settings in schools (Bochis et al., 2020).

Research Question 3

Teachers expressed the need to feel valued by their administrators and that teacher satisfaction and retention are directly correlated to teachers feeling that their voice is being heard, which contributes to student achievement. It is the school's responsibility to hire and retain special education teachers to appropriately support inclusive classroom instruction (Bettini

et al., 2022); thus, they should make conscious efforts in recruiting and retaining diverse

teaching staff (Farinde et al., 2016). Teacher participants expressed both passion for teaching due

to job satisfaction and that they considered leaving education in their responses. Research by

Koutrouba & Michala (2017) states that literature does not offer one single scientific definition

of teacher job dissatisfaction. Research from the study by Okeke and Mtyuda (2017) found that

lack of recognition and insufficient agency support from the state's department of education

contributes to teacher job dissatisfaction.

Administrator Participant Responses

The review of the data collected revealed that it is unanimous of the administrators

surveyed that they feel to provide teachers supports in various ways, including professional

development, training, feedback, evaluations, and one-on-one meetings. Administrators' survey

responses expressed that student needs are better supported in inclusive settings when student

populations are better understood. Administrators also agreed that a positive school climate

supports all students and empowers teachers by hearing their voice. Survey responses and

feedback demonstrated that administrators feel they adequately provide supports to teachers

based on environmental factors such as available resources.

Research Question 1

Administrators reported that professional growth opportunities and feedback are critical

in demonstrating teacher support. Supports can be layered and provided through coaching,

induction, and mentoring. From the administrators' perceptions, communication with staff

weighs on teachers' perceptions of supports received from their administrators. Karacabey's

(2020) study expressed the importance of professional development in motivating teachers in

providing effective inclusive classroom instruction. Facilitating the delivery of current

information that can be used in the classroom is a support administrators can provide

(Karacabey, 2020). Through review of the research, it is concluded that prioritizing the

professional needs of teachers and funding appropriately is a supportive role of administrators

(Bradley-Levine, 2021).

Administrators responded in the survey that email, one-on-one meetings, staff meetings,

texts/phone calls, and asking for feedback through surveys are identified as appropriate methods

to communicate with teachers. It was the opinion of administrators that it may sometimes be

necessary to respond to communications after school hours to aid teachers' perceptions that they

are being supported by their administrator. Review of the data collected concluded that

administrators must hold themselves responsible for their building and teacher's perceptions of

administrative support.

Research Question 2

Providing teachers with the knowledge of culturally responsive approaches and

appropriate supports was acknowledged in the survey by 100% of the administrator participants

as a factor in achieving effective educational outcomes for all students. Administrators felt that

positive educational outcomes are impeded when teachers do not understand the population

served; therefore, administrators stated that training should be offered to remove personal bias

and barriers to culturally responsive instruction in inclusive classroom settings. Administratrs

noted in the survey that traditional four-year college certification programs do not appropriately

prepare teachers for real-world instruction where it will be necessary to address the needs of at-

risk and underserved populations. Professional development that focuses on implementing

culturally responsive strategies that impact student outcomes is supported by the research of

Shogren et al., (2018). Dissatisfaction with professional development was noted by Okeke &

Mtyuda (2017), as being a cause for concern.

Research Question 3

Administrators acknowledged in the survey that teachers want to feel valued as critical

stakeholders, and this factor is important in managing teacher turnover. Self-care should be

perceived equally as an act of kindness for yourself and your learners because happy, healthy

teachers are created from healthy classrooms where learners are doing better academically,

socially, and emotionally (Gallagher, 2020). It was presented in the administrators' survey group

that providing a positive and welcoming school climate impacts the rate of teacher turnover.

Discussion

Review of survey data collected revealed commonalities expanding on the initial pilot

study and established similarities in the questions, structure, and outcomes that were consistent

and directly correlated to the pilot study's results. This qualitative pilot research study collected

and analyzed data from 10 structured open-ended response interview questions:

1. What is your role as an educator? Are you a teacher or an administrator?

2. How long have you been in this role? What is your total time as an educator?

3. What environment do you work in urban, suburban, or rural?

4. What age-group (Pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade) do you currently work with and
   what are your previous experiences as an educator?

5. If you are a teacher, provide feedback on how you feel your administrator has supports or
   supported you? If you are an administrator, provide feedback and information that you
   have received from your staff as how you have supported them. As an administrator, how

do you feel you have supported your staff? Give a brief explanation and as many details or scenarios that will be helpful the interview purpose.

6. If you are a teacher, provide ways that you feel your administrator could better support you? If you are an administrator, provide ways that your staff has shared with you as to how they feel you can better support them? As an administrator, how do you feel you can better support your teachers? Give a brief explanation and as many helpful details or scenarios that will be helpful for the interview purpose.

7. What medium or method of communication was this information received? In person, online, survey where the respondent was known, or an anonymous survey?

8. Was the feedback provided in a one-on-one environment or in a group setting?

9. If you were the teacher providing the feedback did you notice and change in behavior following receipt of the feedback by your administrator? If you are an administrator, did you make accommodations in your supports to your teaching staff because of the feedback that was received.

10. Is there any other information that you feel would be helpful in analyzing how teachers feel they could be better supported by their administrators from either a teacher or administrative perspective?

The pilot study covered a wide geographical area and educational environments, aligning with one basic research question that addressed teachers' feelings of how they can be better supported by their administrators and why. Subjects included a group of educations of various experience levels. The target group, divided into two primary subgroups, included two administrators and two teachers from a group of peers enrolled in a course required for Cohort 3 of the Slippery Rock University Doctorate Program. The study followed standard dissertation

requirements including literature review, methods, analysis, discussion, and conclusion.

Limitations of the study were determined to be target group size. It was concluded and

recommended that future research be conducted expanding the participants, geographic area,

knowledge of current literature, and restructuring research questions to strengthen the correlation

between the literature review and the research study.

Current literature supports the findings from both the pilot study and this dissertation's

research study. Karacabey (2020) found that administrators conclude having appropriate

supports in place, where teachers offer a more negative assessment of supports perceived to be

provided by their administrator. The data collected from survey responses stated that

administrators agreed in providing positive school climates and appropriate support to teachers in

their schools. Expressly, teachers presented that it was their general opinion of needing more

support and professional development to provide effective inclusive instruction across academic

settings, appropriate culturally responsive practices in classrooms, and to understand the at-risk

and underserved populations by creating relationships in communities served by our schools for

meeting the needs of all students in inclusive settings in achieving effective academic outcomes.

Inclusive Practices

Based on the review of literature, survey responses, and analysis of the data collected,

inclusion was found necessary in appropriately supporting equality across academic settings and

meeting the needs of at-risk and underserved populations to have opportunities to achieve

positive educational outcomes. Results from data collected from both administrators and teachers

concluded that successful inclusive culturally responsive instruction is dependent on

administrative supports, professional development, teacher training, staff retention, consistency

in schools, and school climates that foster an understanding of the community and population served.

It was found through research and data analysis that itinerant teachers play an important and key role in achieving quality positive educational outcomes for students since they provide instructional supports to students in the classroom and outside of the classroom environment. However, teachers recognized the importance of itinerant teachers much more than administrators, according to their survey responses.

Inclusion should be viewed broadly as a method of fostering educational experiences at all educational levels, regardless of student demographics or differences. It is the researcher's opinion that knowledge of classroom inclusion is limited to educators' individual personal experiences and training. Inconsistent behavioral policies and procedures directly impact successful classroom academic achievement. Research further finds that lower and medium income black families are limited in resources to solicit advocacy and supports appropriate for implementation of their children's IEPs (Marsico, 2022). Overall, we must follow federal expectations across educational environments, but we have a long way to go to create cohesive educational outcomes for all students in inclusive environments. Expectations in our local school environment are based on federal and state compliance laws that teachers must comply with having limited knowledge, resources, and supports.

The program Learning in Regular Classroom (LRC) was developed in the 1980s by the Chinese government to provide students with disabilities opportunities to have access to regular schools. Creating a just society involves all students having access to high-quality learning, pedagogies allowing them to thrive, and educational opportunities in inclusive settings (Mu, 2021). China's educational model is described by Zhu et al. (2021) as consisting of resource

centers that were previously special education schools with critical inclusive educational support systems across regions to support regular schools providing education to students with disabilities. Comparatively to compulsive education, students with disabilities are supported in regular schools through a national program under the Chinese government, Learning in Regular Classroom (LRC) introduced in the 1980s. Successful implementation of inclusive education is largely dependent on the professional qualities of teachers. Research is limited in identifying professional development because of the increase in the number of special education itinerant teachers, even though there has been growth in inclusive settings (Zhu et al., 2021).

Cultural Awareness Equals Culturally Responsive Practices

Both teachers and administrators' survey responses indicated a need for culturally responsive expectations and classroom practices. The need for understanding students' diverse cultural backgrounds, disabilities, or at-risk populations can be addressed using culturally responsive pedagogy, which supports language complexities and students' backgrounds while actively finding ways to maintain diverse characteristics and recognize that individual experiences in life are shaped by marginalizing identities. Teacher participants and administrators alike stressed the need for professional development in culturally responsive practices, with varying degrees of acknowledgement of whether or not such professional development is orchestrated by school administrators.

O'Connor (2016) cited data that supports the steps necessary in providing effective classroom instruction to culturally diverse populations represented by students with diverse needs such as immigration status, length of time in the United States, and educational experiences in the home country, which are our emergent bilingual or English Language Learner (ELL) students (Coleman et al., 2022). However, one limitation of the data from this study was

that it focused on special education and was limited in the diversity of the samples (O'Connor, 2016). The research study completed by Coleman et al. (2022) said that we see diversity today as a reflection of the changing demographics presented in schools across the United States.

Culturally diverse populations are representative of students with diverse needs such as immigration status, length of time in the United States, and educational experiences in the home country, which are our emergent bilingual or English Language Learner (ELL) students in our classrooms (Coleman et al., 2022). Teachers and administrators agreed that this is an area of professional development to focus on providing training for, the knowledge base and understanding the diversity of students and communities served in their school so they can meet the needs of at-risk and underserved populations in inclusive settings. Review of the survey data supported that there are correlations between positive student educational outcomes and teacher motivation.

Professional Development and Teacher Retention

Professional development not only includes time to analyze data, plan, and collaborate with peers (O'Connor, 2016), but also included are meaningful opportunities in the delivery of grade-level, research-based instruction, as stated in teachers' survey responses, and is an area needed for teachers to be able to provide effective educational opportunities that are culturally responsive to meet the needs of all students, but particularly those who are at-risk, underserved, and/or performing below grade-level. Furthermore, they acknowledged that there are needs for offering ongoing, regularly scheduled professional development opportunities in schools. Teachers felt that administrators can do more to support their personal and professional growth. As leaders, principals are expected to provide tools for achieving great instruction in their schools. One of these tools is staff training on specific professional development days allocated

on the school calendar. Several teacher participants were dissatisfied with the professional development that they receive and attributed this to administrator staffing shortages and the amount of responsibilities placed administrators. Conversely, administrators felt the supports they provide to teachers in their schools adequately and appropriately target culturally responsive inclusive practices that promote equality in classrooms, making students feel a sense of belonging that fosters an overall effective learning environment for all students.

Resources identified in Coleman et al.'s (2022) research noted appropriate professional development opportunities supportive to schools in achieving effective educational outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) populations:

- ASHA Cultural Competence Check-in: Self Reflection is a tool promoting awareness of personal perspective on the influence of cultural and linguistic factors in engagement with families.

- The IRIS Center provides modules eligible for professional development credit on cultural and linguistic diversity. (Coleman et al., 2022)

The online survey responses for this study demonstrated that teachers who are passionate about their job in education or remain in the profession for other personal or nuclear family reasons may not consider leaving the profession, while others leave for other opportunities as educators or for alternative career opportunities, making it imperative to recruit and hire new teachers to fill the major teacher shortage existing in the United States which was determined by Bryner's (2021) study.

Research Questions

Based on interpretations made from the review, grouping, categorization, hand-coding, and analysis of the data collected from teachers' and administrators' responses to the 10 open-

ended survey questions, it is concluded that answers to the three broad research questions developed for this study can be summarized.

1. What are teachers' beliefs, expectations, and perceptions of how their administrators should support them?

   Primarily, teachers reported that they expect their administrators to be knowledgeable and have leadership skills to create an engaging and positive school climate. Review of the literature found that teachers lack motivation in supporting educational research-based practices when there is not a parallel alignment to their personal beliefs, theories, and practices when national, state, and district educational standards and policies provides challenges, which creates pressure or teachers and administrators (Basckin et al., 2021). It was concluded from review of written responses to the survey questions that teachers expect access to resources, specifically curriculum materials to provide appropriate classroom instruction aligned with grade-level benchmarks.

2. What are appropriately culturally responsive approaches that teachers should have knowledge, appropriate supports, and access to so effective education outcomes can be achieved for all student populations?

   The research concludes that communication between teachers and administrators is key in perceptions of supports received. One main point was that teachers feel that their administrator has limited knowledge about what they do in the classroom, therefore negatively affecting leaders' abilities to communicate clear expectation for teachers in their classrooms, as well as administrators in their buildings. It was found that teachers should be aware of cultural differences, absent of personal bias. Peer collaboration, time to plan, and administrators providing feedback are tools that can support achievement of

effective educational outcomes for all students in the classroom environment across

academic settings.

3. Are there correlations between teacher motivation, teacher retention, and student

achievement?

It was determined from analysis of the data collected that educational outcomes are more

successful when teachers are motivated, like their jobs, feel appreciated, understand the

environment, and can remove bias or negative personal experiences from the classroom

setting. The desire to teach and individual interpersonal styles are motivators leading to

teacher enthusiasm and job satisfaction. Supportive student autonomy is established by

what teachers say and do during classroom instruction based on the teacher's motivation

style (Reeve & Su, 2013). Furthermore, teachers value having their opinions heard

because they feel that they are contributing to the school's mission and engaging climate,

therefore encouraging them to remain in the profession.

Pandemic Era

Schools faced disadvantages that already existed before shutdowns from the COVID-19

pandemic in spring 2020 and into the 2020-21 school year. Inequalities were amplified, causing

more challenges for teachers and students across all disciplines and grade levels in underserved

schools (Jones et al., 2021). Rakap et al. (2023) stated that social isolation during the COVID-19

pandemic that was established to prevent the spread of virus transmission presented significant

challenges to families of children with disabilities, including disruption to their daily schedules

and routines which impacted family priorities and increased problematic behaviors. It was

unexpected from the researcher's hypothesis that none of the survey responses from teachers or

administrators referenced management of education practices as contributing to classroom or

school challenges based on lack of in-class hours and school closures as experienced across the United States following the pandemic. The future of educational supports can be examined compared to how the pandemic impacted administrators' perceptions of supports they provided to teachers, the perceptions from teachers of the supports received from their administrators, and if the pandemic impacted perceptions of supports, inclusive practices, cultural awareness, pedagogy, and student educational outcomes across environments.

Limitations

The researcher established an opinion from review of literature, data collected, and cumulation of survey results that the final results presented in the study's final research report is heavily impacted by teacher, administrator, and entity sample size, availability of demographical data, full disclosure of the diversity of the participant population served, entity or environment represented, and protective measures taken. Using the method of protecting participant's identities as in this study impeded the ability to layer the analysis of the results from the survey. The limitations acknowledged in this study are supported by O'Connor's (2016) study, which notes that the limited diversity of samples is directly correlated to there being a limitation in the study's results.

Recommendations

Findings from the study revealed that administrators would benefit from increased knowledge of how teachers are impacted daily across classroom settings and educational environments. This is supported in the literature review from Kostelnik & Grady's (2009) study, which found that the knowledge and leadership of building administrators correlates to program excellence achievements. The researcher feels that all staff, teachers, and administrators would benefit from more training in cultural competency and inclusive practices. Through review and

analysis of survey question responses, teachers and administrators felt they would benefit from increasing their knowledge to better support the students and communities they serve. The researcher determined from review of the literature and data collected that retention of more diverse teachers is imperative in meeting culturally responsive needs of students, but creative strategies will be necessary to address inequalities based on budget constraints, turn-over rates, and limited knowledge of new teachers needing more intensive supports to provide quality instruction in classrooms.

Incentives are being offered to certified special education candidates in order for schools to be able to fulfill legal requirements in meeting the needs of special education students (Bettini et al., 2022). Implementing merit pay is one action that has been noted to retain teachers and improve student achievement in certain circumstances. Adjusting teachers' salaries encourages motivations for higher performance level,; but fairness, monetary limitations, various variables, and other factors create challenges for creating policies and implementing procedures for this type of program and can directly impact the overall effectiveness and outcomes impacting retention of teachers and efficient student achievement (Kim, 2021).

The participating teachers in this study feel education should be fair, and part of that fairness is access to resources needed to address existing barriers in low and high-poverty schools. When resources are not available, teachers feel obligated to use their own money to buy books, supplies, and other materials for their classrooms to meet the needs of students. Principals share this view and supply financial support to their schools by purchasing necessary materials (Will, 2016). The survey completed by Will's (2016) research study found that teachers become frustrated and discouraged when professional expectations are increasing while demands are constantly changing because when there are educational policy discussions teachers feel ignored.

It is the opinion and conclusion of the researcher based on evidence from survey data analysis, teachers are more engaged in instruction when they feel valued and that they contribute to the decisions and successes of their educational environments.

Administrators can create a unique level of support by focusing on teachers' self-care through incentive programs or student achievement connected to professional development, training, and meetings to get ahead of turnover rates in their schools. Teachers not practicing self-care or giving back to themselves eventually risk having nothing left to give based on demands in the profession of education. Some examples of self-care are to hydrate by drinking water, manage stress by taking deep breaths, get a good night's rest to better face the next day, and avoid skipping meals. Positivity in classrooms starts with healthy and happy teachers and filters through to classroom learning and effective student outcomes (Gallagher, 2020).

Recent research demonstrated that the world and our societies' emotional well-being within families continues to be adversely impacted by decisions made during the pandemic (Rakap et al., 2023); therefore, future research should be done to continue to establish trends that will support more conclusive impacts that the pandemic created for schools, classroom instruction, graduation rates, and serving at-risk and underserved populations (Rakap et al., 2023).

The researcher recommends continued research on the topic of teacher perceptions of administrator supports for culturally relevant classroom practices for at-risk populations. Future studies should be conducted to include demographic characteristics of the school, survey participants, and the students served. The current research used an anonymous online survey for collecting data to protect the participants from harm, which is necessary, but not without considering the need for future research to be able to categorize the data using a coding system to

maintain participants' privacy, especially relative to demographics, environments where services are provided, and specific age group served so the data can be presented in greater detail in the report. Future research could have a survey exclusion protocol measure for participants that may not be a part of either the teacher or administrator groups, such as long-term substitutes not having substantial input to the survey questions. Additionally, future research should use a larger sample size and wider geographic area for increased generalizability of results.

Conclusion

The overall impacts of the study results could be more conclusive by continuing to increase the participation percentages for individuals and educational entities across Pennsylvania. Researchers need to continue to foster open and honest feedback through the data collection process without jeopardizing the content quality of the results and allowing for data collection from larger diversification and differentiation of demographical ranges among common themes and target areas. While this study did reveal important themes regarding teacher perception of administrator support for culturally relevant practices in inclusive classrooms, its results were limited to the two Pennsylvania LEAs that participated. In order to make more generalizable conclusions about these themes in a larger context, it is the conclusion and recommendation of the researcher that educational research and improvements would benefit from further research regarding how administrators support and provide teachers with tools to efficiently respond to inclusive instruction for at-risk students and underserved student communities using culturally appropriate research-based methods.

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Appendix A: Google Forms Online Survey Questions

Educator Survey

A Qualitative Research Study on the Impact of Administrative Support and Access to Culturally

Responsive Tools Among Teachers Serving At-Risk Populations

* Indicates required question

1. Describe the support you receive from your building or district administration and if you feel

    this support is sufficient for you to provide quality education to your students. *

2. Does the support that you receive from your administrator foster an effective learning

    environment in inclusive classroom settings? Please explain. *

3. Explain how at-risk populations are supported in your educational environment and if you

    feel this support is inclusive for successful educational outcomes. *

4. Relative to culturally responsive practices and resources, do you feel that you are well

    prepared to deliver education in a positive manner for all students? What additional training

    and support would benefit you and your students? *

5. How effective is the communication, training, and professional development provided by

    administrators in your school? How do these factors impact your assessment of

    administrative support? *

6. What is the area that you feel the need for the most significant support? Does this area

    impede delivery of successful lessons in the classroom? How can administrators address this

    area? Please elaborate on specific issues. *

7. Do you feel that your opinions are considered and valued in the school's mission of creating

    a successful educational model? Please explain. *

8. How important is one-on-one feedback and performance evaluations to you for personal

    professional growth? What do you need to continue to develop as an effective educator?

    Explain. *

9. Have you ever considered leaving education or looking for a new position elsewhere? How

    does administrator support impact your decision to stay in your current position or seek other

    employment? *

10. Do you generally feel supported by your administrator? If so, what factors impact this

    impression? If not, what can you suggest that administrators do to increase the support in

    schools and clarify teacher perceptions of administrative support? What is the most important

    area that you feel an administrator should provide the most support for a successful school

    climate? *

Administrator Survey

A Qualitative Research Study on the Impact of Administrative Support and Access to Culturally Responsive Tools Among Teachers Serving At-Risk Populations Survey

* Indicates required question

1. Describe the support you provide to educators and if you feel this support is sufficient for teachers to provide quality education to their students. Identify if this support is based on your own evaluation or based on educator feedback. *

2. Does the support that you provide to educators foster an effective learning environment in inclusive classroom settings? Please explain. *

3. Explain how you provide support for educators to meet the needs of at-risk populations in your educational environment and if you feel this support is inclusive for successful educational outcomes. *

4. Relative to culturally responsive practices and resources, do you feel that your educators are well prepared to deliver education in a positive manner for all students? What additional training and support would benefit your educators and students? *

5. In your perception, how effective is your communication, training, and professional development that you provide to educators in your school? How do you think these factors impact your teachers' assessment of the support you provide? *

6. What is the area that you feel educators need the most significant support? Does this area impede delivery of successful lessons in the classroom? How can you and other administrators address this area? Please elaborate on specific issues. *

7. To what extent do you consider and value your educators' opinions in the school's mission of creating a successful educational model? Please explain. *

8. How important is one-on-one feedback and performance evaluations to your educators for

   personal professional growth? What do you provide to educators to continue their

   development as effective educators? *

9. Do you often deal with teachers who are considering leaving education or looking for a new

   position elsewhere? How do you think administrator support impacts educators' decision to

   stay in their current position or seek other employment? *

10. Do you generally feel that you support your educators? If so, what factors impact this

    impression? If not, what can you suggest that you and other administrators do to increase the

    support in schools and clarify educator perceptions of administrative support? What is the

    most important area that you feel administrators should provide the most support for a

    successful school climate? *

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Google Forms

Appendix B: Letters of Approval from Participating School Entities

Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV
453 Maple Street, Grove City, PA 16127 · 724-458-6700 · fax: 724-458-5083 · www.miu4.org

Approval Request Form to Complete Research in District

April 29, 2023

Title of Study: A Qualitative Research Study on the Impact of Administrative
                             Support and Access to Culturally Responsive Tools Among
                             Teachers Serving At-Risk Populations

Principal Investigator(s):   Dr. Ashlea Rineer-Hershey
                             M. Glynnes Smith

To the Slippery Rock University IRB,

As a representative of Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV, I confirm that the intermediate unit grants permission for the proposed research: Educator and Administrator Surveys to be conducted once IRB approval has been obtained.

Wayde Killmeyer   Executive Director
Printed Name of School District Official   Title of School District Official

_____   May 2, 2023
Signature of School District Official   Date

Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV is an education and community service agency comprised of highly qualified staff who customize solutions to evolving challenges.

Renaissance Academy

413 Fairview Street, Phoenixville, PA 19460
Phone: 610-983-4080 Fax: 610-983-4096

Approval Request Form to Complete Research in Charter School

April 29, 2023

Title of Study: A Qualitative Research Study on the Impact of Administrative Support and Access to Culturally Responsive Tools Among Educators serving At-Risk Populations

Principal Investigator(s):
Dr. Ashlea Rineer-Hershey
M. Glynnes Smith

To the Slippery Rock University IRB,
As a representative of the Renaissance Academy Charter School, I confirm that the charter school grants permission for the proposed research: Teacher and Administrator Surveys to be conducted once IRB approval has been obtained.

_Gina Guarino Buli_____   _CEO_____
Printed Name of Charter School Official   Title of Charter School Official

_____   _5/3/23_____
Signature of Charter School Official   Date

Hello Dr. Killmeyer,

      I am attaching a template that can be used for your approval so that I can submit IRB with my application. I hope this will be helpful. I will look forward to hearing from you soon. Stay safe, take good care, and thank you again for your support.

Regards,

Glynnes

Approval Request Form to Complete Research in District

Date: April 29, 2023

Title of Study: A Qualitative Research Study on the Impact of Administrative
                                           Support and Access to Culturally Responsive Tools Among
                                           Educators Serving At-Risk Populations

Principal Investigator(s):   Dr. Ashlea Rineer-Hershey
                                           M. Glynnes Smith

To the Slippery Rock University IRB,

As a representative of the _____ school district, I confirm that the school district grants permission for the proposed research: Educator and Administrator Surveys to be conducted once IRB approval has been obtained.

_____   _____
Printed Name of School District Official   Title of School District Official

_____   _____
Signature of School District Official   Date

Appendix C: Invitation to Participate Letters

From: Smith, M G mgs1004@sru.edu
Subject: Doctoral Student Dissertation Update and Participant Survey Information
Date: June 2, 2023 at 12:12 PM
To: LEA Leader@miu4.org
Bcc: Smith, M G mgs1004@sru.edu

Good Afternoon Dr. Killmeyer,

I am excited to share with you that my study has been approved by IRB very thankful for your patience as I navigated this process. Your approval to support my doctoral program dissertation research study is appreciated. I am honored to have the privilege of expertise from the staff at Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV to assist me by completing a 10-question online open-ended survey to collect data for my study, "A Qualitative Research Study on the Impact of Administrative Support and Access to Culturally Responsive Tools Among Teachers Serving At-Risk Populations" which has been approved by the Slippery Rock University Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Spring 2023 academic term. It is expected to take 15-20 minutes to complete the survey focusing on culturally responsive practices used to meet the needs of at-risk and underserved populations from diverse demographical settings in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade pre and post COVID-19 pandemic educational environments in varying geographical areas across Pennsylvania public schools. Participation in the online survey is completely voluntary, open-ended written responses will be sent electronically using Google Forms. Participant identity and confidentiality measures include not collecting personal information, investigator contact details are undisclosed, and strict methods of confidential hand data coding will be utilized to prepare the analysis and results included in the final dissertation study report.

The goal of my research study is to assist in identifying professional development and administrative support success in schools across the state. Suggestions for future state-wide improvements, increasing supports, or any needs for further research will be included as part of this published dissertation. There is a survey specific to educators: teachers, paraprofessionals, assistants, and related service providers. A separate survey is included targeting data collection from an administrative perspective. These two surveys collect feedback from school staff involved in the day-to-day functions within the classroom environment. For your convenience, I am attaching is an email including survey, consent details, and electronic links to both surveys that can be forwarded directly to your staff as appropriate. Links to both surveys are below for your review. Due to individual educator and administrator responsibilities and busy schedules, I will send a reminder email that you may forward at your discretion on or after the 5th day of the survey window which will be open for no more than10 days, closing at the end of the day on June 15, 2023. I have adjusted the survey window to hopefully be more convenient based on our collaboration. I am looking forward to analyzing the data and completing my dissertation study report. Thank you in advance for your time and assistance.

Have a nice weekend and upcoming close of the 2022-2023 academic school year!

Respectfully and Best Regards,

M. Glynnes Smith, M.Ed., MBA
Candidate for Doctorate of Special Education
Slippery Rock University Pennsylvania
Email: mgs1004@Sru.edu
Phone: 610-334-9966

"I don't know what lies around the bend, but I'm going to believe that the best does." - L. M. Montgomery

Participant Survey...py.pdf

Hello Educational Colleagues,

It is a privilege to have the opportunity to invite you to participate in research on the topic: "A Qualitative Research Study on the Impact of Administrative Support and Access to Culturally Responsive Tools Among Teachers Serving At-Risk Populations." I am using my doctoral in special education dissertation as the platform. As an educator, I have seen supports through the lenses of a special education teacher and district-level administrator. The goal of this project is to use a positive methodology format to confidentially collect, thoroughly review, and hand-code data collected to identify administrative success in supporting staff, areas that may benefit from additional professional development opportunities, and if there are needs for future research in our school environments across Pennsylvania.

Your support by participating in this online open-ended 10-question survey by providing written response feedback using Google Forms would be appreciated. Strict methods of confidential hand data coding will be used to present results and protect the subject identity. Participation is completely voluntary, will take a minimum of 15-20 minutes to complete, and the survey window will be open through the end of the day on June 15, 2023. By clicking the appropriate link below to submit your completed responses you are confirming that you are currently a member of that specific sub-group, acknowledge that you are voluntarily participating in the study, your responses are being provided using ethical standards, and that you understand that the information obtained will only be used for purposes of this dissertation study. Please review the Research Participant Information Letter below prior to starting the survey.

Educators: teachers, paraprofessionals, assistants, and related service providers please click this link: https://forms.gle/cD68L4WCFajcqobKA

Administrative staff please click this link: https://forms.gle/ThLGxESAgi3tVvoVA

I will look forward to confidentially reviewing the cumulative data collected from survey responses. Your support is important in our educational processes and in assisting me in my personal educational goal to strengthen my skills as an educator. Thank you for sharing your valuable time with me by completing and submitting your feedback. Have a great day in education!

Respectfully,

M. Glynnes Smith, M.Ed., MBA
Candidate for Doctor of Special Education
Slippery Rock University Pennsylvania
Email: mgs1004@Sru.edu
Phone: 610-334-9966

"I don't know what lies around the bend, but I'm going to believe that the best does." - L. M. Montgomery

Appendix D: Informed Consent Letter

SlipperyRock
University
of Pennsylvania

Department of Special Education
114 McKay Education Building
Slippery Rock, PA 16057

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATIONAL LETTER

A Qualitative Research Study on the Impact of Administrative Support and Access to Culturally Responsive Tools Among Teachers Serving At-Risk Populations
Co-Investigator: M. Glynnes Smith, M.Ed., MBA, BS
Email: mgs1004@sru.edu

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a member of a school district, charter school, or intermediate unit's teaching staff, classroom support staff, related services provider, or administrator in Pennsylvania.

Important Information about the Research Study

Things you should know:

- The purpose of the study is to identify areas that administrators are supporting classroom staff or areas that need additional supports. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete written responses to a 10-question online open-ended electronic survey. This will take approximately a minimum of 15-20 minutes to complete.
- Risks for participating in the study are expected to be minimal and could include participant's discomfort in providing objective feedback or emotional stress from discussing sensitive topics.
- The study will provide benefits to educator's future supports for at-risk and underserved students.
- 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 take part in this research project.

What is the Study About and Why are We Doing it?

The purpose of the study is to identify and provide data in areas that administrators are supporting classroom staff or areas that would benefit from receiving additional supports. The data will be collected, assessed, evaluated, thoroughly reviewed, grouped, analyzed, and presented in the research report to identify administrative successes in supporting classroom staff and identify areas that will benefit from additional supports.

What Will Happen if You Take Part in This Study?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete and submit written responses to a 10-question online open-ended electronic survey using a link provided by the co-investigator within a limited time frame not to exceed 10 days. This is expected to take approximately a minimum of 15-20 minutes to

complete. The information provided will be linked to dissertation review of literature and a pilot study completed by the co-investigator as a requirement of the university's doctorate in special education program.

How Could You Benefit From This Study?

Access to the published dissertation and data results will be necessary for individual participants to benefit directly from the study. Review of the study will provide knowledge of how classrooms are supported across Pennsylvania relative to culturally responsive practices for educators serving at-risk populations and underserved populations. Classroom staff can use the data to make improvements and request additional supports that will benefit delivery of quality educational outcomes. Participants can benefit from the data provided in the report for continuing to support the educational process in serving at-risk poulations across the state through culturally responsive opportunities. Participants in an administrative role can use the data to review their current practices and provide additional trainings and other support identified in the study's results to benefit their school's staff and students.

What Risks Might Result From Being in This Study?

There will be no personal identifiers used in the survey submission, data collection, or study report processes. Eliminating tracking individual identifiers reduces inadvertent disclosure of personal information that could pose risk or harm to the participants. The primary and co-investigators believe there are minimal risks from participating in this research study, which could include discomforts in providing objective feedback or emotional stress from discussing sensitive topics such as support provided by school leaders. Protecting the participants' identity through an anonymous survey decreases the risk of punitive harm from a participant's employer.

What Resources Are Available To Support Risks?

Precautions to protect disclosure of any participant's personal information includes elimination of the ability to collect personal details as part of the online written survey response data collection process using Google Forms. The survey tool, Google Forms has been formatted to eliminate any probability of collecting participants' personal identifying information that would connect their identity to any written response to any specific question, therefore there is no opportunity to unintentionally disclose information that could be harmful. Participants experiencing personal psychological feelings resulting from participation in the study or by providing written responses to sensitive topics during the data collection process for purposes of this qualitative research study can access mental health support information by clicking the links below.

https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/MentalHealth/Pages/default.aspx

https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/safeschools/MentalHealth/Pages/Resources.aspx

https://www.forbes.com/sites/onemind/2020/10/06/the-mental-health-resources-that-teachersneed/?sh=1562325a79b9

How Will We Protect Your Information?

We plan to publish the results of this study. To protect your privacy, we will not include any information that could directly identify you. We will protect the confidentiality of your research records by using an anonymous survey tool that does not save your email or any identifying information. Your name and an

other information that can directly identify you will not be collected as part of the data collection process of this project.

What Will Happen to the Information We Collect About You After the Study is Over?

The co-investigator will keep your survey responses to use for future research or other purposes. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will not be collected or saved as part of this study.

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.

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, you do not need to submit your survey electronically. There are no known instances under which the subject's participation may be terminated by the primary or co-investigator without the consent of the subject, but information deemed inappropriate for purposes of the study may be excluded.

Contact Information for the Study Team and Questions about the Research

If you have questions about this research study, you may contact:

Principal Investigator: Ashlea Rineer-Hershey, PhD
Email: a.rineer-hershey@sru.edu
Phone: 724-202-9107
Fax: 724-738-4395

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 302
Slippery Rock, PA 16057
Phone: (724)738-4846
Email: irb@sru.edu

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You will be provided an electronic copy of this document for your records and you can print the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, 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. You indicate your voluntary agreement to participate by completing and electronically submitting written responses to the survey questions.

Appendix E: Survey Closing Reminder Letter

From: "Smith, M G" <mgs1004@sru.edu>
Subject: Survey Reminder_Closing Thursday, June 15, 2023
Date: June 10, 2023 at 4:40:22 PM EDT
To: Wayde Killmeyer <wayde.killmeyer@miu4.org>
Reply-To: "Smith, M G" <mgs1004@sru.edu>

Good afternoon Dr. Killmeyer,

Hopefully, you had a good week. Overall, my study will benefit from the anonymous written survey responses that I have received across participating Pennsylvania school entities. Google Forms has been strictly coded not to collect any identifying information; therefore, I do not know the source or entity relative to any specific data. I am reaching out to follow-up and as a professional courtesy reminder that there is still time to support my Spring 2023 academic term doctoral research study, "A Qualitative Research Study on the Impact of Administrative Support and Access to Culturally Responsive Tools Among Teachers Serving At-Risk Populations" through Slippery Rock University Pennsylvania. The survey will close at the end of the day on Thursday, June 15th. If there is any way you can provide encouragement for staff to voluntarily participate in the study and emphasize confidentiality of written responses, it would be appreciated. An increase in educator and administrator data will be helpful in further validating my research study results. Attached is a drafted reminder email regarding the survey and links for your convenience in forwarding to your staff at your discretion.

Your time and participation in my research study is appreciated. Thank you again for supporting my personal professional journey. Have an awesome weekend and best wishes in preparing for the 2023-2024 academic school year.

Respectfully,

M. Glynnes Smith

M. Glynnes Smith, M.Ed., MBA
Candidate for Doctor of Special Education
Slippery Rock University Pennsylvania
Email: mgs1004@Sru.edu
Phone: 610-334-9966

"I don't know what lies around the bend, but I'm going to believe that the best does." - L. M. Montgomery

Dear Educators and Administrators,

This is a reminder that there is still time for the Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV staff to provide written responses to my research study survey, "A Qualitative Research Study on the Impact of Administrative Support and Access to Culturally Responsive Tools Among Teachers Serving At-Risk Populations". Google Forms has been coded to anonymously collect the survey data. By not collecting identifying information, identity of participants will be confidential. Strict methods of hand data coding will be used to present results and protect participants identities. Participation is completely voluntary and survey responses can be submitted through the end of the day on Thursday, June 15th. By clicking the appropriate link below to submit your completed responses, you are confirming that you are currently a member of that specific sub-group, acknowledge that you are voluntarily participating in the study, your responses are being provided using ethical standards, and that you understand that the information obtained will only be used for purposes of this dissertation study. I appreciate you sharing your valuable time with me by completing and submitting responses to the 10 open-ended questions. Thank you for making a difference!

Regards,

M. Glynnes Smith

M. Glynnes Smith, M.Ed., MBA
Candidate for Doctor of Special Education
Slippery Rock University Pennsylvania
Email: mgs1004@Sru.edu
Phone: 610-334-9966

Please click the link below if you are an educator, including teachers, paraprofessionals, assistants, and related service providers:

https://forms.gle/MHojBEAkaiXWboKj9

Please click the link below if you are a member of your school entity's administrative team.

https://forms.gle/FbVYNEBRP4p4F4xh9

Appendix F: School Leader Participation Request Letter

On Thu, Mar 16, 2023 at 3:40 PM Smith, M G <mgs1004@sru.edu> wrote:

Good afternoon Dr. Killmeyer,

I am a Doctoral Student at Slippery Rock University Pennsylvania for the Spring 2023 academic term. I writing to request the privilege to including teachers and administrators from your district, charter school, or intermediate unit in a brief survey using semi-structured open-ended interview questions regarding culturally responsive practices used to meet the needs of at-risk and underserved populations from diverse demographical settings in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade educational environments in varying geographical areas across Pennsylvania public schools. Pre and post COVID-19 pandemic impacted responses will be analyzed as appropriate. There will be a survey specific to teachers and a separate survey intended to target data collection from an administrative perspective. Participation in the survey is completely voluntary, will be provided via electronic link, and is expected to take 10-15 minutes to complete. Strict methods of confidential hand data coding will be used to present results and protect the subject identity. The survey questions can be viewed on the attached document. The benefit of supporting my research study is to assist in identifying professional development and administrative support success in schools across the state. Suggestions for future state-wide improvements, increasing supports, or needs for further research will be included as part of this published dissertation.

If you and your district, charter school, or intermediate unit approves this request, a return email acknowledging receipt of this email stating your approval would be appreciated. Please include a letter as an email attachment on official stationery acknowledging your approval and support to participate in my study, "A Qualitative Research Study on the Impact of Administrative Support and Access to Culturally Responsive Tools Among Teachers Serving At-Risk Populations" to be included with my application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The goal is to forward an initial email with survey details, addressing consent for participating, and links to the survey across participating districts, charter schools, and intermediate units immediately upon receipt of IRB approval opening a 10-day survey response window. Reminder emails will be forwarded to the designee on or after the 5th day that can be forwarded to appropriate staff at your discretion. To be appreciative and respectful of individual educator's busy schedules across the state, I do not anticipate extending the response window. I will look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your time and consideration is appreciated.

M. Glynnes Smith

M. Glynnes Smith, M.Ed., MBA

Candidate for Doctorate of Special Education

Slippery Rock University Pennsylvania

Email: mgs1004@Sru.edu

Phone: 610-334-9966

"I don't know what lies around the bend, but I'm going to believe that the best does." - L. M. Montgomery

Appendix G: IRB Approval

On Jun 1, 2023, at 12:16 PM, irb <irb@sru.edu> wrote

Hello!

Please find attached a letter from the IRB approving protocol# 2023-096-88-A titled, "A Qualitative Research Study on the Impact of Administrative Support and Access to Culturally Responsive Tools Among Teachers Serving At-Risk Populations."

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Slippery Rock University received the requested modifications to the above-referenced protocol.

The IRB has reviewed the modifications and approved the protocol under the EXEMPT category of review.

You may begin your project as of June 1, 2023. Your protocol will automatically close on May 31, 2024, unless you request, in writing, to keep it open.

Please contact the IRB Office by phone at (724)738-4846 or via email at irb@sru.edu should your protocol change in any way.

Best wishes in your research!

Sincerely,

Rachel Seminatore

Office of Grants, Research & Sponsored Programs
Academic Affairs
Institutional Review Board (IRB
irb@sru.edu

Office (724) 738-4846

SlipperyRock
University
of Pennsylvania

TO: Dr. Ashlea Rineer-Hershey
               Special Education

FROM: _____
               Michael Holmstrup, Ph.D., Chairperson
               Institutional Review Board (IRB)

DATE: June 1, 2023

RE: Protocol #:   2023-096-88-A
               Protocol Title: A Qualitative Research Study on the Impact of
                               Administrative Support and Access to Culturally
                               Responsive Tools Among Teachers Serving At-Risk
                               Populations

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Slippery Rock University received the requested modifications to the above-referenced protocol.

The IRB has reviewed the modifications and approved the protocol under the EXEMPT category of review.

You may begin your project as of June 1, 2023. Your protocol will automatically close on May 31, 2024 unless you request, in writing, to keep it open.

Please contact the IRB Office by phone at (724)738-4846 or via email at irb@sru.edu should your protocol change in any way.