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Factors in Teacher Turnover Within a Nonpublic Special Education Setting

Sarah Wilson
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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Sarah Sturgill-Wilson

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

Factors in Teacher Turnover Within a Nonpublic Special Education Setting

by

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MA, Frostburg State University, 2011

BS, Frostburg State University, 2009

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2025

Abstract

The persistent turnover among special educators poses significant challenges to the quality of education provided to students with disabilities. The problem addressed in this study was the significant rate of turnover of special education teachers in a nonpublic special needs school on the east coast of the United States. Guided by Maslow's theory of motivation and hierarchy of needs, the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate the experiences of special education teachers and factors that influenced their decision to remain within the classroom environment. Eight special educators participated in semistructured interviews sharing the experiences they perceived as contributing factors to remaining within the classroom environment. Additionally, four nonpublic school program administrators provided their perspectives on teacher turnover and school-wide supports to promote special education teacher retention. Thematic analysis using open coding was conducted. Results revealed that special educators (a) often felt isolated within the school community, (b) required more direct support and involvement from school administration, and (c) expressed a strong desire to connect with colleagues through mentorship opportunities, professional growth, and team collaboration. Findings were used to inform a professional development plan aimed at fostering mentoring and building support for special educators within the school community. By strengthening the partnerships among school administrators and special education teachers a more inclusive, supportive educational community with the potential for decreased teacher turnover may be created, thereby fostering positive social change over time.

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Dedication

I dedicate this research to my father, Dennis Sturgill, for always pushing and supporting me during this process to brag to his friends that he finally had a doctor in the family. To my children, for someday understanding why I was always working and studying. To Dr. Andersson for being flexible and understanding with me during this process. It has been hard for me to find a balance between family and schoolwork. Finally, I dedicate this research to all the educators entering the field of special education who seek to make a difference in the lives of their students.

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I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Walden University for providing me with this truly transformative educational experience. Through the rigorous curriculum and supportive faculty, Walden has empowered me to develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence to create meaningful, lasting change within my field of education.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

In special education, qualified educators are essential in supporting student needs while also creating an overall successful school community. In better supporting student needs, the issue of special education teacher turnover has become a growing concern for researchers, practitioners, and school administrative leaders (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Increased teacher turnover has led to negative effects on the school community (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Creating an educational environment that sustains special educators is one of the most challenging aspects within the field of special education yet appears to be the most needed to meet the needs of the growing student population (Van den Borre et al., 2021). High rates of teacher turnover are directly linked to teacher shortages nationally, accounting for close to 90% of annual teacher demand (Van den Borre et al., 2021).

Educators within nonpublic settings are responsible for making curriculum meaningful through real world experiences and applicable to students' lives while also demonstrating effective teaching strategies to promote overall positive behaviors (Craig, 2024). The problem addressed by this study takes place in an east coast city of the United States within nonpublic special needs program consisting of four special needs school programs totaling an estimated 450 students (for students ages 6 to age 21) that are experiencing high rates of special education teacher turnover. According to McCullough et al. (2022), across all classroom models, those classroom settings with higher percentages of students with disabilities are associated with larger turnover. Special

education teachers are often at a higher risk of turnover, not because of the demands presented by the students that they teach, but rather due to additional expectations consistent with the special education position (McCullough et al., 2022). Special education teacher attrition has numerous negative effects for students and schools (Madigan & Curran, 2021).

Rationale

The target nonpublic school system studied has a population of an estimated 450 students within the target special education program, and all students have varying special needs from specific learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral disorders, autism, traumatic brain injury, as well as varying physical impairments. The target nonpublic school system being studied is part of a network of nonpublic schools state-wide, all experiencing similarly high rates of teacher turnover as well. The target nonpublic special needs school system is located within a mid-eastern city of the United States and is experiencing high rates of teacher turnover. According to program administrators, such high rates of teacher turnover have led to difficulties in fully providing student support and structure within the classroom setting as well as maintaining an effective learning environment of educators familiar with the needs of the students and the expectations of the school community.

According to data from January 2014 through January 2019, the target school program had 100 identified special educators each year. Within that 5-year period collectively, 90% of special education teachers left their original classroom setting with new special education teachers hired to fill all needed vacancies. On average 25% of

special education teachers leave this program each year creating a continuous need for support within the target school program, creating close to 100% turnover within a 5-year period. With such high rates of turnover, creating a school community with consistent faculty and support for students with special needs has become an ongoing problem each year.

Teaching can be a highly stressful job due to workload within special education, contributing to overall high rates of turnover and increased teacher burnout (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2021). The goal of this study was to improve understanding of attrition by identifying common trends and factors within special education that contribute to the increased turnover while also developing a means for better supporting the needs of special educators. According to program administrators, high rates of teacher turnover have led to difficulties in fully providing student support and structure within the classroom setting as well as maintaining an effective learning environment of educators familiar with the needs of the students and the expectations of the school community. The purpose of this study was to investigate special education teachers' experiences about factors that influence their retention decision. A basic qualitative study approach was used to address the target study, focusing on special education teacher turnover.

Definition of Terms

To provide greater clarity, the following terms are defined according to usage in the context of this study. All terms are directly linked to research and/or related terminology relating to perceived factors in teacher turnover within a nonpublic special

education environment.

Attrition rate: The term attrition rate refers to the number of teachers leaving the school, the system, or the profession altogether (DeMatthews et al., 2022). The term attraction rate specially refers to the rate by which special education teachers leave the target study location.

Administrator: The term administrator refers to the person responsible for supervising and evaluating special education programs in the building (Jackson & Parker, 2023). In this study, administrators may include educational directors, principals, assistant principal, and school specific roles, such as curriculum coordinator and/or assessment coordinator (Smith Washington, 2024).

Nonpublic special education setting: Within this study, the term nonpublic special education setting refers to nonsectarian schools designed to support students who demonstrated academic, behavioral, and social deficits and were unsuccessful in traditional mainstream public-school setting (Craig, 2024).

Novice teacher: The term novice teacher refers to a teacher who is within the initial 5 years of teaching (Smith Washington, 2024).

Teacher turnover: Within this study, teacher turnover refers to the rate by which teachers transfer schools and/or exit the profession of education (DeMatthews et al., 2022). Teacher turnover also refers to the rate that a classroom teacher changes from their classroom teaching to another position from one school year to another, expressed as a percentage (DeMatthews et al., 2022)

Significance of the Study

Within recent years, students identified as those in need of special education services have increased, creating an increased need for experienced special educators, educational supports, and resources (Franciso et al., 2020). Teachers and students have become essential stakeholders within special education, both greatly affected by the increase in turnover through lack of effective classroom instruction, paired with limited support from experienced educators (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020).

Nonpublic schools are privately operated educational institutions and often deemed as independent schools or independent school systems (Ved & Kumar, 2021). While public schools must accept all students and make accommodations for all, nonpublic schools have greater flexibility in student acceptance based on programing needs best provided by the target school setting (Ved & Kumar, 2021). Nonpublic schools are publicly funded schools that provide specialized educational and/or healthcare services for students with exceptional needs, which cannot be met in a traditional public-school setting (Ved & Kumar, 2021). Students enrolled within nonpublic settings require an alternative education program often including specialized instruction, due to increased developmental and behavioral delays (Yu & Monteiro, 2020). Nonpublic school settings have become the setting for students who require creativity and flexibility in programming due to lack of success within the mainstream classroom (Yu & Monterio, 2020). However, nonpublic special education settings continue to see increased rates of turnover among teachers creating less support for the student population that they serve (Craig, 2024).

By identifying factors corresponding to special education teacher turnover, local school administrators may be more equipped to better support teacher needs, thus creating a greater likelihood of long-term retention within the field of special education. A review of special education teachers' experiences allows for those outside the classroom setting to develop greater insight into the daily stressors, as well as the demands placed on teachers, which contribute to the overall turnover. By developing an approach to decreasing special education turnover, administrators will also be providing students with greater levels of consistency and effective long-term instruction school-wide within nonpublic classroom settings.

Research Questions

Special education teachers are faced with daily responsibilities and challenges, paired with the overwhelming expectation to create change within the classroom setting for students with disabilities. Special education teachers serve a population of students who require greater support and daily modifications to meet the needs of their classroom. The research questions (RQs) that guided this study focus on factors that influence teachers to leave the profession within the nonpublic special education setting. By developing a greater understanding of these corresponding factors that influence teachers to leave their current school setting, school programs may be able to provide greater support to teachers in hopes of decreasing turnover and improving the school community.

RQ 1: What do experienced special educators perceive as contributing factors that increase the likelihood of their leaving or remaining within the classroom environment beyond 5 years, in nonpublic special education settings?

RQ 2: What are novice teachers' experiences about the factors that influence teachers to leave the profession?

RQ 3: What suggestions do teacher participants offer that might decrease teacher turnover among their colleagues?

RQ 4: What contributing factors do administrators identify as those that increase the likelihood of special educators leaving or remaining within the classroom environment beyond 5 years, in nonpublic special education settings?

Review of the Literature

To effectively gather research on the topic of teacher turnover, special education turnover and overall retention with education, education databases were used. Databases were available through the Walden University Library and consisted of ERIC, Education Complete, and SAGE Journals. Keywords used to search these databases include but were not limited to *teacher turnover, special education, burnout, teacher turnover and problems, attrition, mentoring, novice teachers, nonpublic, school community, and policy reform*. In addition to these databases, Google Scholar was also used as a resource.

Conceptual Framework

Within this study, Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation and hierarchy of needs was used as a model for the basis for the conceptual framework. This theory is relevant to the present study in that it acknowledges the motivations and needs of individuals engaging in activities within a given setting and/or situation (Maslow, 1970). According to Maslow (1970), humans strive to have basic needs met before seeking to fulfill higher needs within a hierarchy of needs. Maslow identified five motivational needs divided into

two categories of basic needs and growth needs. Motivational needs, in order from the lowest to the highest, are physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. Maslow explained that lower-level basic needs must be fulfilled first before a person can fulfill the highest level of need, which is identified as self-actualization. At the bottom of the hierarchy, creating the foundation of all needs, are physiological needs, defined as biological requirements for human survival such as air, food, drink, shelter, clothing, warmth, and sleep. Physiological needs satisfy the human body's requirements, and a person cannot function without having these met. Individuals could never be expected to perform at a higher behavioral and/or cognitive level without satisfying basic human needs to provide stability.

Once an individual has met basic physiological needs, progression to the second level within Maslow's hierarchy naturally will occur (Maslow, 1970). According to Maslow (1970), security and safety become significant to individuals who strive to find personal fulfillment. Maslow stated that individuals want to experience control, both consciously and subconsciously, to provide order and a feeling of safekeeping. These needs can be satisfied by family or society through support with local police, schools, business, and medical care. Providing security and safety also means providing emotional security, financial security, social stability, and health and wellbeing, which allow individuals to feel grounded and connected to their surrounding environment. If individuals feel secure and safe within their environment, they have a greater likelihood of developing relationships and reaching the skills needed for greater self-actualization.

The third level of human needs is linked to a person's social need to belong

through a connection of love and belongingness. The need for interpersonal relationships motivates behavior and allows individuals to feel a greater level of connection to a group affiliation, which provides the emotional support needed to thrive (Maslow, 1970). In finding love and belongingness, individuals are provided a safeguard for emotions and relationships, thus creating a network for support. Human beings need connection to others and often thrive on relationships that provide positive experiences such as those in families, work settings, religions, and communities. These connections provide the needed interpersonal relationships for a person to possess the feelings of love and belongingness while in turn supporting the needs of the other in that target relationship.

Once a sense of love and belongingness has been obtained, an individual can progress to the next level in Maslow's hierarchy of needs to fulfill esteem needs, which means esteem for self and esteem through others in the form of respect from others (Maslow, 1970). When a person seeks self-esteem, typically that involves seeking behaviors that create a greater feeling of value through independence, mastery, and recognized personal achievements. When a person seeks esteem through the support of others, the individual is often striving to create opportunities for leadership, status, and respect within their target social and/or professional group. Maslow also noted that the need for respect and/or reputation is important for children and adolescents; it often precedes real self-esteem or dignity within the hierarchy as a means of creating opportunities for approval and acceptance by others, which in turn provides a greater sense of self-esteem.

Lastly, self-actualization needs are the highest level in Maslow's hierarchy of

needs. Self-actualization refers to the realization of a person's potential, growth, and experiences (Maslow, 1943). This level is difficult to reach and is based on fulfillment of the previous levels. An individual may focus on self-actualization very precisely, in the form of reaching a personal economic, academic, or more career goal. Self-actualization requires a level of reflective thought and contemplation regarding actions, behaviors, and experiences. A person consistently performing at this level would be more equipped to acknowledge strengths and weaknesses based on personal experiences to modify their behavior and develop a greater sense of self. When an individual has reached the level of self-actualization, the individual is more willing and able to express needs as well as become an advocate for others in their community to create a greater sense of overall well-being (Maslow, 1970).

Throughout Maslow's research (Maslow, 1943, 1962; Maslow & Lewis, 1987), he continued to refine this theory based on the concept of a hierarchy of needs to meet the changes in society. Maslow and Lewis (1987) noted that the order in the hierarchy was meant to guide individuals and may need to be more flexible based on additional external circumstances. Maslow also drew attention to the fact that human behavior is determined by a combination of several basic needs rather than the abundance or absence of one (Maslow & Lewis, 1987). An individual requires flexibility and constant growth within the hierarchy of needs to achieve long-standing self-actualization (Maslow & Lewis, 1987).

Maslow's theory has been the framework for studies that involve employment retention with first year teachers. Stone (2024) drew attention to factors that support

teacher perceptions of factors that influence their employment retention. Stone noted the need for creating a positive work environment that provided educators job satisfaction and purpose through the opportunity to improve student academic performance. Allowing teachers to develop their own skills promotes the development of their self-esteem and self-actualization in the classroom setting (Stone, 2024). Maslow's (1943) theory helped to identify what needs are required in order to feel motivated in the workplace. Maslow suggested motivating people based on the listed hierarchy of needs: (a) need to survive, (b) need to feel safe, (c) need to belong, (d) need of self-esteem, and (e) need for professional growth. To increase teacher satisfaction and quality of classroom instruction, teachers must feel motivated within a safe, positive school environment (Stone, 2024).

In another study that considered the conceptual framework of Maslow, Schaefer (2023) investigated the perceptions of novice elementary teachers related to job retention. According to Schaefer, attrition rates for teachers has increased, with job satisfaction as the main determinant, especially for special education teachers. Maslow (1970) suggested that all people can reach self-actualization, but only a limited number of individuals will progress to the highest level based on personal fulfillment at each stage. Individuals must satisfy the lower-level basic needs before progressing to higher level needs. Regarding education, novice teachers must feel a connection to the school community as well as to the classroom environment in order to meet the early requirements of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Schaefer, 2023). As teachers progress through the hierarchy, novice teachers are more equipped to develop relationships and a sense of belonging to their school community, thus creating a greater level of job satisfaction and intent to remain in the

classroom setting (Schaefer, 2023).

Lord (2024) also considered Maslow's theory when exploring the attrition rates of teachers working with students identified as having emotional and behavioral disorders (EBDs). Lord noted teachers who served students with EBDs had the highest attrition rates of any specialized teaching discipline in the United States. With high attrition rates, EBD teachers, school districts, and students with EBD were negatively affected through the inconsistent staffing and lack of continuous classroom team structure. Maslow (1943) theorized that humans must acquire basic needs of survival such as food, water, clothing, and shelter prior to accessing higher levels of the hierarchy continuum, safety and security followed by physical and mental health needs (Maslow, 1943). Lord used Maslow's research to support the concept that safety and security are needed to enhance the success of teachers and students. When educators feel safe in the school environment, they are more likely to remain in the teaching setting for an extended period. Students with EBD are often identified as having more behavioral issues and needing greater support, which creates challenges in consistently providing a safe and supportive working environment for teachers.

In special education, the varying levels of Maslow's motivational needs can be directly linked to aspects of teaching that may affect a teacher's intent to remain (Maslow, 1970). The present study was focused on teacher perceptions based on their experiences, including stressors and daily environmental factors that contribute to teacher turnover. This study addressed the extent to which school environments paired with personal teaching experiences are contributing factors in teacher turnover. In this study, I

investigated what motivates and/or influences special education teachers to leave their current teaching setting. By applying Maslow's theory of motivation in this study, the idea that teachers need to be supported at a more basic level before progressing to a greater level of satisfaction and self-actualization suggests that job satisfaction is a process in the teaching profession. To understand teacher retention, Maslow's hierarchy of needs model guided this study based on teachers' perceptions regarding what motivates them and creates overall job satisfaction.

Teacher Shortage

In the United States, widespread teaching shortages have become a topic of concern for all educators (Gui, 2024). The need for qualified educators continues to grow to better support students in all educational settings (Day et al., 2024). Schools have found ways to increase hiring among teachers following the country's Great Recession of 2007 to 2009, as well as to compensate for the additional teacher layoffs during 2015 (Day et al., 2024). While national data trends suggest an abundance of new teacher candidates, many states continue to struggle to supply teachers with their workforce needs, and therefore many school systems are nonetheless facing a teacher shortage crisis (Green, 2024). Many states have taken local action to address the teacher shortages by altering the job description of teachers, varying the requirements for hiring to make it more appealing to potential candidates (Koch, 2024). Many school systems have created various incentives for teachers such as a signing bonus, increased classroom materials and additional classroom support staff to entice individuals to enter the profession (Shell et al., 2024). Other school systems have developed creative means for obtaining teachers

through state and nationally funded teaching programs that place educators in the classroom upon hiring while providing on-site training (Shell et al., 2024). Target on-site teaching programs often focus on development of teaching skills while the teacher candidate is working in a classroom compared to skill attainment through more traditional teaching programs provided at a college or university prior to entering the classroom (Shell et al., 2024). Other states have decreased standards for teacher preparation and increased the use of emergency certifications or conditional certifications to have teachers in the classroom at a quicker rate (Amitai & Van Houtte, 2022).

Schools in urban and rural settings have experienced greater difficulties filling teacher vacancies compared to schools in more diverse suburban areas (Hedin et al., 2024). Schools that serve a target student population, such as those within special education, also have greater difficulty filling teacher vacancies (Hedin et al., 2024). Persistent shortages can be costly for districts and have long term negative effects on student outcomes and school climate (Day et al., 2024). These burdens linked to teacher attrition can create lasting negative effects on students, teachers, and school communities (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Issues linked to the overall teacher shortage vary significantly by state, district, school, and target subject matter. As such, efforts to address the shortages should focus on recruiting and retaining teachers in the right subjects for the right schools to promote a greater likelihood of continued success (Day et al., 2024).

Teacher Turnover

Teaching has always been known as a demanding profession but one with great rewards. Within the last decade, the education profession has experienced declining

teacher numbers largely due to an overall lack of interest in teaching, in addition to shifts in the nature of the education profession (Wiggin et al., 2021). A once highly respected profession has slowly become a job with less qualified instructors supporting multiple areas of needed instruction with little parent involvement to maintain and reinforce previously taught student skills (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Following the reform of No Child Left Behind 2002–2015, teaching has appeared more controlled and regimented compared to years' prior, making it less attractive to young people looking to pursue a more creative and rewarding career opportunity (Acosta et al., 2020; Koch, 2024). During the era of No Child Left Behind, higher rates of teacher attrition and migration occurred in many school districts due to lack of resources and support provided in the classroom setting to meet the evolving needs of the student population (Jeon et al., 2022). When teachers were given the opportunity to make decisions regarding school-wide policies and procedures, student programming, needed support and overall school-wide development experiences, a level of fulfillment and connection was achieved, creating greater teacher retention (Kamrath & Bradford, 2020).

Teacher turnover has been noted as having a clear negative influence on school quality as measured by student performance, and it has also created an overall sense of school decline based on student attitudes, teacher experiences, and lessening school-wide collaboration (Räsänen et al., 2020). With high turnover comes a decline in quality of classroom-based instruction, loss in experience among school teams, and a decrease in overall productivity among teachers due to limited team support and limited variety in teaching skills (Van Eycken et al., 2024). According to Gilmour and Wehby (2020),

teaching students with disabilities has a greater influence on teacher turnover on both general education certified teachers as well as special education certified teachers within their current teaching environment. With greater numbers of students identified as having disabilities, special educators are supporting more students across class settings than years prior (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020). As special education programming continues to rise, teacher workload has been transformed to meet the changing school climate and overall school need for educational support (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020).

The field of education was once known as a profession for skilled, creative-minded individuals seeking opportunities to shape student minds using a team approach among teachers across grade and subject boundaries (Madigan & Kim, 2021). With policy reforms, changes in school programming, and the increase in students with disabilities, the profession of education has featured greater statistical accountability, increased stress, and adverse outcomes for all teachers such as increased turnover and overall dissatisfaction within the field of teaching (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

Changes in Education

With educational policy reform, comes a change in the overall working conditions within school communities (Räsänen et al., 2020). Teachers often perceive that their working conditions are evolving in a negative direction when change occurs, through lack of financial resources, or more diverse expectations on teaching related work (Räsänen et al., 2020). Within the last 10 years, the teaching profession has become considerably more complicated and, at the same time, public appreciation for the profession of education has diminished (Räsänen et al., 2020). With the perception of

change, teachers are continuously facing new responsibilities in the form of ongoing school reforms and educational innovations with less time to complete daily responsibilities needed to effectively manage and support the needs of an evolving classroom (Räsänen et al., 2020). In the current teaching climate, working as an educator requires a greater capacity to tolerate change and manage unfinished tasks and personal incompleteness (Yastibas et al., 2022). Educators must now focus on developing skills needed to create more flexibility within their daily workload as well as the overall expectations of the changing school climate (Yastibas et al., 2022).

More recent studies suggest that teachers have become the key factor in improving the educational achievement of students within school settings (Han, 2020). According to Criss et al. (2024), teachers who exhibit high efficaciousness tend to exhibit higher levels of enthusiasm for the content in which they teach. Criss et al. noted that an educator's enthusiasm often translates as a teacher who is working hard to engage and assist those struggling students but creating excitement for the target topics. Thomas et al. (2020), as well as Loughlan and Alonzo (2019), draw attention to the fact that when teachers feel positive about students, school community and what they are teaching, they are more likely to create a positive classroom, creating a setting which allows students to recognize what they need to learn, and thus, increasing the likelihood of long-term retention.

Yet, additional research also suggests that the overall quality of teaching has declined within the past decade as policymakers have focused more attention on modifying educational reform nationwide (Han, 2020). With greater focus on educational

reform, greater attention has been placed on protecting jobs as a means of avoiding further teaching shortages, often retaining low-quality teachers through union policies and/or to meet the required need for teachers within a school rather than due to teacher effectiveness (Han, 2020). According to Graham et al. (2020), less educators are being provided with basic professional development opportunities, which once sought to provide a foundation for teaching for that corresponding while also enhancing their classroom skills for the overall good of the student population. Mantei and Kervin (2020) also note, that educators become frustrated and demoralized when they are targeting a given topic and/or student skill with limited knowledge, specified training and restrictive resources simply make a quota for the school program. With a greater necessity for teachers in the classroom many schools have retained ineffective educators who negatively contribute to the wellbeing of the school community through lack of collaboration, experience, and overall ineffective instruction (Han, 2020). Educators who are identified as ineffective often have a greater negative effect on their students, team members and school community (Han, 2020). According to Han, designing strong teacher hiring programs paired with mentoring opportunities are essential in improving long term outcomes within school programs while decreasing rates of turnover. Keeping strong teachers as mentors and leaders creates a positive school community which allows for continued success for both students and teachers.

In addition to policy reform, the field of education has created a greater focus on accountability for all teachers and school staff in the form of measurable student progress, implementation of academic programs, and overall tracking of student growth

(Jefsen & Gunnes, 2020). In theory, making teachers accountable for student progress appears to be a positive way to ensure student success (Dizon-Ross, 2020). According to Dizon-Ross (2020), this action could make it difficult for low-performing schools to attract and retain good teachers due to the likelihood of not meeting annual goals. Evidence from surveys of teachers suggests that effective teachers may feel pressure to teach to the test to have a greater likelihood of student success (Dizon-Ross, 2020). However, according to Jefsen and Gunnes (2020), student achievement is not always directly attributable to teacher behavior as many factors can influence student achievement beyond a teachers' control creating an unrealistic expectation for students and teachers. Consistent with Yeh (2020), at-risk students from lower performing school districts often require additional support to demonstrate academic skills, often modeling and integration of hands-on experiences to understand content, making it difficult to fully access their skills. Overtime, the focus on accountability creates a high pressure, negative relationship between students and classroom performance (Jefsen & Gunnes, 2020). As school accountability increases, teachers are often taking on a more administrative role within the classroom, in terms of monitoring student performance, thus, shifting from student learning to student testing and ongoing assessment (Bates, 2020). With accountability comes a greater focus on meeting school-wide goals and test scores to meet benchmark requirements with less focus on the student's specific needs and measurable progress as it relates to student overall growth and development.

All educators strive to make a difference in the lives of their students but also as a means of creating positive change for the future through education (Smith Washington,

2024). The first years of teaching are the most important in an educator's career in terms of both developing theories and practices which will influence how that educator creates the framework for their classroom (Smith Washington, 2024). However, most teachers who leave their profession do so within their first 5 years. The overwhelming demands placed by school programs, state reforms and teacher-based accountability have been correlated with a spike in both novice and veteran teacher turnover (Rood & Ashby, 2020). With the integration of new school policies and procedures, many educators feel disconnected to teaching and more focused on daily management creating frustration and overall dissatisfaction with their current position (Rood & Ashby, 2020). Those who continue to feel connected to the school community are provided opportunities to voice concerns, share feedback and make decisions on a larger scale (Rivero, 2020).

Special Education Turnover

Special education programs experience higher rates of turnover, often due to increased workload paired with the overall increase in responsibilities which comes with supporting students with widespread disabilities (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2021). Historically, general education and special education teachers have shared responsibilities for educating students with disabilities; however, with the increase of students, special education teachers have taken on larger caseloads creating an environment with less collaboration and a more isolated style of instruction for students with a specific identified disability (Ström et al., 2024). According to Amitai and Van Houtte (2022), special educators who provide instruction to only one classification of disability have a higher rate of attrition compared to those who support a variety of students across a

variety of academic settings. Educators, who provide instruction within a self-contained special education classroom setting, typically support students with similarly diagnosed disabilities, limiting their exposure to a wider range of disabilities, and making them more likely to leave the classroom (McFarland-Whisman et al., 2023). For example, when analyzing North Carolina's data set, Gilmour and Wehby (2020) noted special educators serving students identified as emotionally and behaviorally disturbed had a 4.37 rate of leaving special education, compared to those with a rate of 1.66 who served students within a mixed needs classroom consisting of students with a wider variety of skills and deficits. It is uncertain whether the higher turnover rates consistent within special education reflect the specific challenges of teaching students with disabilities or those additional responsibilities linked to the job classification (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020). However, the concern within special education has shifted from not only filling teacher vacancies to that of also retaining teachers within the profession of special education for an extended period in hopes of creating consistency for schools, as well as the field of special education (McFarland-Whisman et al., 2023).

Variables That Influence Special Education Turnover

Special education teachers have many complex responsibilities relating to the needs of the classroom structure, school environment and overall demands to best meet the needs of their current student population. Special educators often have greater daily stressors, in addition to an overall increased workload, largely due to the increase in daily demands and expectations consistent with the needs of their student population (Scott et al., 2022). This level of teacher demand may cause an increased level of frustration, as

well as increase in workload, thus, contributing to feelings of stress, anxiety, and resentment, while creating a lack of manageability (Seibt & Kreuzfeld, 2021). Special education teachers' time is spread across many daily responsibilities including paperwork, individualized education programs, meetings, parent communication, lesson planning, creating materials, collaboration, data collection and direct student instruction (Jeon et al., 2022). Special education classrooms often consist of students with a variety of needs, skill sets and disabilities, thus, instructional demands differ due to the incorporation of target goals and services outlined in the students' individualized education programs (Park & Shin, 2020). With such high expectations in terms of providing instruction, educators often feel overwhelmed and unable to keep up with the increasing demands of state-wide and specific programing requirements (Yastibas et al., 2022).

For many educators, workload and daily responsibilities are the key factors in turnover, as well as fair and appropriate pay. Many teachers' salaries are based on a set rate determined by a combination of years of experience and educational attainment making the salaries of some special educators not always linked to the expectation set forth by the target special education program (Theobald et al., 2021). With that in mind, teacher salaries do not always match that of their classroom requirements and expectations for those classrooms with greater student needs, creating an additional level of stress for educators who feel underpaid for the required work needed to sustain their classrooms (Gilmour, 2024). Gilmour also noted that in areas such as mathematics, reading and special education, educators were not always the best fit for that target

student grouping based on their educational background. By placing unqualified educators in a special education classroom, student progress was negatively influenced through lack of direct student instruction, creating an overall job dissatisfaction of newer teachers within special education (Gilmour, 2024). With teachers feeling a sense of dissatisfaction, paired with a lower salary, many teachers feel a need to seek alternative employment to better meet financial and personal concerns (Scott et al., 2021).

School administrative involvement has also been identified as a perceived factor in teacher turnover based on varying administrative team support and collaboration within the school community (Ström et al., 2024). According to Yastibas et al. (2022) administrative support is often deemed a workplace condition most predictive of teacher turnover due to the perceived lack of administrative support provided to special education teachers. Along with the lack of administrative support, Yastibas et al. noted a need for administrative involvement to allow for a collaborative school setting through an administrator's ability to inspire others, communicate goals and visions, recognize outstanding performance in a meaning manner as well as manage the day to day needs of the school. According to Manal et al. (2024), many school administrators strive to be supportive and provide leadership to teachers; yet lack the basic skills needed to create the framework and structure needed to create a professional supervisory role. Many administrators also require coaching to best develop relationships which enhance school programing needs (Manal et al., 2024). Administrators who can provide leadership while also becoming an involved advocate within the school community are more likely to provide special education teachers with needed levels of support (Yastibas et al., 2022).

Through this target study, identifying how administrative support affects special education teacher retention will be explored to better understand the connection between administrative involvement and special education teacher retention within a nonpublic school setting.

In addition to supporting teachers with day-to-day classroom management, administrators who provide ongoing supervisory feedback in a constructive manner were associated with increased likelihood of educator retention, thus decreasing turnover for their corresponding school program (Welch & Brantmeier, 2021). Feedback is often perceived to be negative, yet it has the potential to create strong working relationships among educators and allows for an opportunity for growth depending on the provided leadership model from administration (Welch & Brantmeier, 2021). Yastibas et al. (2022) also noted that according to recent findings, when teachers do not feel administration support, they are more than twice as likely to leave the current teaching setting, many times in search of a stronger leadership model. When educators, regardless of years of experience and/or teaching background feel encouraged, respected, and supported by a strong school leader, they develop a positive perception of their school administration creating greater connection and job satisfaction, which in turn creates a greater likelihood of teacher attrition (Carré, 2020). Within the target study, by using teachers with varying years of experience, a more diverse viewpoint relating to school administration and job satisfaction will be shared.

The responsibilities and expectations of those within the field of special education are multifaceted and continuously changing (Billingsley et al., 2020). With such diversity

among student needs, teachers must be provided with support, opportunities for growth as well as compensation for maintaining and developing the skills of students in special education (Wiggins et al., 2021). It is vital for administrators and school districts to understand the causes of teacher attrition, such as inadequate pay, low self-efficacy, poor motivation, and support from leadership to better create a strong, experienced school community (Wiggins et al., 2021). The high teacher turnover imposes numerous expenses on schools and districts through recruiting, hiring, and training, as well as the overall composition and quality of the teaching staff (Brown, 2020).

Special Education and Nonpublic Schools

Nonpublic schools (NPS) serve students with disabilities in place of an education within their standard local public-school setting (Yu & Monteiro, 2020). Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act students with disabilities are provided the least restrictive environment outside the general education setting, to have access to all needed support and maximum student success (Yu & Monteiro, 2020). The U.S. Department of Education recognizes two types of NPS settings, private separate day schools and residential schools sometimes referred to as home schools (Yu & Monteiro, 2020). Nonpublic schools which are identified as private schools, are done so due to the daily operation being through a private organization which abides to state and federal school policies; yet, have no affiliation to the location of state public school (Yu & Monteiro, 2020). Local school systems are authorized to use state and federal funds for a NPS placement for a student with special needs, if deemed necessary to provide the student a free and appropriate public education (FAPE; Yu & Monterio, 2020). However,

there are situations when families make the decision to place their student in an NPS, which is recognized as the right of parents at their own cost (Yu & Monteiro, 2020). When a student is placed within an NPS, it is typically after the local school system has made its best effort to provide needed supports and individualized instruction as indicated on the student's individualized education program, yet the student continues to require a great level of instructional support unable to be met within the local school system (Craig, 2024). Within an NPS, the students with disabilities are provided greater individualized instruction, with the support of behavior resources, therapists, school psychologists and specialized educators who are typically more equipped to work with more challenging students (Craig, 2024). Within many NPS, school psychologists play a larger role in developing a relationship with the students' educational support team as a means of creating an ongoing support plan which also acknowledges their mental, emotional and physical capabilities (Craig, 2024). Nonpublic schools strive to create differentiated instruction through small class sizes and creativity in programming as well as a collaborative team approach when supporting the student (Yu & Monteiro, 2020).

Teacher Mentorship

Teacher induction programs are often provided to new employees upon hire in the form of supervisory meetings, small group sessions as well as orientations to become familiar with school-wide expectations (Manal, 2024). Quality teacher induction programs which incorporate mentoring and coaching have improved novice teacher practices while reducing attrition from the teaching profession (Heubeck, 2021). Many school programs have developed opportunities for coaching among grade level teams to

improve effective teaching behaviors linked to student success (Cornelius, 2020). However, establishing supportive, on-going professional development opportunities through structured coaching sessions and preservice modeling strategies has been shown to increase an educator/s likelihood of long-term retention (Cutrer-Párraga et al., 2022; Theobald et al., 2021). Programs which utilize small group coaching opportunities, learning communicates and/or peer mentorship programs have created greater opportunities for teacher success in supporting one another and the unique needs of their student population (Cornelius, 2020). Novice special educators have shown marked improvement with instructional practices, behavior management, and overall communicative skills following the implementation of a mentorship program by those who receive professional development and specialized coaching to better support colleagues (Cornelius, 2020). Creating a functional relationship between interventions, educators, and mentors has shown how to improve instruction within school settings and create a more cohesive school community (Cornelius, 2020).

Implications

Creating an environment which supports long term special education teacher retention begins by developing a school community which values and supports the needs of special educators. The purpose of this study was to investigate special education teachers' experiences about factors that influence their retention decision. A basic qualitative study approach was used to address the target study, focusing on special education teacher turnover within a nonpublic special education setting. The goal of this study was to explore the perceptions of special education teachers about factors that

influence retention to share experiences with administration in hopes of creating change. In understanding the needs of special educators, administration as well as all members of the school community, will be more equipped in supporting colleagues as well as increasing school-wide morale. According to Jung and Sheldon (2020) school leaders have a strong influence on the overall quality of the school community which can strive to promote partnerships that create positive outcomes for teachers and students. With a focus on relationships within the school settings, teachers and students feel a greater sense of community and worth, while working together to achieve success (Jung & Sheldon, 2020). Dreer (2024), noted that morale is connected to a school's ability to provide a strong sense of fellowship and mutual respect among colleagues. Schools which strive to create a positive community relationship have a greater likelihood of teacher satisfaction and retention (Dreer, 2024). Teachers who perceive that they have more autonomy over their daily responsibilities with opportunities for growth within their current school setting are less likely to move to another school or leave the profession (Shepley & Waddington, 2024). By embracing the connection between student learning and community, teachers and school staff ensure that students have a greater opportunity for a well-rounded education, while accessing all needed resources and support (Cornelius, 2020; Dreer, 2024).

This study has implications for positive social change within nonpublic special education settings, as well as across general education school settings, by providing quantitative research focused on teacher experiences specific to those working with students with special needs. Through firsthand accounts, teachers were able to share

insights regarding the daily stressors of teaching within the realm of special education as a tool for creating greater opportunities for support and on-going change for educators entering the classroom. This study used research to better prepare special educators for the classroom experience through professional development opportunities as well as the implementation of a peer-mentoring program to support novice special educators in creating a greater likelihood of long-term retention. In addition to supporting special educators, providing greater feedback to school administration in hopes that they will make changes on a smaller scale to better support special educator teachers daily, to decrease teacher turnover. As special education continues to evolve to meet the demands of changing school reforms and student populations as do the needs of educators in creating a positive learning environment which teachers and students feel supported, inspired, and valued as part of the school community.

According to Scott et al. (2022), mentoring programs have proven to increase special education teacher retention by allowing for greater opportunities for collaboration and support from those within similar school programs. Scott et al. noted that the most effective mentor/mentee programs provide multiple components to meet the needs of multiple teaching and learning styles such as face-to-face meetings with mentors, mentor/mentee observations, adequate mentor/mentee discussion and reflection time, and having a mentor from within the same subject matter background. The collected findings of the research will be to bring awareness to the problem of special education teacher retention within nonpublic school settings.

Summary

Nonpublic special education schools are responsible for educating students with varying physical, developmental and emotional needs (Craig, 2024). Students within these types of school programs often require greater support paired with direct personalized instruction, thus requiring the instruction of a highly skilled effective special educator (Craig, 2024). With more students entering special education due to increases in diagnosed disabilities, creating an educational environment that sustains student need continues to be an ongoing concern (Francisco, 2020). Each year more special educators leave the classroom setting, and often the field of education, in search of new opportunities as well as a new work environment which is more conducive and supportive to their own personal and/or emotional needs (Heath & Holyoke, 2023).

In Section 1, research and literature is presented to share perceived factors in special education teacher turnover. High teacher turnover rates have been noted in all school systems and school programs, but most significantly there are greater rates of turnover within special education compared to that of general education (Edwards et al., 2024). Teachers are leaving the classroom setting, yet, retaining skilled educators is essential in the overall success of any school setting as well as creating staff consistency within the school community (Edwards et al., 2024). In Section 2, I present methodology for this study as it relates to the overall purpose of the study and alignment with the corresponding research questions. Topics discussed in the methodology include the design, data collection, data analysis, participants, and the interpretation of the findings. Section 3 provides information that supports the rationale of the project as well as a

greater review of corresponding literature to support the project. Lastly, Section 4, provides data and collected findings of the project's strengths, recommendations, limitations, scholarship, project development and evaluation, leadership and change, analysis of change, as well as the project's potential effect on social change.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

This is a basic qualitative study used to describe the experiences and daily stressors of special education teachers from their own perspectives to investigate special education teachers' experiences about factors that influence their retention within the special education setting. To gather data, a total of 10 special educators were interviewed using semistructured, open-ended questions; five target educators were within their initial 5-year period and identified as novice special educators, while five additional special educators have been in the classroom setting for a period of 6 years or longer. Administrative members who participated were one principal, two assistant principals, and one program director. Those who participated within the study all currently worked within a nonpublic special needs school with students of varying ages and disabilities.

Qualitative research is an approach that allows researchers to explore social interactions, and behaviors of individuals by developing a greater understanding of the ways people interact and manage within target situations (Mays & Pope, 2020).

Qualitative research is an approach built on personal experiences, first-hand accounts, and relationships as they contribute to one's behavior (Mays & Pope, 2020). Within my project study, I used a qualitative approach to gain greater insight as to how special education teachers and school administrator experiences contributed to turnover within nonpublic special education settings. By using a qualitative approach, I developed a greater understanding of the needs and ongoing concerns of special educators. Through their own stories and firsthand accounts, special education teachers and school

administrators provided insight that is not always captured through other means of data collection. By conducting interviews, the participants had a greater opportunity to express ideas and share feedback as they directly relate to their own journey within special education.

Quantitative research design is another approach to the design and data collection process that was reviewed but was deemed as not an ideal fit. Quantitative research design is intended for discovering how many people think, act, or feel regarding a specific topic (Guardiola Corral, 2022). Quantitative projects typically involve large sample sizes, with greater attention and focus on the overall quantity of responses, as opposed to gaining the more focused insight that is provided within a qualitative research design (Guardiola Corral, 2022). Quantitative research can be limited through its focused attention on statistical relationships, often overlooking broader themes and relationships (Guardiola Corral, 2022). In contrast, qualitative research methods are created in a manner that helps reveal the behaviors and perceptions of a target audience with reference to a given topic of study.

Within qualitative research, varying forms of methodologies such as narrative research, case study research, phenomenological research, grounded theory research, content analysis, and basic qualitative studies exist to better support the needs of the corresponding study (Sneed et al., 2020). Narrative research focuses on telling a story with great attention to the experience as it relates to human accounts and chronological events (Lichtman, 2023). This study was not based on telling a story related to special education teacher turnover; thus, this form of methodology was not appropriate.

Phenomenology research is rooted in psychology and is used to interpret experiences with the assumption that information can be interpreted in varying ways with a focus on actual live experiences (Lichtman, 2023). The target study utilized first-hand accounts as told by special education teachers with no interpretations but rather personal narratives and/or shared experiences. Grounded theory research is used to create understanding through observations and/or data obtained through practice to develop greater theories related to the topic of study (Lichtman, 2023). I did not conduct observations nor apply data obtained directly to teaching practices; thus, grounded theory research was not appropriate. Content analysis research involves using observations to share findings through an outside perspective with no need to create change but, rather share current practices (Sneed et al., 2020). My study used gathered data to make recommendations toward changes in practice for special education teacher support, depending on corresponding findings, thus, this form of methodology would not be appropriate. Ethnographic studies strive to investigate complexities of cultures and of groups within cultures (Sneed et al., 2020). My study did not focus on information related to set cultures and/or groups within cultures but rather, those identified as special educator teachers due to profession, making this methodology inappropriate.

Lastly, basic qualitative studies are used to observe, interpret, and share data collected from the experiences and behaviors of others while creating a purpose for developing greater understanding (Soulimane, 2020). My study is a basic qualitative study used to describe the teaching experiences of special education teachers and administrators from their own perspectives. By using a basic qualitative study when

researching teacher turnover, I not only investigated turnover rates, but also explored the reasoning behind those experiences, which in turn have shaped current turnover trends. By using a basic qualitative study, I could hear firsthand accounts from educators who provided insight into the needs of special education educators.

Through this study, I examined teacher experiences and factors that influence a special educator's intent to leave the profession, as well as leave their current place of employment. Within this nonpublic school program most classrooms are utilizing a team-teaching approach, in which special education students are transitioning to a limited number of additional teachers outside of their primary classroom teacher. Several special educators do utilize the self-contained model in which they remain with their students for the entire day, with students only transitioning to related services, such as speech sessions. In addition to special educators, members of school administrative leadership teams will also be interviewed. School administrators were interviewed to explore the turnover trends on a larger school-wide scale and how those trends are viewed from an administrative standpoint. By exploring the views of administrative team members, the larger effects of turnover program-wide were explored through a different lens.

Special educators are at higher risks for turnover within the first few years of their careers, making the significance and rationale for this study even more important for the outcome of special education school programs (Gilmour, 2024). Special educators' perceptions linked to the overall experience within the classroom setting will provide a more in-depth look at factors which contribute to the likelihood of special education teachers leaving and/or remaining within the classroom environment. Currently, special

education teachers are leaving their current teaching setting within the initial 5-year period within nonpublic special education settings. Novice special educators are identified as those educators within the initial 5 years of teaching and will provide a varying viewpoint as to the needs of a new educator compared to that of a veteran special educator (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020). By acknowledging varying experiences of both veteran and novice teachers, viewpoints paired with classroom exposure can better identify how the scope and needs of education have changed.

Participants

I collected data using in-person, Zoom, and/or phone interviews with special education teachers and administrators from within the target nonpublic special education program. Interviews were conducted with both novice and veteran special educators from within 90 non-public special education school programs. To gain access to the necessary participants for this study, I first contacted the director of nonpublic schools, who then served as a gatekeeper by distributing information to the various special education programs under their view. This allowed for efficiency when reaching out to a wide network of potential participants, as the director communicated with the nonpublic school administrators. By having the director send the initial invitation, it helped establish legitimacy and credibility for the study, making the schools and educators more receptive to my outreach. Once the schools expressed interest in participating, I then cultivated a productive working relationship with the novice and veteran special educators who agreed to be interviewed. This involved clearly explaining the purpose and goals of the research, as well as addressing any questions or concerns the participants had about the

process. Building trust was crucial, creating a positive working relationship. They also offered flexibility in scheduling the interviews to accommodate the busy schedules of the special education professionals. Additionally, I demonstrated genuine interest in the participants' experiences and perspectives, which helped put them at ease and encouraged them to openly share their insights. By establishing this collaborative dynamic, I was able to gather rich, nuanced data that provided valuable firsthand accounts from both new and seasoned special educators working within the non-public school system.

All special educators had experience ranging in years of teaching as well as different educational backgrounds to better support their experience within special education. The target special education school system possessed an average of 150 administrators who worked directly in the school setting, while supervising special educators as part of the school-wide leadership team. For this study, a total of eight special educators were interviewed with semistructured, open-ended questions; four of the target educators were within their initial 5-year period, while four met criteria of being beyond that initial period to provide a varying experiences of educator needs. Administrative members consisted of one principal, one assistant principal and two program directors with the goal to obtain a purposeful sampling of data from a variety of educators to better share the scope of experiences and backgrounds among the educator population. By incorporating administrative members, I hoped to obtain data from a supervisory mindset as well as incorporate the experiences of those who work with a variety of skilled special educators. The participants were chosen based on these inclusion criteria:

1. Special education teachers with 5 or more years of experience teaching special education.
2. Special education teachers with less than 5 years of experience teaching special education.
3. All educators were certified to teach special education, to define a common level of training within this nonpublic school program.
4. Administrators with more than 3 years of experience within their current position were chosen to better gain experiences from individuals with a greater leadership capacity. Administrators were certified to teach special education within this nonpublic school program and/or had a previous certification within the last 15 years.

I increased trust by describing the methods of data collection outlined in the consent form. Researchers need to expand the traditional landscape of data collection to better meet the needs of those being interviewed while also creating an environment which allows for one to have the ability to engage in an in-depth interview (Twis et al., 2020). I also presented the topic of the study at a weekly staff meeting and reached out to all teachers who met the varying criteria to identify a group of potential interviewees. Of those who fit the criteria for selection, four special educators from each grouping were selected at random. The selection for administrators was based on availability and criteria for working within a special education teacher supervisory role. Those participants selected were contacted privately to review the goals of the study, participants' rights, including informed consent as well as confidently procedure used with collected data. To

ensure confidentiality, names were not used; each participant was assigned a number within the data collection process. All participants were divided into two groups based on years of experience and then interviewed. The code saturation was reached with eight special educator participants, thus interviewing an estimated 5% of the current special education teacher population from across varying nonpublic schools within the nonpublic school system (Buckley, 2022).

In addition to Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB 612-312-1283), permission for this study was obtained through the school nonpublic school administration consisting of program directors and principals from within the participating nonpublic school system to use data from current teacher turnover trends. Nonpublic school administration consisted of program directors as well as the executive director of the nonpublic school system. I met with several school administrators and discussed current trends in teacher turnover as well as the need to ensure that educators remain in the classroom longer. With that in mind, I inquired if I may pursue a study focused on teacher turnover from the experiences of special educators within current nonpublic schools. Interview participants were teachers and administrators from additional nonpublic special education settings within the nonpublic school system network; this allowed the gathering of more diverse experiences with similar school populations.

Data Collection

Within this qualitative research study, my purpose was to investigate the experiences of special education teachers, and the insights of administrators, regarding

the factors that influence the retention decision of the special education teacher. By obtaining information from novices, as well as experienced special educators, data were collected from various sources to provide varying points of view and details related to the needs of educators. Using a thematic analysis, transcripts from the target interviews provided information and perspectives on changes within the realm of special education, as well as ever-growing needs of special educators.

Open coding is an essential tool within the qualitative data process used for data analysis (Miles et al., 2020). Open coding refers to an interpretive process in which the researcher collects all raw research data, while organizing it in a systematic manner often by grouping and/or categorizing based on common factors (Miles et al., 2020). By using open coding methods, I was able to label concepts and identify trends and/or categories based on the data obtained from first-hand teacher accounts, as noted in Table 1. In using manual open coding method, many codes were considered based on participant feedback. As described, this method was employed in the study to identify common themes and patterns emerging from the educator interviews. By closely reading through the full transcripts of these first-hand accounts, the researcher was able to label and group together conceptually similar content. This open-ended, interpretive coding approach allows for a deep, nuanced understanding of the participants' perspectives to surface, rather than confining the analysis to pre-determined categories.

Through this iterative coding procedure, I began by identifying broad, overarching themes or ideas expressed across multiple interviews. I then further broken down these higher-level themes into more granular, distinct codes that capture the

nuances and variations in the educators' responses. This could involve grouping together statements that discuss similar instructional challenges, for instance, or clustering feedback about effective professional development practice (Miles et al., 2020). The manual, hands-on nature of open coding, as noted, facilitates an inductive analysis where the researcher can remain open to unexpected insights and let the data guide the emergence of the coding structure.

Organizing the raw interview data in this systematic way through open coding, as illustrated in Table 1, enables the researcher to more readily identify patterns, trends, and relationships that might not be immediately apparent from simply reading the transcripts in isolation. This structured analysis then lays the groundwork for higher-level interpretation and the development of key findings, allowing the researcher to draw meaningful conclusions about the educators' experiences and perspectives on the topic at hand.

Table 1
Open Coding

Quotes/Ideas	Code	Category
"System for new hires, depending on new hires and situation but we will provide a lot of extra support and coaching by pairing a staff with hat new hire"	Coaching New hire support Collaboration	Mentorship Collaboration
"Challenging, a lot of conversations with our supervisor and instructional support staff is what is the current process is for providing supervision and supporting all teachers specifically what the process for is providing supervision and support system"	Supervision Instructional support staff	Support
"Administration, they paired the strongest TA in the building in my room so she knew the whole landscape, so it was easy for her to step right into that from that roll. She's been planning and lightning my workload during my planning time."	Workload Strong assistant	Workload Support
"Assistant principal and principal both provided individual training specialist"	More training Collaboration	Collaboration
"Supervisor who has experience with amount of daily expectations and accountability from school supervisor"	Daily expectations	Administrative Support

	Accountability Workload	Workload
“Educators feel miserable and looking for opportunities to leave because people felt overworked and unable to be flexible in their role”	Workload New opportunities	Workload New opportunities
“We need more behavioral specialists to support classrooms and teams by providing strategies and training”	Training Collaboration	Collaboration
“Looking to create more opportunities for teachers to create a strong classroom and develop classroom management skills within the classroom to be more equipped to move up”	Collaboration New opportunities	Collaboration New opportunities
“I just don’t make enough money to stay long term”	Pay	Salary
“School does not really have foundations of communication then it effects everything with the program, supports and we can’t work together”	Communication	Collaboration
“Teachers should get six figure salary due to time and demand”	Pay	Salary
“I would like to be able to explore more opportunities like the realm of student advocacy”	New opportunities	New opportunities

To maintain validity, all findings were gathered using semistructured, digitally recorded, one-on-one interviews, entailing open-ended questions and probes, about special education teacher experiences that affect retention. According to Natow (2020), using interviews as a key source of data collection allows valuable information from various perspectives based on education, background, and power within the work environment. By interviewing administrators, data was collected from a supervisory leadership standpoint on perceived factors across different classroom populations and program wide needs. Interviews were conducted from multiple special educators and administrators with varying years of experience who were able to provide a wider range of data. Interviews with administrators were conducted within the target school setting, via zoom or over phone, based on scheduling availability as a means of obtaining greater feedback on perceived factors in teacher turnover.

Within a research study, member checking is a form of reviewing a respondent’s

feedback to increase validity and develop a level of trust between interviewers and interviewees. When using member checks within qualitative research, the researcher is creating a system that allows for multiple opportunities to revisit information to ensure the response is consistent and accurate as a source of data in the study (Hamilton, 2020). Member checks were conducted when reviewing the interview transcripts and/or recordings of interview sessions when conducted via zoom, phone and/or in person to ensure that all data was collected correctly. Member checks were conducted by providing participants with the opportunity to engage with and add to the interviews and interpret the data. Participants also had an opportunity to review data to ensure validity. The data collection for this project study was conducted face-to-face at the selected program location, via Zoom or through a phone interview, depending on the needs of the participant, due to scheduling and personal comfort. If a participant preferred face-to-face, via phone or was more comfortable participating via Zoom, all options were available to the participant.

According to Westafer et al. (2020), using a variety of participants provides greater insight into the target issue, such as teacher retention, within the target research sample. In this study, data collection methods included using one-on-one special education teacher interviews and one-on-one administrative interviews. I selected these forms of data collection to address the purpose of the study and the research questions that directly relate to the personal experiences of special education teachers and reflective thoughts of administrators regarding special education teacher turnover. By interviewing administrators, I hoped to obtain data linked to experiences on special education turnover

as it relates to a supervisory standpoint, which addresses leadership as a potential factor in turnover. Administrators may be more equipped to provide details as to the needs of educators across programs, as well as be able to discriminate between what needs are teacher specific versus those needs which are programmatic within their school wide teacher expectations.

I selected one-on-one interviews because of the extensive information and/or material often obtained during a one-on-one interview. I allowed virtual Zoom sessions and phone interviews, depending on the schedule of the participants. I scheduled times to meet in person, via zoom and/or by phone, with participants for interviews ranging 45–60 minutes, based on their availability, my goal was work around participant schedules to ensure that I was creating the most ideal interview environment. According to Natow (2020), qualitative evaluations and interviews were designed to expand to different aspects of target findings. With a target question, one might create a conversation which in turn provides greater clarity and further study (Natow, 2020). Using the questions created in Appendix A, the goal was to use semistructured, open-ended questions to allow for greater opportunities for detailed responses, as well as expansion of thought by also discussing viewpoints on factors linked to special education teacher turnover. By using a semistructured interview approach, participants were provided structure within the interview while still providing opportunities for personal reflection. Self-created interview instruments (Appendix B and Appendix C), entitled Teacher Turnover within a Non-Public Special Education Setting Interview Guide, were implemented within the study for both special educators and administrators. Questions for the interviews were

developed by the researcher and reviewed by three experienced educators within the field of special education (see Appendix B). To effectively track responses, I recorded interviews and took notes on key points made within a research log. This allowed me to reflect on the teachers' responses to ensure I captured their thoughts as accurately as possible in addition to the digital audio recording. In using qualitative interviewing, the collected data linked to understanding the experiences and ideas from special education teachers and administrators within the ever-evolving special education classroom.

The role of a qualitative researcher is to provide an environment for individuals to share their personal experiences and reflect on experiences to provide a greater connection and understanding to the corresponding topic (Hatch, 2023). My goal as a researcher was to examine the data obtained in hopes of supporting special educators who are often dissatisfied, frustrated and/or overwhelmed by expectations within the current teaching system. I hoped to provide an opportunity for special educators and administrators to voice concerns and/or share opinions as to how factors within special education have led to increased turnover. As the researcher conducting this study, it is important to consider my own role and how it may impact the data collection process. My past and current professional experiences within the field of special education are highly relevant, as they shape my perspectives and potential biases. This close familiarity with the day-to-day experiences of special educators could influence the way I interpret the participants' responses and the insights they share. Additionally, I developed a professional relationship with many of the teachers and administrators who will be participating in the interviews. While this rapport helped put them at ease and encourage

more open and honest dialogue, it also raised the possibility of participants feeling pressure to provide responses they believe I want to hear, rather than expressing their true, unfiltered perspectives. To mitigate these potential issues, I needed to be acutely aware of my own biases and made a concerted effort to maintain objectivity throughout the interview process. I strived to create a safe, judgment-free space where participants feel empowered to share their authentic experiences, concerns, and ideas, even if they differed from my own. By remaining cognizant of how my background and relationships influenced the data, I worked to collect the most accurate and insightful information possible to truly understand the factors contributing to special education teacher turnover in this setting.

Data Analysis

When analyzing data, it is important to remain unbiased about the analysis and overall interpretation of the data but rather allow the data to answer the corresponding research questions (Atasoy, 2020). To answer the research questions, I collected qualitative data using semistructured, digitally recorded, one-on-one interviews with open-ended questions and probes about special education teacher experiences that affect retention.

Member Check and Peer Review

The goal with member checking is to analyze data to ensure that the participants' intended information is presented correctly in the manner they wish to be understood (Hamilton, 2020). Member checking creates greater accuracy and validity within a study while ensuring that information provided by participants is correctly interpreted regarding

experiences relating to special education teachers' desire to stay in or leave the teaching profession (Hamilton, 2020). I conducted member checking to allow participants the opportunity to modify their responses by both adding and/or removing information upon further reflection. Member checking also allows for inconsistencies within data to be minimized by allowing greater opportunities for reflection and/or reporting of biases (Hamilton, 2020). By providing opportunities for member checking, I am increasing the validity of the collected data by allowing participants to check for accuracy and resonance within the information provided during each participant's interview.

For my qualitative research study, interviews were conducted with eight special educators and four administrators within the target nonpublic setting. Of those interviewed, four of the target educators were within their initial 5-year period, while four of the educators were beyond that initial period. Administrative members consisted of one principal, one assistant principal and two program directors who were interviewed to provide more insight into factors which contribute to educator turnover.

To better ensure authenticity within my analysis, a peer review debriefing took place to review all research and allow for an unbiased evaluation of all research by those not involved with the study. I enlisted the support of a colleague that recently earned a Doctor of Education degree to conduct the peer review and provide me with ongoing feedback to ensure the removal of any information which unintentionally presents assumptions and/or biases. By allowing for peer review, I have set expectations and created measures which in turn increase credibility within my study.

Dealing with discrepant cases is a crucial aspect of qualitative research, as it

involves addressing any data or findings that do not align with the overall patterns or themes that emerge from the study. When conducting interviews, one may encounter responses that seem to contradict the predominant experiences being described by participants. These discrepant cases require careful attention and analysis to fully understand their significance and implications for the research. The first step is to thoroughly examine the discrepant data, looking for potential explanations or contextual factors that could account for the divergence. This may involve revisiting interview transcripts and notes to uncover nuances or details that provide clarity. I then must consider whether the discrepant case represents an outlier that can be explained, or if it points to the need to refine or expand the study's conceptual framework. In some instances, a discrepant case may challenge initial assumptions and lead to the discovery of new, unanticipated insights. Addressing discrepant cases thoughtfully and transparently is essential for enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research findings. By carefully examining and incorporating these divergent perspectives, researchers can develop a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

Limitations

This study examined data collected from special education teacher interviews which addressed attrition and retention within a nonpublic special education setting by exploring experiences of special education teachers and administrators. I conducted member checking as part of this study to ensure that data was returned to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their interviews. Limitations are circumstances

and/or situations not controlled by the corresponding research that could affect the validity and/or outcome of the study. Participation in the study was limited to schools located in a metropolitan area on the east coast, within a specific nonpublic special needs school program consisting of school, thus, the teacher experiences consisted of those within the target school system setting and do not fully represent the views of special educators across the entire realm of special educators in other school settings. The information obtained from this study may help to understand the views of novice special educators, experienced special educators, and administrators as they relate to teacher turnover.

Data Analysis Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the experiences of special education teachers and administrators to identify factors that influenced special education retention within nonpublic special education settings. To gather the necessary data, a total of eight special education teachers and four administrators were interviewed using semistructured, open-ended questions conducted via the video conferencing platform Zoom. Of the eight teacher participants, four were considered novice educators within their first 5 years of experience, while the other four were veteran teachers with 6 or more years in the classroom. The administrator participants included one principal, one assistant principal, and two program directors. These one-on-one semistructured interviews allowed for flexibility to delve deeper into the complexities of the educators' jobs and the various factors that contributed to their decisions to either remain in or leave their current nonpublic special education placements. The semistructured interview

format provided a balance between the structure of standardized questions and the opportunity to explore personal accounts and perspectives. All interviewer responses were recorded via Zoom and then meticulously transcribed to text to enable further detailed analysis. A research log was maintained throughout the data collection process, noting common themes as well as any areas requiring additional clarification. Once the interview transcripts were produced, the data was then systematically coded by labeling key words and phrases that represented important and recurring themes in the participants' responses.

Open coding is a qualitative data analysis process that involves carefully examining interview transcripts and assigning codes or labels to words, phrases, or longer excerpts that capture key concepts, ideas, or themes (Saldaña, 2021). In this study, open coding was employed to analyze the transcripts from in-depth interviews conducted with interviewees. After each interview was completed, the audio recording was transcribed verbatim into a text document. After each interview was conducted and transcribed, the transcript was sent to the respective participant via email, giving them the opportunity to review it for accuracy, though no revisions were ultimately requested by any of the participants. With the transcripts finalized, the researcher read through each one multiple times, becoming deeply immersed in the data. During this process, the researcher began open coding by highlighting notable words, phrases, and longer quotations, and assigning a descriptive code to each one. These codes served to break down the large volume of qualitative data into more manageable chunks, each representing an important concept or insight emerging from the teachers' responses (Miles et al., 2020). As more interviews

were coded, the researcher compared codes across transcripts to identify common themes and categories, which were further developed and refined throughout the analysis process. The codes produced were meant to break down the qualitative data into discrete excerpts (Miles et al., 2020). No revisions were made by any participants.

Ensuring the accuracy and validity of research data is a critical component of any high-quality qualitative study. In this case, I employed several key strategies to address the reliability and trustworthiness of the data collected. The primary method used was member checking, which involves actively engaging research participants to verify that the information presented accurately reflects their intended perspectives and experiences. By allowing participants the opportunity to review, modify, add to, or clarify their responses, then I was able to minimize the potential for misinterpretation or misrepresentation of the data. This process enhances the credibility of the findings by ensuring they are grounded in the authentic voices and experiences of the participants. The inclusion of diverse perspectives and data sources helped to validate the emergent themes and reduce the impact of individual biases.

This qualitative study meticulously accounted for all salient data in its findings did not have any discrepant cases emerge. I employed a rigorous methodology to gather in-depth insights into the experiences of special education teachers and administrators within nonpublic school settings. By conducting comprehensive, semistructured interviews with a diverse sample of participants - including both novice and veteran teachers as well as school leaders like principals and program directors - the study was able to capture a well-rounded understanding of the complex factors influencing special

education retention. The open-ended, flexible interview format allowed the researchers to delve deeper into the nuances and personal perspectives of the educators, uncovering the unique challenges, needs, and motivations that shape their decisions to remain in or depart from their current roles. This collaborative approach helped to validate the emergent themes and minimize the potential for misinterpretation. The findings provide invaluable, grounded insights that can inform targeted strategies to enhance support, professional development, and career advancement for this critical segment of the education workforce.

The research findings conveyed factors contributing to the increasing turnover rates within the special education field, as observed across various non-public special education programs in the state of Maryland. Through in-depth interviews, the study gave educators and administrators a platform to openly discuss the specific needs, challenges, and opportunities within their schools and classrooms. The emergent themes provide valuable insights into the core drivers behind this concerning trend. The common themes and/or factors that emerged were as follows: (a) administrative support and involvement, (b) mentoring or collaboration, (c) opportunities for increased salary or benefits, (d) opportunities for professional advancement. Inadequate administrative support and involvement was a key concern, as teachers often felt isolated and lacking the guidance and resources needed to effectively manage their classrooms and students. Similarly, the absence of structured mentorship programs and meaningful collaboration opportunities left many educators feeling unsupported in their professional development. Compounding these issues were the limited prospects for increased compensation or career

advancement, which further diminished job satisfaction and retention. Overall, the findings underscore the multifaceted nature of the turnover problem, highlighting the critical need for comprehensive support systems, enhanced professional growth pathways, and a greater emphasis on fostering a nurturing, collaborative environment for special education practitioners. By addressing these core areas, school districts and policymakers can work to stem the tide of attrition and cultivate a more stable, dedicated special education workforce.

Presentation of Findings

Within this study, interviews were used to examine the critical issue of why special education teachers continue to leave the field through the utilization of in-depth, semistructured interviews. By providing guiding questions to the participants but allowing for open-ended responses, the researchers were able to gather rich, narrative accounts of the experiences and factors that contribute to special educators' decisions to potentially depart the profession. The qualitative approach enabled a deeper, more nuanced understanding than could be gleaned from quantitative data alone. The sample for this investigation was carefully selected to capture a diverse range of experiences. It included eight special education teachers, one male and seven females, as well as four administrators, one male and three female, all of whom worked in non-public school settings across the state of Maryland.

Those special educators interviewed taught students varying in age from kindergarten through high school, covering a variety of subject areas from specialized reading and language arts to full self-contained classrooms. This breadth of experience

provided invaluable insights into the multifaceted challenges facing special education teachers. The interviews, which were conducted via Zoom at times convenient for the participants, ranged from approximately 1 hour to over an hour in length. This flexibility allowed all to share their experiences in as much detail as they wished, resulting in rich, descriptive data. Many interviews took approximately 1 hour, and some exceeded an hour, based on the willingness to share narrative stories from each participant. After each interview, the recordings were promptly transcribed and sent back to the participants to review for accuracy, ensuring the validity of the findings. In analyzing the research findings, all important information must be considered and addressed. Any cases of special education teacher turnover that stand out should be dealt with appropriately. Identifying and understanding the key data points is crucial to making informed decisions about how to address the issue of turnover. Handling any discrepancies in the data with care and attention is essential for improving the retention of special education teachers.

Through this in-depth exploration, I was able to identify key themes and patterns that can inform efforts to better support and retain special education teachers, ultimately benefiting the students who rely on their expertise. Drawing upon Maslow's hierarchy of needs, these themes align with the fundamental requirements for human motivation and fulfillment. At the most basic level, special education teachers require administrative support and involvement, a sense that their school leadership values their critical role and is invested in their success. This could manifest through ample resources, manageable caseloads, and protected time for planning and collaboration. Moving up the hierarchy, teachers also deeply need opportunities for mentorship, peer support, and productive

collaboration with colleagues. Feeling isolated and unsupported is a major driver of burnout and attrition in this demanding field. Further up, the data revealed that competitive compensation, including opportunities for increased salary and benefits, is essential for attracting and retaining top talent in special education. Teachers are skilled professionals who make profound differences in the lives of vulnerable students and should be compensated accordingly. Finally, the highest level of the hierarchy, self-actualization, was addressed through a need for pathways to professional advancement and leadership roles (Maslow, 1970).

When summarizing the outcomes of this research study on special education teacher retention, it was crucial to approach the analysis in a logical and comprehensive manner, considering the study's core problem and research questions in relation to the broader body of literature on the topic. The diverse range of experiences shared by the special educators interviewed in this study, who taught students spanning from kindergarten to high school and across a variety of subject areas, provides invaluable insights into the multifaceted challenges facing this critical profession. At the most fundamental level, special educators require a sense that their school leadership values their critical role and is invested in their success, which could manifest through adequate resources, manageable caseloads, and protected planning time. Moving up the hierarchy, the data highlighted the vital need for mentorship, peer support, and productive collaboration, as feelings of isolation can be a major driver of burnout and attrition. Competitive compensation, including opportunities for increased salary and benefits, emerged as essential for attracting and retaining top talent in this demanding field, where

teachers make profound differences in students' lives. By strategically addressing these multifaceted needs, school systems can create an environment that nurtures, fulfills, and retains the exceptional educators that students with disabilities deserve. Special educators want to grow, develop new skills, and have a voice in shaping the policies and practices that impact their work. By strategically addressing these interconnected needs, school systems can create an environment that empowers, fulfills, and retains the exceptional educators that students with disabilities deserve. The common themes and/or factors that emerged were as follows: (a) administrative support and involvement, (b) mentoring or collaboration, (c) opportunities for increased salary or benefits, (d) opportunities for professional advancement.

Participant Narratives

The interview of Participant 1 provided valuable insight regarding creating a strong leadership team that balanced a school program as well as created opportunities for leadership within the model of the non-public school. Creating leaders within each department allowed individuals to feel connected to colleagues when making long term program design decisions and, also, allowed for consistent collaboration on a day-to-day basis. Participant 1 spoke directly regarding the process in creating needed training opportunities and new positions to provide those additional opportunities for teacher support and more fully create a strong, well-rounded school team. Participant 1 worked as a principal within a non-public special education program.

The interview of Participant 2 provided additional insight on school program goals of training and supporting new teachers from the perspective of an assistant

principal. Participant 2 spoke directly on the school's process for ensuring that those special education teachers understood expectations and were more equipped to handle more challenging situations, follow opportunities for direct support and mentor from others within the school setting. Participant 2 provided details related to how peer observations are used as a tool for feedback and professional development among colleagues in a less formal setting. The goal of this non-public setting had been focused on reinventing the mindset of observations to create a continuous feedback mindset for growth.

Participant 3 had 30 years of experience within a non-public setting and shared a great deal of information regarding her background working with diverse students with special needs, yet currently worked as a program director within a non-public special education program. Her background allowed her to support the changes in programming, as well as to create greater opportunities for growth within the non-public program to not only meet the needs of the community but also the special educators. She spoke in length regarding misconceptions which follow non-public schools and student populations which can negatively impact any program.

Participant 4 provided understanding on how special education has evolved over the last few years and the changes in special education that have created differences in programming. Participant 4 is a program director within a non-public special education program. Participant 4 felt that these changes have been factors for teachers currently employed within special education as well as factors for those recruiting for special educators. Participant 4 also commented on the need for training which involved putting

to practice skills that are taught during professional development opportunities for newly hired teachers.

Special education teacher interviewees were grouped into two categories based on years of teaching experience. The eight special education teachers were a mix of both novice and veteran educators. Teachers within their first 5 years of teaching were those identified as novice special educators, as well as veteran teachers, who had been teaching six or more years within special education.

Participant 5 was a veteran teacher with more than 10 years of experience within a self-contained classroom, within a nonpublic school program. Participant 5 spoke highly of her time working within a nonpublic school when provided supportive, involved administration who connected with the teaching team on an almost daily basis. As leadership changed, so did the program and means in which special education teachers were provided needed classroom support. With changing leadership came an ongoing concern for communication, collaboration, and respect for those who had been working within the program for longer periods of time. According to Participant 5, when the leadership was collaborative and supportive, the school had a feeling of unity and created a positive work environment for all community members.

Participant 6 and Participant 7 have both been educators for 7 years and had very similar positive experiences with working in a nonpublic that focused on collaboration as a tool for creating a positive teaching environment. Both participants had worked within the nonpublic setting with a strong mentor, prior to taking on a role as a lead classroom teacher, that allowed them to learn first-hand how to effectively manage more difficult

teaching situations. However, both referred to the increasing demands of educators and the constant turnover related to paraprofessionals that in turn created a constant need for retraining and modified student coverage schedules for students with greater needs. Thus, making day-to-day academic programming challenging and inconsistent for students and special educators. For Participant 6 and Participant 7, salary was also a factor in their novice years of teaching by which they were paid less than many special educators within public schools. Participant 6 commented that in situations where salary is less, the work environment must be exceptional to compensate for those differences, otherwise many educators will need to find new positions.

Participant 8 was a veteran teacher with more than 20 years of experience within a nonpublic school program. Participant 8 provided insight into a different mindset than most special educators, largely due to his background and the overwhelming amount of time he had worked with students with such severe disabilities. Participant 8 viewed the changes in special education as part of the process for working in education. Participant 8 felt that leadership, teaching and the overall view of students with disabilities was an ever-evolving topic that often transformed over the years, yet eventually teachers went back to previous ideas related to instruction and the needs of special education.

Participant 9 and Participant 11 were both novice special educators in their third year of teaching within a nonpublic school program working with students with various learning disabilities and intellectual disabilities. Participant 11 provided insight related to lack of communication between new teachers and school administration. According to Participant 11, nonpublic programs are often smaller yet, her current program continued

to overlook the need for a strong foundation of structured communication among educators, even in such a smaller work environment, where communication would appear more manageable. Participant 11 recommended having a set mentor for all novice teachers to develop a mindset of coaching and support as novice educators build their instructional repertoire of skills. Participant 9 spoke of needing more direct support from her colleagues in learning how to manage everyday situations, having one individual within the program such as a mentor would have created a feeling of connection to the school community.

Participant 10 was a novice teacher with 4 years of experience within a nonpublic school program working with students with severe autism and pervasive behavior disorders. Participant 10 spoke of the positives surrounding working in a program with direct support from a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) daily. Having individuals with a wide range of skills all focused on students with disabilities provided a strong team experience. However, as a novice special educator she felt that she was given too many responsibilities and not enough support from administration regarding programing. This created a ripple effect in uncompleted responsibilities such as meetings, professional development opportunities, lesson planning and/or parent communication. Oftentimes, administration tried connecting with Participant 10, though it was inconsistent, and support not always provided when needed most.

Participant 12 was a special educator with 3 years of teaching experience within a nonpublic school program working with students with reading disabilities. Participant 12 has had a positive experience working in a nonpublic program due to the amount of

support and professional development training provided by her current administrative team. Her program focused on building strong school community relationships between educators, administrators, and related services professionals. Participant 12 felt that her program held special educators to very high expectations, however, with communication and support from administration, the expectations were manageable. Unfortunately, Participant 12 did state that she would be leaving the nonpublic program within the next few years, due to the low salary she was currently provided.

Theme 1: Administrative Support and Involvement

According to Myles (2022), when school administrators develop positive relationships with educators, they create trust and connection to their teaching staff. In turn, job satisfaction of teachers can be anticipated by the administrative team, further creating a more positive work environment built on mutual respect (Myles, 2022). The qualitative data collected from eight special educator participants revealed that those eight participants felt as though lack of administrative support contributed to special educator turnover. Regardless of years of experience, those eight participants noted the relationships with their administrative team, both positive and negative, as a key factor in their decision to remain with their current school and/or within their current position.

Participant 5 felt as though her administrative team had created a culture of mistrust and dishonesty through lack of respect for special educators. She noted that she did not feel valued by the administration and stated, “we have cameras in the entire building, everywhere and I don’t feel as though they respect me or appreciate me as a teacher.” Participant 5 also commented that the turnover in administration has also

created constant discourse with lack of school structure and consistency in the school program. Participant 5 stated “They don’t know how to help; they don’t know how to respond or help in the crisis. They don’t know the kids or why we’re responding to the students in a certain way, our administrative team doesn’t know the population”.

Participant 10 commented “we had meetings sometime with administration. They offered help and sometimes would help, but I didn’t always feel that same support when I needed it. It was just offered but not actually provided”. Participant 7 would frequently reach out to her supervisors to seek advice in managing staff and difficult parents, she was intermittently provided feedback creating high stress levels and inconsistency in best practice for addressing key concerns. Participant 9 was provided opportunities for direct coaching which allowed her to receive more personalized support, however, she continued to feel disconnected from her school leadership team in terms of what her expectations were and how she should improve her teaching performance when working outside of her mentor. Participant 11 had experience with both supportive administration as well as leadership teams who were less encouraging. Participant 11 stated, “I felt like I was learning to fly with no leadership”, “everything was blurred, I was never held accountable, but I also never knew what I was supposed to be doing, other than teaching”.

Several participants also shared that they had benefited from additional administrative support of collaboration, self-reflection, and classroom management. By having that direct connection and positive relationship with members of the administrative team, issues were able to be resolved and a mutual understanding for each

person's role was more apparent. According to Participant 12, "My supervisor and I have a great relationship, I'm treated like a human, and I feel respect among my colleagues". Participant 12 spoke highly of how her administrative team focused on creating those professional relationships to further support a positive school community. Participant 6 has been provided many opportunities to collaborate with her supervisor in a way her administrative team valued her ideas through weekly meetings where both could reflect on the classroom and professional progress. Participant 6 noted, "my supportive administration will keep me in my position, teamwork makes the dream work".

The experiences shared from the participants revealed that there were many instances where teachers felt as though they needed additional support from administration, many participants noting that the overall administration involved directly affected their intent to remain a special educator. Several participants also commented that support from the school leadership team could be a factor in remaining in the classroom and working in less-than-ideal situations. Though each participants' experience was unique, all participants expressed a need for consistent and substantial administrative support.

Theme 2: Mentoring and Collaboration

Teacher leadership is often associated with mentoring and working with the school administration to facilitate change (Morcom & MacCallum, 2022). Exemplary teachers should use their expertise in the classroom to work collaboratively as leaders in schools, working with colleagues (Morcom & MacCallum, 2022). How teachers address common issues and tensions in schools, can be done so through mentoring and teacher

collaboration. During administrative and special education teacher interviews, participants noted the need for mentoring and a system for collaboration. Novice special educators noted the need for a school-based teacher mentor to support with daily expectation and learning how to effectively create systems for their workload or even address classroom management. While more experienced teachers noted the positives of working collaboratively with colleagues as a means of feeling more connected to the teaching community.

In reference to collaboration, Participant 8 drew attention to the changes in special education since he had first started teaching but stated “when people in a school have a family relationship, it’s better for everyone, we can all work together”. He noted the need for a collaborative effort between teachers and administration for school consistency and to better develop professionalism. Participant 6 noted the inclusion of team meetings on a regular basis which allowed for collaboration with instruction, programming, and planning among all special educators and related services who supported her classroom. She narrated “we are able to learn from each other on what our students need”, this in turn has supported her feeling connected to her grade level team. Participant 12 had a similar experience with her colleagues, she noted “we have a lot of meetings, a lot of training and we are always able to reach each other, we always know what the other class is doing”. Teacher collaboration is an important characteristic of successful schools in helping to foster effective teaching and promote student achievement (Meyer et al., 2022). Teachers supporting teachers in dealing with stressors strengthen a school’s capacity for improvement (Meyer et al., 2022). Successful collaboration presupposes

individuals can work with as a group towards common needs (Meyer et al., 2022).

In addition to teacher collaboration, creating opportunities for mentorship within special education through direct mentoring can serve as another means for collaboration. Not all mentoring needs to be formal but rather creates a partnership in which individuals are learning and creating a mutually beneficial relationship (Multani, 2022). Creating special educator mentorships can be a means of retaining valuable employees who have a larger impact on the life of the school community (Multani, 2022). As information is passed on to newer teachers, the climate of the school becomes more positive as educators demonstrate the principle that all learn from each another (Multani, 2022). Participant 9 was provided with a mentor to coach her on lesson planning and classroom programming for students with more challenging needs. She commented that “the support and coaching from another teacher was helpful in allowing me to understand data and how to program for students one-on-one”. Participant 11 was also provided with a mentor who provided weekly coaching sessions as well as supporting her in creating personal professional long-term goals in her professional career.

Participant 1 provided feedback on her program’s need for having a new teacher training position to better support newly hired and novice teachers as they develop skills and put into practice new techniques. She narrated, “she and I will work hand and hand to implement the instructional vision for teachers”, “she will take on the instructional piece while working directly with teachers as their mentor”. Participant 1 elaborated that the role of this position will also be to directly mentor with special education teachers, “she will meet with teachers weekly as an instructional coach, where we have already seen

marked improvement and increased rigor within our classrooms due to that additional mentoring”.

Theme 3: Opportunities for Increased Salary or Benefits

Clearly, teacher quality is paramount in determining student outcome and the overall success of a school (García et al., 2022). Higher salaries for educators had the potential to attract and retain special educators with greater experience and knowledge for working with more specialized student populations (García et al., 2022). Higher base salaries can retain teachers for longer careers creating more stability for students and opportunities for educators (García et al., 2022). Higher teacher salaries are directly associated with increased student performance, especially for students with special needs and/or from lower socioeconomic background (García et al., 2022). The qualitative data collected from eight special educator participants and four administrative participants, all of whom reference the need for increased salary or opportunity for greater flexibility for special educators.

Participant 7 narrated the need for higher wages and more flexibility in her schedule, “I need more money to live and more time off. We work a lot in the summer, and it would be nice to have more of a break”. Participant 12 also echoed those similar ideas by stating, “I am a single income household, and need more income to support myself. I love my school and my job, but I will have to leave in another year due to money”. Participant 11 continued to provide more thought on salary and benefits as it relates to her own need for stability, “teachers should get a six-figure salary due to time and demand. I work very hard and need to be paid for it”.

From an administrative perspective, Participant 4 noted the changes in education as a key factor of what people are looking for when pursuing a career. Participant 4 revealed, “Education is changing faster than changes can be made for teachers. People feel overworked and unable to be flexible in their role as teachers and they could make more in other areas, outside of the school realm”. Participant 3 also exclaimed a need for an increase in salary as compared to public school, she says “When I look at what the public-school years make, our teachers need to make more. With inflation, we need to increase pay for these people to live”.

Increasing teacher salaries is a challenging task that has many moving parts, however, in creating an expectation that great teachers will be well paid, schools are in turn retaining the best educators for their population. As noted by Participant 4, special educators have undergone several changes in recent years, which has caused an increased need for work-life balance among special educators. Educators must perform multiple roles, outside of teaching, involving family, friends, health, personal interest, and personal goals (Banerjee & Verma, 2022). Special educators are seeking an increase in salary, as well as opportunities for flexibility within their current roles to have a great life balance that allows them to pursue a career within education while also having balanced times for items in their personal life (Banerjee & Verma, 2022).

Theme 4: Opportunities for Professional Advancement

According to Kuvin (2022), teaching, like many professions requires practice and development of skills. Teachers need opportunities to explore additional resources, develop their craft and become better educators (Kuvin, 2022). Teachers need to feel as

though they are meeting new expectations and making gains in their professional career in a direction that allows for new opportunities and flexibility within their career (Kuvin, 2022). According to the collected data, several participants provided direct feedback on the need for professional growth and development within the field of special education.

As noted by Participant 3, “Teachers need to be included in the process for change and the conversation of what is happening with their school”. Participant 3 provided details from her own professional experience, noting that she strives to create an environment where her team feels heard and part of the overarching plan for change. Participant 11 elaborated on her own needs for growth within special education to keep her challenged and professionally developing. Participant 11 stated, “I was to work with advocates for families in the early intervention realm. I want to really explore the realm of advocacy.” Participant 4 added to the conversation regarding a need for professional growth, noting, “people feel overworked and unable to be flexible in their role, we need to provide something that keeps them here and makes schools a better place with more options”.

According to Participant 8, allowing school administrators the opportunity to lead instruction and work with the students directly often provides a great deal of information on the challenges of special education. In doing so, leaders may become more aware and open to the idea that special education teachers have a wide range of skills, making them ascent outside the classroom and thus, more viewed as an educational professional.

Lastly, Participant 12, provided a final thought regarding teacher turnover. She stated, “as much as the kids sometimes need a different placement, so do the teachers. We

also need change and need to find the perfect fit for our work.” She expressed a need for growth and change not always in the job position but rather in the daily expectations, noting that even slight changes such as subjects taught, field trips planned, grade level teams and even school-based responsibilities can create a feeling of growth and development for any educator. According to Leuverink and Aarts (2022), changing a professional environment can facilitate changes in a teacher’s professional growth (Leuverink & Aarts, 2022). Changing the way, the environment feels, has the potential to allow educators to participate in a professional development beyond their current skill set and in turn create a positive school culture (Leuverink & Aarts, 2022).

Findings for Research Questions

Research Question 1

The first research question was as follows: What do experienced special educators perceive as contributing factors that increase the likelihood of their leaving or remaining within the classroom environment beyond 5 years, in non-public special education settings? This target question was answered during the interview by all four experienced special educators. Each participant provided their own feedback on what they perceived to be a factor specific to their own work experience; yet a combination of contributing factors emerged during data collection identifying themes to be administrative support, mentoring and collaboration, increased salary and benefits as well as opportunity for growth.

The four experienced special educators all commented on needing administrative support as a key factor within a well-run school community. Participant 7, stressed the

importance of having connection with her school team and her supervisor, she stated “I never knew what I was supposed to be doing and when I needed help, I felt as if no one was there for me.” Participant 5 has experienced both positive and negative experiences with different administrative teams over the years while deemed a classroom special education teacher. Participant 5, spoke highly of the need for a connection between administrative teams and special education classroom teams as a means to create a sense of belonging and community. Participant 5 commented, “the former administrative team checked in with me all the time and I liked that they knew what I was doing”. Participant 5 elaborated that though her former administrative team was not always able to support, their knowledge of the daily classroom operations created a culture of community and collaboration.

All four experienced special education participants provided additional reasons relating to contributing factors that increase the likelihood of their leaving or remaining, which did not necessarily fall within one of the identified central themes from the collected data, however, still allowed for greater insight as to the daily operation of a special education program. Participant 6 noted that many new teachers do not always know how to put into practice what they have learned, and the overall pressure of the job and expectations can be overwhelming at times. Participant 6 commented “being down staffed and not having time to get everything done can be stressful, but a supportive administrator changes that for me”. Participant 6 elaborated that she was provided a direct mentor upon hire, which did create a source for direct support for her classroom. Participant 8 noted that education is constantly changing, and it can be difficult to keep

up with the needs of the students while also supporting staff members within the classroom. Participant 8 stated “having to manage so much, all day, is a lot if you don’t know how and it would be nice to have more respect from the administration”.

Research Question 2

The second research question was as follows: What are novice teachers’ experiences with, and perceptions about, the factors that influence teachers to leave the profession? This target question was answered during the interview by all four novice special educators. Each participant provided data directly connected to emerging themes such as administrative support, mentoring and collaboration, increased salary, and benefits as well as opportunity for professional growth. Participant 9, spoke directly about her limited administrative support, connection to needing a mentor and how having that mentor when working on individualized education programs was necessary for her in noting data and progression of skills for students with more severe needs. As a new special education teacher, Participant 9 said “I really needed help and was overwhelmed with everything I had to do. I didn’t have a lot of help or teachers willing to work with me”. Her overall limited collaboration with colleagues, other than her mentor, as well as her limited administrative involvement created negative work experiences and in turn increased the likelihood of her leaving special education.

Participant 10 summarized her experience by stating, “I had too many responsibilities and not enough support from administration, not enough support when paras were out, no help was offered in that situation”, she continued by saying “everything that went wrong in a day seemed to be blamed on the teacher, when a lot of

was out of my control”. Participant 10 explained that she felt that administration was involved regarding deadlines and accounting for workload, yet, provided limited support proactively. Participant 10 noted, “I did consider leaving multiple times during that first year due to the overall lack of support”.

Participant 11, reflected on interactions being miscommunicated in terms of information not being clearly expressed and limited accountability from her supervisor. With little accountability, expectations were often unclear and/or not completed by the target date. Participant 11 stated, “everything was very blurred, information wasn’t being shared, I always felt that I was learning on the fly in that first year”. Participant 11 did express positive experiences that have evolved to create a better school community. Participant 11 stated, “we now have quarterly meetings, direct coaching for all newer teachers and I’m currently enrolled in a professional development online training that is working on my leadership skills. These things are really helping me feel professional”. The viewpoint shared by Participant 12 reinforces the positive outcomes that come with collaboration and connection to administration and colleagues. Creating a community of connection is essential in developing as a special educator. Participant 12 stated, “We are required to share on google drive our lesson plans and weekly goals, we can share everything as a department. Everyone is very open, and I support others in the building when I can. I view myself as a professional in the community, however, I will mostly leave in a few years due to a need for more pay”.

Research Question 3

Regarding Research Question 3: What suggestions do teacher participants offer

that might decrease teacher turnover among their colleagues, all eight teacher participants shared thoughts and ideas to decrease special education teacher turnover. Once again, suggestions provided did correspond to emerging themes such as administrative support, mentoring and collaboration, increased salary, and benefits as well as opportunities for professional growth. Participant 1 stated, having effective productive conversations with teachers and staff to make feedback meaningful and positive, she noted “naming things takes the power away from them, my goal is to reshape how I’m giving feedback to make the culture of feedback, continuous and ongoing for all school personnel”. Participant 2, spoke of creating a school community in which feedback is a tool for change as well as providing a great deal of hands-on support to new teachers and developing a strong foundation for those entering the classroom. Participants 1, 3 and 4 all spoke in some capacity regarding creating a school-based position in which a point person directly connects with teachers in need as well as novice teachers to create a structured foundation for those with less experience and additional programming needs.

Of the total 12 participants’ interviews, 10 made direct statements speaking to the need for increases in salary for special education teachers. Participant 2 stated “teachers need more money, their time is valuable”, Participant 4 stated “people could make a lot more money in other areas”, “the job is getting harder; yet less tools are available”. Participant 11 directly stated, “teachers should get paid six figure salaries due to time and demand of the classroom”. With such a wide-spread agreement as to the increases in salary for the overall demand of the position, almost all participants noted the increases in work demands not matching the current expectation for pay of special education non-

public educators. According to Participant 5, special education is a challenging field with a need for effectively training specialized educators and experienced administrators, “we need a principal with experience in a non-public school in Maryland and who knows and understands the population. When someone doesn’t know the population it’s a hard way to go in this world of education”.

Research Question 4

Regarding Research Question 4: What contributing factors do administrators identify as those that increase the likelihood of special educators leaving or remaining within the classroom environment beyond 5 years, in non-public special education settings. The suggestions provided did correspond to the previously emerging themes such as training and teacher mentoring, increased salary and benefits as well as opportunities for professional growth. Participant 1 provided feedback on the changes being implemented within her own school program as a means of creating an inviting environment which uses feedback as a tool in retaining special education beyond that initial 5-year period. Feedback should be continuous, on-going, and authentic in allowing an individual the opportunity for growth and development. Participant 1 stated, “Feedback doesn’t mean failure, you won’t have it all done in year one. Lesson ideas won’t be incredible, but you will have a space to grow”. Participant 1 strived to create a learning environment for both students and teachers to better allow for mentoring, collaboration, and professional growth.

Participant 2, spoke for the need to allow time for teacher development beyond basic training. Creating a structured space for teachers to identify their goals is essential

in any work environment but more importantly creates a culture of respect and professionalism. Participant 2 stated, “teachers are one the greatest people on earth, it’s a hard job and they don’t always get paid enough and society doesn’t treat them the way they should be treated”. Participant 2 noted that she felt a lack respect and professional often creates negatives for special educators and in turn can lead to turnover. Participant 3 spoke candidly about the need to include special educators in the process for change and growth on a smaller and larger scale within a school setting to create a feeling of connection within the school community. Participant 3 stated “we have a slight disconnect between the higher ups and the classrooms in terms of need”, she elaborated by saying “sadly, a focus has to be enrollment, but we sometimes need more people for more than simply running the day to day, and that’s what teachers are able to see and explain”.

Lastly, Participant 4 appeared very concerned about the recent increases in special education turnover and had since worked to create additional positions to better combat the need for educators. Participant 4 also used recruiters to best find qualified educators who seek change in the capacity by which his school needed support. Participant 4 increased quarterly meetings, webinars, and general informational training to keep teachers up to date and supported the changing needs of the student population. However, Participant 4, noted the need for a strong leader in support of special educators, however, also commented on the general need for increased salary and benefits for those working in the field of special education. Participant 4 stated, “Education is changing faster than changes can be made for teachers. People feel overworked and unable to be flexible in

their role as teachers and they could make more in other areas, outside of the school realm.”

Summary

The evidence provided shows that there is a strong correlation between teacher turnover and administrative support, collaboration, a competitive salary, and increased opportunities for professional growth. The research questions that were aligned to this study inquired as to why teachers decided to leave special education with a non-public special education setting. The third research question then examined what suggestions teacher participants have for decreasing teacher turnover.

Section 3: The Project

In this study, I focused on the experiences of special educators and school administrators in nonpublic school programs as it relates to the overall likelihood of special educator teacher turnover. A review of the findings from this study suggests the need for professional development training for administrators and special educators within nonpublic special education settings. This professional development 3-day workshop is based on my qualitative project study addressing the problem of special education teacher turnover within nonpublic special education settings. Based on data collected from interviews of special educator participants and administrators within nonpublic special education facilities, the workshop will increase administrator awareness of special educator needs as well as develop a stronger teaching support system. The purpose of this workshop is to support administrators in creating opportunities for special educator support and professional growth. This workshop can be used to train administrators on how to implement site-based systems based on the needs of special educators while also allowing experienced educators opportunities for professional growth through teacher leadership and mentoring opportunities.

The goal of this professional development workshop is to provide a guide for administrators on how to create meaningful collaboration through a teacher mentorship program within the school community. This professional learning workshop emphasizes the need for a special education teacher to be provided a consistent structured training approach as well as create a model for the mentorship program with guidance and feedback from experienced special educators. This workshop provides a guide to special

educators in knowing how to address needs with administration while also seeking support from colleagues in a productive professional manner. Learning outcomes from this workshop include providing administrators with tools needed in creating a more cohesive school community while also directly addressing the needs of special educators to decrease the likelihood of their decision to leave the special education classroom environment. The target audience for this will be school administrators from nonpublic special education settings. The information provided will be done so in a 3-day professional development workshop to allow for reflection as it related to their target program. School administrators will be expected to share the information provided with their school teaching teams and colleagues.

The professional development workshop will provide an overview of study findings and needs of special educators, as expressed by special educators from within nonpublic special education programs. The workshop guidelines identify the process for creating meaningful collaboration within the school community through teacher mentorship opportunities. This provides school administrators with the tools to both support novice teachers while also providing experienced educators an opportunity for leadership and growth among peers. This workshop provides a general understanding as to the needs of novel educators to better create a structured new teacher training approach based on the expectations of each school program. Lastly, administrators and veteran special educators will be provided tools for training novice special educators in how to directly address concerns from colleagues in a productive professional manner through coaching and direct mentoring. The professional development workshop design includes

built-in opportunities for discussion, problem solving, and collaboration among learners during a lecture style presentation. Learners are provided all that is needed for the presented workshop and have opportunities to explore how this model would be most effective within their own school community.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a well-established theory that provides crucial insights into the fundamental drivers of human motivation and behavior (Maslow & Lewis, 1987). At the core of this framework lies the psychological needs, which Maslow posited as the most prominent and proponent of all the needs that compel and guide human behavior. The present study delves into the perceptions and experiences of special education teachers, revealing that the majority of participants were dissatisfied in some manner. However, the data indicate that the dominant need among these teachers was of a psychological nature, centered around a desire for increased support and involvement, additional financial compensation, and opportunities for professional growth and development. This aligns with Maslow's theory, which underscores the fundamental human yearning for belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. The study's findings suggest that in the context of special education, the varying levels of these motivational needs can be directly linked to aspects of the teaching experience that ultimately impact a teacher's intention to remain in the profession. To fully understand and address teacher retention, it is crucial for school administrators to recognize the significance of supporting special educators at a more foundational level, ensuring their psychological needs are met before they can progress towards higher levels of job satisfaction and self-fulfillment. The study's recommendations highlight the necessity for targeted

professional development programs that equip administrators with the knowledge and strategies to effectively identify and cater to the unique needs of their special education teaching staff, thereby enhancing retention and fostering a thriving educational environment for both teachers and their students.

Rationale

Based on qualitative data collected and analyzed, special education teachers and administrators from the network of nonpublic schools state-wide have all experienced similarly high rates of teacher turnover and provided similar data as to different perceived factors relating to the high rates of special education teacher turnover. As a result, the project chosen was a 3-day professional development workshop that will provide information necessary to build a solid knowledge as to the current needs of special educators. The collected information and provided data will be from the perspectives of current special educators and administrators from within nonpublic special needs facilities. The professional development workshop will provide administrators with tools for better supporting teachers through school-wide systems and direct training as to the needs of their teachers. The professional development workshop will also provide training to veteran special educators and administrators on how to provide novice special education teachers with coaching and mentoring to better develop a school community of collaboration while also creating leadership roles for more experienced special educators. The formal professional development project plan will include learning activities across a 3-day presentation.

Review of the Literature

The literature review includes an analysis of scholarly, peer-reviewed journal articles published within the last 5 years. These publications relate to both the genre and content of the proposed professional development project as well as the research findings from Section 2. The search engines used to obtain research articles included the ERIC, Education Research Complete, and Academic Search Complete databases that were accessed through the Walden University Library. I conducted the searches using keywords and phrases, such as *teacher collaboration*, *teacher mentoring*, *principal mentoring*, *school leadership*, *novice teacher training*, *novice teacher mentorship*, *speech education teacher mentoring*, *special education teacher perceptions*, *principal perception*, *school leader perceptions*, *novice teacher needs and supports*, and *teacher leadership styles and receptions*.

The conceptual framework for understanding adult learning process is a multifaceted approach, drawing from the concept of adult learning theory. Adult learning theory is a comprehensive framework that acknowledges the unique needs and preferences of adult learners. Introduced by an American educator Malcolm Knowles in 1968, this theory recognizes that adult learners bring a wealth of prior experiences, self-directed mindsets, and practical goals to the learning process, in stark contrast to the teacher-directed, subject-centered approach typically used for children (Knowles, 1968). Adult learning theory asserts that adults are intrinsically motivated, prefer learning that is immediately applicable to their lives, and have a deep need to be seen as self-sufficient (Bouchrika, 2024). As such, effective adult education should be designed around these

core principles, with instructors adopting more facilitative, collaborative roles that empower learners to take an active part in shaping their own educational journeys (Bouchrika, 2024). At its core, this framework centered on adult learning theory recognizes the unique needs and characteristics of adult learners such as administrators who often bring a wealth of experiences, self-directed motivations, and practical applications to the learning process (McGuire et al., 2024).

This framework also emphasizes the importance of fostering collaborative learning environments, where adults can engage in peer-to-peer mentoring, knowledge sharing, and collective problem-solving (Bouchrika, 2024). Additionally, this conceptual model highlights the role of administrative support and organizational structures in facilitating professional development opportunities that align with the specific needs and career aspirations of adult learners (Leahy, 2024). By understanding this multidimensional conceptual framework, educators can design learning experiences that truly resonate with and empower adult students, leveraging their unique strengths and motivations to cultivate transformative, lifelong learning (Leahy, 2024). This holistic approach helps ensure that adult education programs are not only academically rigorous, but also practically applicable and personally meaningful for the diverse array of learners they serve (Leahy, 2024).

The literature review consists of three subsections that were derived from the project study findings. These include conceptual project alignment and the workshop content areas of administrative support and involvement, teacher mentoring and collaboration, as well as opportunities for professional advancement. The analysis of the

literature will provide an overview of current trends regarding (a) administrative support and involvement, (b) mentoring and collaboration, and (c) opportunities for professional advancement.

Administrative Support and Involvement

Declines in teacher retention as well as student performance can be directly attributed to the continuous concerns related to poor school-based leadership displayed by many principals as well as school management teams (Agyeman & Aphane, 2024). Even though there are no stringent criteria for the appointment of school principals many have potential to lead an affective and successful school community (Agyeman & Aphane, 2024). Principals have the potential to develop exemplary leadership practices when subject to training within professional development programs (Tran et al., 2021). Creating a strong school management team made of professional qualifications and specialized leadership skills takes time and focused attention on the direct needs and strengths of those leaders (Tran et al., 2021). According to Agyeman and Aphane (2024), many principals are appointed into leadership positions with limited experience, requiring skills adapting to the demands and expectations of the role they are required to execute. All school management teams require additional specialized leadership training with continuous professional development and ongoing mentorship to better support their own growth and development within their current role as well as adapt to the needs of the ever-changing educational climate (Tran et al., 2021).

Leadership style has been considered one of the most important factors affecting school success (Morris, 2021). Research notes that principals and other school

management teams who have completed additional leadership courses, as well as professional development, focused on expanding their leadership styles, have proven to be a greater asset to their school community (Agyeman & Aphane, 2024). Currently, most school administrators rely on transformational and instructional based leadership styles (Agyeman & Aphane, 2024). The transformational leadership style used by school-based leaders has been criticized due to its focus on creating a leader to be the champion and problem solver, often lacking additional skills which allow the leader to develop a stronger community, proactively (Agyeman & Aphane, 2024). The use of an instructional leadership style by school administrators has also been criticized for its focus on an authoritative model in which the leader is viewed as the main controller within the school setting (Agyeman & Aphane, 2024). As the needs of educators as well as schools adapt to meet the needs of changing school populations, as does the need for a shift in leadership styles. Principals who are more equipped to shift their thinking as well as their style of support have the greatest potential to create change while developing an exceptional school community, which supports the needs of all (Aziz et al., 2022).

Leaders in successful schools often focus on creating leadership styles that encompass components of multiple leadership styles and models as well as create opportunities for one to become more adaptive (Agyeman & Aphane, 2024). School management teams play an important role in the success of schools and create school excellence by taking on traits of multiple leadership styles, according to specific situations (Aziz et al., 2022). Research collected by Aziz et al. (2022), explains that school-based leaders who used different strategies to monitor and evaluate the teaching-

learning process in their schools through classroom monitoring and observations appeared to focus on transforming the overall needs of their school community, often starting by addressing basic aspects of the school as an organization. Those leaders who were able to demonstrate flexibility and creativity in their support style as well as balance between the social, ethical and emotional wellbeing of others proved to be a greater resource for their school community (Aziz et al., 2022). Research conducted by Agyeman and Aphane (2024), suggests that by requiring specialized skill training and participation of current leaders as well as those with teachers with leadership potential, learning and instructional practice become infused into the individual's current skill set. Specialized skill training paired with continuous opportunities for professional leadership development and applied practical experience have the greatest potential outcome for creating strong effective school-based leaders who are more equipped and willing to transform the ongoing needs of any school setting (Agyeman & Aphane, 2024).

The field of education is constantly unsettled with new academic trends, new policies and ever-growing student needs and concerns (Varano, 2022). Novice teachers have their own set of different challenges, motivation, and goals to be addressed within the initial 5-year period of teaching, while also striving to find balance within the realm of education (Varano, 2022). Being a novice educator often comes with greater expectations and daily struggles as one attempts to develop one's own natural technique and style of teaching (Mitani et al., 2022). School administrators are responsible for ensuring that adequate teacher development and learning takes place in their schools (Mitani et al., 2022). The principal's role becomes critical in directly creating opportunities for support,

early in a teacher's career as well as creating a structured supportive induction process (Evashkovsky & Osipova, 2023). Mitani et al. (2022) noted that principal engagement and direct mentoring positively affected novice teacher's retention by highlighting the importance of directly supervising and creating professional relationship development.

According to a study conducted by DeMatthews et al. (2022), when novice teachers were given direct support, coaching and collaboration opportunities by supervising administrators, teachers felt more capable and connected to their teaching environment and more willing to remain in the field of education to further their skill set. DeMatthews et al. shared that novice educators expressed that administrator had demonstrated a willingness to provide support, collaborate on their current teaching methods and assist them through the evaluation process (DeMatthews et al., 2022). This example of a professional and supportive approach to supervising, directly from experienced leaders, focused on the concept on helping to guide, share, and support early career teachers and proved invaluable in the development of their confidence and resilience (DeMatthews et al., 2022). Administrators who were available to talk, checked in regularly, listened to novice teachers' concerns, and generally demonstrated a caring demeanor, in turn created educators who felt capable to remain within education for a longer period (DeMatthews et al., 2022). Administrators also created a supportive relationship by offering to cover classes and provide relief time when possible, giving novice teachers opportunities for professional development, while challenging them to improve their current teaching skill set (DeMatthews et al., 2022). These actions by administrators created trust and gave novice educators freedom to experiment with their

teaching methods knowing they had support, if not successful (DeMatthews et al., 2022).

School administrators' engagement is vital for the induction of novice educators to establish and operationalize the vision, mission, and goals of the school as well as create the structural framework by which an educator develops their own teaching style (Evashkovsky & Osipova, 2023). Programmatically, principal engagement is thought to be a critical aspect of any induction and mentoring program, but more importantly that this coaching role is taken on by a school administrator who understanding the long-term positive outcomes of directly supporting a teacher (Evashkovsky & Osipova, 2023). Support was found to be most effective when the role of the administrator was consistent and paired with positive administrative interactions that encouraged trusting relationships, provided feedback and opportunities for teacher development (DeMatthews et al., 2022). These examples for administrative engagement were from school- based leaders who saw the value of building the skill set of novice teachers to create a strong long-term progression of skills within their school community (DeMatthews et al., 2022). These school administrators took in the responsibility for ensuring that adequate teacher development and learning took place in their school, thus, directly creating an ideal opportunity for professional growth and development (DeMatthews et al., 2022; Mitani et al., 2022).

Mentoring and Collaboration

According to research conducted by Heubeck (2021), first-year teachers have arguably one of the most demanding jobs within the field of education, which could explain why so many new teachers leave the profession within the initial years. Heubeck

notes that an analysis of federal data shows that more than 40 percent of new teachers leave the profession within that initial 5-year period. However, mentorship programs can make a significant difference in retaining first year teachers (Heubeck, 2021; Tyagi & Misra, 2021). First year teachers who had been given direct support through access to a teacher mentor or school-based mentorship program had a greater likelihood of returning to the classroom for a second year (Heubeck, 2021). Schools across the nation, have slowly increased the focus towards current veteran educators becoming involved in teaching the next generations of teachers how to effectively manage a classroom setting and navigate those foundational years within the classroom, both indirectly as well through a structured mentorship experience (Tyagi & Misra, 2021). Veteran teachers have always had an influence on the initial training of novice teachers and for many novice educators, those veteran teachers not only became mentors but also role models and friends (Tyagi & Misra, 2021).

During student teaching experiences, student educators are encouraged to acquire different competences, skills, and values that they hope to deploy further in their future classrooms (Tyagi & Misra, 2021). However, as teachers fully embark on novice years within the classroom, beyond their prior role as a student teacher, needs and skill sets differ, thus, requiring a mentor of a different capacity. Within that transition to classroom leader, novice teachers now have increasing requirements and expectations while still needing a basic level of mentorship to ensure a smoother transition into that initial classroom manager role (Maas et al., 2022). According to Maas et al., (2022), collaborative social support from a school principal and/or school-based mentor is an

important factor that significantly contributed to teacher satisfaction of novice teachers' basic needs. Maas et al. (2022) explained that job demands, and the use of job resources were more balanced for novice educators when those same educators had a model from a supportive colleague. By modeling as well as providing direct coaching to novice teachers, through a direct mentorship opportunity, exemplary teaching behavior was more likely to appear within the school environment (Maas et al., 2022). When novice teachers were given mentors and school-based coaching, they were more equipped to apply instructional methods and strategies to everyday situations, and in turn created a stronger foundations of teaching skills (Ahmmed et al., 2022; Maas et al., 2022).

In developing a mentorship experience for new teachers, it is important to note that some experiences have a greater likelihood for novice teacher success (Heubeck, 2021). In creating a positive mentorship experience, mentors should provide consistent on-going support and feedback while utilizing a school-based mentoring framework for teachers within their first year (Heubeck, 2021). In creating a framework for teachers, the approach towards mentoring should be consistent to all novice teachers while ensuring a balance by exposing novice educators to a wider range of potential experiences (Heubeck, 2021). Those same novice teachers should be provided coaching through modeling and goal setting as it relates to their own professional growth and development (Ahmmed et al., 2022). Novice teachers should be developing their skills set by enhancing their understanding how to teach as well as adapt their current teaching styles through peer observations as well as trialing instructional techniques within their own classrooms (Ahmmed et al., 2022). Novice teachers should also be provided direct

support on short- and long-term goal setting to create a focus on improvement in specific areas of personal need for long term career success (Meyer et al., 2023).

Opportunities for Professional Advancement

All professionals require some level of professional development in order to continuously evolve and keep up to date with the latest needs of their current market (Nooruddin & Bhamani, 2019). Likewise, special educators also require opportunities for professional development to better support overall professional growth and advancement within current instructional needs (Nooruddin & Bhamani, 2019). Those educators within the realm of special education often require additional opportunities for professional development due to high classroom demands and continuous demand of student needs (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020). According to Dougherty and Dougherty (2023), professional development for educators as well as opportunities for mentoring, improved instruction, and professional expertise of all, thus, mentor teachers because greater instructors and more likely to reflect on their own instructional strength while advancing their current professional skill set.

Project Description

Based on the findings from this study, as well as the literature review on special education trends and teacher turnover, the project was a plan for professional development directed towards helping special education teachers as well as administrators to be more effective and collaborative within their school environment. The professional development project aimed to address the critical challenges facing special education teachers by providing administrators with a comprehensive training

program tailored to the unique needs of special education teachers. Drawing insights from the latest research on special education trends and teacher turnover, this 3-day workshop equipped administrative participants with the knowledge and practical strategies to foster a more effective and collaborative school environment. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of the issues at hand, the program took a holistic approach, empowering administrators to work in tandem with special educators in their school community towards positive change.

During the information sessions, school administrators were provided with valuable tools to enhance their leadership practices, strengthen their support networks, and cultivate a school environment which provides a greater sense of fulfillment for special educators. Administrators were provided with tailored guidance on implementing school-wide initiatives that prioritize teacher well-being and retention. Through a blend of interactive presentations, hands-on activities, and structured reflection periods, participants will have the opportunity to deeply engage with the material, share best practices, and develop actionable plans for immediate implementation within their respective schools. By investing in the professional development of this critical workforce, the project aimed to create a ripple effect of improved outcomes for students with special needs, increased job satisfaction among educators, and a more cohesive, supportive school community.

Addressing teacher turnover is a critical challenge facing many school districts, and providing effective training and support for teachers and administrators can be a crucial step in tackling this issue. When designing a professional development focused on

supporting teacher turnover, it is important to carefully consider the potential barriers that may arise and identify proactive solutions to overcome them. One key barrier could be lack of buy-in or engagement from participants. If administrators do not see the value or relevance of the training, they may be less motivated to fully participate. To address this, the professional development aimed its design to be highly interactive and tailored to the specific needs and concerns from special educators, drawing on real-world examples that resonate with their experiences. Another potential hurdle was time and resource constraints. Teachers and administrators often have full schedules, and finding the time to dedicate to professional development can also be a challenge. Offering professional development in a condensed 3-day format, provided enough cover time to address the target topics while also securing buy-in from district leadership that training can occur in such a short amount of time, which overcame these logistical barriers. Additionally, ensuring the training content is evidence-based, comprehensive, and provides actionable strategies that participants can immediately implement in their schools was crucial to maximizing the impact and making the most of the limited time available. By proactively identifying and addressing these types of potential barriers, administration training could be structured to provide meaningful, lasting support in the critical area of teacher turnover.

Project Evaluation Plan

To thoroughly assess the effectiveness of the professional development training sessions for school administrators, a multi-faceted evaluation approach was utilized. At the outset, a formative preassessment was conducted to gauge the administrators' existing

knowledge and understanding of Maslow's theory of human motivation and its practical applications in the school setting. Additional questions relating to daily expectations of special educators was used to gauge administrators' general awareness of the daily roles, responsibilities, and expectations faced by special education teachers. By establishing this initial benchmark, the training facilitators could then tailor the workshop content to address any gaps or misconceptions, ensuring the sessions would be maximally impactful and relevant (see Appendix A for workshop content). A formative assessment is an evaluation process used to modify the provided instruction to better achieve the intended outcomes (Abd et al., 2024). Formative assessments are typically used as a tool throughout the teaching and learning process and play an important role in identifying effective practices (Abd et al., 2024).

Over the course of the 3-day training, the administrators engaged in interactive activities, discussions, and case study analyses to deepen their comprehension of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and how it underpins the social-emotional supports necessary for special educators and their students to thrive. The outcome of the workshop was to equip the administrators with a solid conceptual framework for recognizing the unique challenges confronting special education teachers, as well as strategies for providing meaningful mentorship and growth opportunities. At the conclusion of the workshop, a summative evaluation survey was administered to gather anonymous feedback, insights, and suggestions for improving the quality and delivery of the professional development content (Appendix A).

This multiphase evaluation approach, encompassing both formative and

summative assessments, was deliberately chosen to optimize the training's effectiveness and impact. The formative preassessment allowed the facilitators to tailor the instruction to the administrators' existing knowledge and needs, while the summative survey provided valuable data to guide future iterations of the workshop. The key stakeholders in this process included the school district's leadership team, the special education department, and the participating administrators themselves, all of whom had a vested interest in enhancing the support and professional growth opportunities available to their special education teachers. By rigorously evaluating the training's outcomes, the project aimed to empower administrators to better understand and fulfill their roles as instructional leaders and mentors, ultimately benefiting the entire school community.

Project Implications

This professional development project was based on the findings of my research study. This project has the potential to support school administrators with decreasing the high number of special educator turnover. This professional development project aimed to empower administrators with the knowledge and practical strategies to foster a more effective and collaborative school environment. Drawing insights from the latest research on special education trends and teacher turnover, the 3-day workshop prepared administrative participants with a comprehensive training program for special educators in their schools. Addressing the nature of the issues at hand, the program took a holistic approach, empowering administrators to work in tandem with their special education teachers towards positive change. By strengthening the partnership between school leaders and special educators, the project held the potential to drive meaningful social

change, improving outcomes for vulnerable student populations and creating a more inclusive, supportive educational system.

On a local level, the training program provided crucial resources and guidance to administrators, equipping them to better support their special education staff and, in turn, the students they serve. In a broader context, the project's evidence-based strategies and collaborative framework could be replicated in school districts nationwide, amplifying its impact and helping to address the nationwide crisis of special education teacher turnover. Ultimately, this professional development initiative represented a vital step towards cultivating more effective, empowered special education teams, teams that are better positioned to deliver life-changing educational opportunities to students with diverse needs. Through this collaborative approach, the project held the promise of fostering lasting improvements in special education, benefiting vulnerable learners, dedicated teachers, and entire school communities.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

This study addressed the issue of special education teacher attrition and retention within a nonpublic school setting. By grounding the discussion in the relevant academic literature, I was able to provide important context and a solid conceptual framework for the study. Specifically, the study drew upon Maslow's theory of motivation and hierarchy to explore how the varied experiences of special education teachers, both novice and experienced, as well as school administrators, influenced decisions to remain in the classroom environment long term. Through in-depth interviews with eight special educators and four administrators overseeing nonpublic special education programs, I was able to uncover valuable insights into the factors driving high turnover rates, such as the need for stronger mentorship, increased opportunities for collaboration, and clearer pathways for professional advancement. In the following section, I discuss the strengths and limitations of the deliverable project as well as make recommendations for alternative approaches. I also reflect on research processes and my personal growth as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. Finally, I discuss recommendations for practice and future research.

Project Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

The strengths of this project are rooted in teacher turnover related to special education settings and is critical in making positive changes for educators. Teacher turnover is an issue that has far-reaching implications for students with special needs. The project's focus on the experiences of special educators and the factors that influence their

decision to remain in the classroom is particularly insightful, as this population often faces unique challenges and stressors that can contribute to high attrition rates. The inclusion of both special educator participants and program administrators further enriches the data, allowing for a multifaceted perspective that captures the experiences and perceptions of those on the frontlines as well as those in leadership roles (Heubeck, 2021).

The implications of this project extend beyond the individual school settings, serving as a valuable blueprint for communities nationwide as they work to address the critical challenge of teacher turnover and ensure that students with special needs have consistent access to the specialized instruction and support, they require to thrive. By highlighting the unique experiences and needs of special educators, this project lays the groundwork for the development of targeted, evidence-based strategies that can cultivate vibrant, sustainable special education programs, a goal that holds tremendous promise for driving positive social change. In presenting this project in a 3-day professional development, participants can engage and reflect on knowledge presented. This project will support both special education teachers and, by extension, students receiving co-teaching services

Limitations

At the heart of the project was a deep understanding that the partnership between school leaders and special educators is essential to driving positive change and improving outcomes for vulnerable student populations. Through the training curriculum, administrators will gain invaluable knowledge and practical strategies for strengthening

this critical bond, learning how to better support, empower, and work in tandem with their special education staff. By equipping administrators with these capabilities, the initiative held the potential to create a ripple effect, transforming not just individual schools, but entire districts and communities. However, limitations with this project are often out of the control of the local school system, administrators, or classroom teachers. Limitations such as a lack of time, difficulties with scheduling, and personality conflicts may inhibit the success of this project model. No matter how much energy is invested in any professional development, if not presented in a meaningful manner, the effort will be unsuccessful.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The study's findings presented a valuable opportunity to approach the challenge of retaining special education teachers. Rather than relying on a singular definition of the problem, I examined the experiences shared by the eight special educator participants, to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence their decisions to leave or remain in the classroom long-term. The administrators' perceptions added another layer of insight, highlighting the importance of administrative involvement, mentoring, and collaboration. An alternative approach to the problem discussed could have been addressed depending on how I chose to frame the problem. For example, an alternate definition of the problem could have been a lack of teacher preparedness when entering the classroom, which could have a negative effect on teacher retention. An alternate way to address the problem could have been to change the design of the study to investigate university education programs in training novice teachers and aligning to the needs of

current special education classroom needs. I would then be able to determine if there was a significant difference between the needs of the special educators based on their program of study and/or educational background.

Utilizing a mixed methods design could have been a valuable approach to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Incorporating a survey or questionnaire alongside qualitative data collection would have allowed for a larger sample size, enabling more generalizable results that could be more confidently applied beyond the specific context. A program evaluation could have also offered valuable high-level insights, examining the initiative's goals, implementation, and outcomes from a systemic viewpoint.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

This doctoral process was a challenging and transformative journey that has led to a newfound respect and appreciation for the rigors of academic research and development. As a scholar, navigating the complexities of the literature, synthesizing diverse theoretical frameworks, and crafting a cohesive research design pushed me to develop a more critical eye. This scholarly growth was complemented by the practical lessons I learned as a practitioner, where I was required to translate abstract concepts into tangible, real-world applications. Perhaps most significantly, this process has instilled in me a profound respect for the work of project developers, the meticulous planning, the iterative refinement, and the persistence required to transform an idea into a viable, impactful solution. I now appreciate the delicate balance of vision, technical expertise, and sheer determination that underpins the successful development of any meaningful

project.

During the process of completing my project study, I learned more about what it takes to be an effective educational leader who strives to work with administrators and special education teachers. I gained a profound appreciation for the multifaceted role of an effective leader. Beyond simply managing administrative tasks, I learned that true leadership in the educational realm requires a steadfast commitment to collaborating closely with both administrators and teachers. Effective leaders must possess a keen understanding of the complex, interconnected systems that govern a school while also maintaining a firm grasp on the day-to-day realities faced by educators in the classroom. Through my research and development process, I came to recognize the critical importance of fostering open lines of communication, building trust, and aligning the visions and priorities of all stakeholders.

In terms of creating change as a leader, I learned that successful educational leaders must be adept at identifying areas for improvement, empowering teachers to innovate and experiment, and championing initiatives that drive student achievement. Equally crucial is the ability to make data-driven decisions and implement evidence-based strategies with teachers, all while remaining attuned to the unique needs and challenges of the local community. Ultimately, I learned that the most impactful educational leaders are those who blend top-down oversight with a deep understanding of the in-classroom experiences of teachers and students.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

As a special educator, I have a profound and immensely rewarding calling, one

that requires tremendous dedication, empathy, and a steadfast commitment to helping students with unique needs reach their full potential. However, the reality is that the incredible hard work and influence I strive to make is often hampered by high turnover rates in the field. This is a frustrating and disheartening challenge, as so much of the progress and growth I help facilitate with students can be quickly undone when they are faced with a new teacher who lacks the deep understanding and personalized approach you have developed.

Despite these setbacks, the importance of the work of special educators cannot be overstated. Teachers are a lifeline for students who may otherwise fall through the cracks of a one-size-fits-all education system. Through tireless efforts to adapt curriculum, teaching methods, and supportive resources to meet each child's unique needs, you empower them to flourish and showcase their true capabilities. This individualized, empathetic approach allows students with learning disabilities, cognitive differences, or other special needs to build confidence, develop critical skills, and realize their full academic and personal potential. By advocating for better support systems, reduced administrative burdens, and greater flexibility, I hope I can help create an environment that nurtures and retains talented special educators and, in turn, ensure that the life-changing work our teachers do continues uninterrupted, providing a stable, empowering foundation for the students who need it most.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The issue of teacher turnover is a significant concern that extends far beyond individual classrooms, with the potential to create rippling effects across various levels of

society. At the classroom level, high teacher turnover can lead to educational inconsistencies and disruptions in the learning process for students, particularly those in specialized settings like nonpublic special education programs. Without the stability of consistent, experienced educators, these vulnerable students may struggle to form meaningful connections and may experience gaps in their academic and social-emotional development. Moving to the family level, the impact of teacher turnover can reverberate through households, as parents and guardians grapple with the challenges of navigating an ever-changing educational landscape for their children. Families may be forced to expend additional time and resources to help their children adapt to new teachers and teaching styles, further compounding the stresses they already face.

At the organizational level, high turnover rates can create significant operational burdens for school districts and special education providers (Yastibas et al., 2022). Schools must allocate substantial time and resources to the constant recruitment, onboarding, and training of new staff, diverting attention and funding away from other critical areas (Darling-Hammond et al., 2023). This cycle of turnover has the potential to undermine the overall quality and cohesion of educational programs, and the ability to effectively serve the needs of their students. Finally, at the societal and policy level, the widespread issue of teacher turnover, especially in specialized fields such as special education, has far-reaching implications (Darling-Hammond et al., 2023). Policymakers and educational leaders must prioritize addressing the root causes of this problem, through targeted initiatives, improved working conditions, and comprehensive support systems for educators, to foster positive social change and ensure all students have access

to the high-quality, consistent educational experiences they deserve (Darling-Hammond et al., 2023).

From a methodological standpoint, I utilized a qualitative research approach, using both in-depth interviews and survey data to capture the perspectives of participants. This multilayered design allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the realities faced by special educators. By illuminating critical factors, the study offered a roadmap for school administrators, and teacher preparation programs to implement evidence-based strategies that enhance teacher retention and, ultimately, improve outcomes for students with diverse learning needs.

In reference to future research on teacher turnover, there is a need for deeper exploration and analysis. With teacher shortages and retention challenges within school districts nationwide, understanding the complex factors that drive educators to leave the profession is of critical importance. Potential avenues for future study could explore the effectiveness of potential interventions and support systems, such as mentorship programs, improved working conditions, and better access to mental health resources in mitigating teacher burnout and improving retention rates. Another avenue for future research could be to take a closer look at the disparities in teacher turnover, exploring how factors like school demographics, geographic location, and teacher demographics (e.g. race, gender, experience level) influence attrition patterns. Understanding these dynamics could potentially inform more targeted retention strategies tailored to the unique needs of different teacher populations and school communities. Finally, studies tracking teachers' career trajectories over time would shed light on the complex personal

and professional considerations that shape their decisions to remain in or leave the field. Examining the long-term impacts of teacher turnover on student outcomes, school culture, and the teaching profession would also be a valuable area of inquiry.

Conclusion

Special education serves a critical role in supporting the diverse learning needs of students with a wide range of disabilities and challenges (Edwards et al., 2024). As high numbers of students with identified learning, physical, or cognitive disabilities continues to grow, the demand for knowledgeable, compassionate special educators has become increasingly urgent (Edwards et al., 2024). Special educators play a vital role in ensuring students with diverse needs receive the individualized instruction, accommodations, and therapeutic interventions essential for their academic and personal development (Edwards et al., 2024). However, the field of special education has struggled with high turnover rates, depriving students of the consistent, effective teaching they require (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020). Without seasoned special education professionals to lead classrooms and mentor newer teachers, students can miss out on crucial learning opportunities (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020). The key message from this study is that special educators are essential. Investing in recruiting, training, and retaining exceptional special educators, while also providing them with the tools and backing they need to succeed, is crucial for empowering students with diverse abilities to reach their full potential. By addressing the systemic issues, school districts can work toward creating more stable, enriching learning environments that meet the unique needs of all students.

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Appendix A: The Project

Introduction
Overview

Day 1: Defining Roles and Responsibilities in Special Education:

Agenda

Current Trends in Turnover with Non-Public Schools

Areas of need relating to Communication; Collaboration; and Classroom climate.

Study Findings

Data Findings from Novice Teachers: What are the Needs?

Range of Responsibilities

Defining Roles and Responsibilities in Special Education

Day 2: Focused Mentoring and Support:

Agenda

Mentoring Program Overview

How to Support your Mentors

Annual Timeline for Teacher Mentorship

Supporting Teacher in Setting Short and Long-term Goals

Potential Barriers and Limitations and Factors to be Considered within any school setting.

Day 3: Providing Feedback and Growth Opportunities:

Agenda

Research Findings

Giving feedback

Discussion

Coaching Strategies

Evaluations

Satisfaction Instrument

Implementation Survey

AGENDA – Three Day Workshop

Day 1: Defining Roles and Responsibilities in Special Education

Time	Activity / Topic	Notes
8:00-8:45	<p>Check-In and Coffee</p> <p>Complete Pre-Assessment-Formative Assessment</p>	<p>Participants are free to choose table groups at this point.</p> <p>Participants will be instructed to bring their laptop computers and begin by completing a pre assessment.</p> <p>PowerPoint Presentation Title: Building Understanding and Collaboration: Identifying Needs in Special Education</p>
8:45-10:00	<p>Welcome / Agenda</p> <p>PowerPoint Presentation Title: Building Understanding and Collaboration: Identifying Needs in Special Education</p> <p>One Word Wonders each participant writes one word on a sticky note - describing their current emotion about working in special education and shares them anonymously. Discuss the collective mood following.</p> <p>Reflecting on One World Wonders Discuss the pros and cons of what is currently in practice within the realm of special education, in small groups related to: Communication; Collaboration; and Contribution to the Classroom climate</p>	<p>Briefly review agenda and goals of the workshop</p> <p>We can paste the sticky notes on chart paper to share in groups.</p> <p>Discuss the groupings/tables</p>
10:00-10:15	BREAK	
10:15-12:30	<p>PowerPoint Presentation Title: Building Understanding and Collaboration: Identifying Needs in Special Education</p> <p>Provide an overview of study findings and needs of special educators. What do special educators need, according to data? Applying Theory Application in the classroom.</p>	<p>Provide information on recent trends in Special Education as well as the expressed needs of special educators from data findings.</p>
12:30-1:30	LUNCH BREAK	
1:30-3:00	<p>Topic: Roles and Responsibilities of Special Education Teachers. What is the Range of Responsibilities</p> <p>PowerPoint Presentation Title: Defining Roles and Responsibilities in Special Education.</p>	<p>PowerPoint Presentation Title: Defining Roles and Responsibilities in Special Education.</p> <p>What goals do you have for working collaboratively?</p>

AGENDA – Three Day Workshop - Day 2
 Day 2: Focused Mentoring and Support

Time	Activity / Topic	Notes
8:00-8:45	Check-In and Coffee	Participants are free to choose table groups at this point. Respond to ice breaker question and share with table. How do you teach a new skill? i.e. riding a bike?
8:45-10:00	Briefly Review Roles and Responsibilities for special education teachers both novice and veteran teachers.	Consider the varying needs as provided in the Study. Allow from reflection and time to discuss within small groups.
10:00-10:15	BREAK	
10:15-12:30	<p>Review of Mentorship Program</p> <p>Annual Timeline for Teacher Mentorship</p> <p>Setting Short- and Long-term goals for teachers</p> <p>Potential Barriers and Limitations</p> <p>Factors to be Considered within any school setting</p>	Annual Timeline for Teacher Mentorship and how this will be maintained within our program.
12:30-1:30	LUNCH BREAK	
1:30-3:00	<p>Program Evaluation Measures</p> <p>Sample: Contracts and Documentation</p> <p>Sample: Peer Interview Teacher Observation Form</p> <p>Conclusion: How do you support your mentor and develop their skill sets.</p> <p>Conclusion Discussion</p> <p>How do you see yourself and/or your school adapting to support you veteran teacher/ mentors?</p>	


AGENDA – Three Day Workshop - Day 3

Day 3: Providing Feedback and Growth Opportunities

Time	Activity / Topic	Notes
8:00-8:45	Check-In and Coffee	Participants are free to choose table groups at this point. Respond to ice breaker question with your table. Prior to being an administrator, what did you think your responsibilities would include versus what you actually take ownership of within your school?
8:45-10:00	<p>Presentation: Workshop Day 3.1: Providing Feedback and Growth Opportunities</p> <p>Providing Teachers with Feedback That Fosters Growth.</p> <p>Model for Providing feedback while Building Meaningful Relationships</p> <p>Think Paire Share: How are you currently providing feedback to Teachers?</p>	
10:00-10:15	BREAK	
10:15-12:30	<p>Creating Opportunities for Growth with Teachers</p> <p>How can we support goals while aligning to the needs of the schools?</p>	
12:30-1:30	LUNCH BREAK	
1:30-3:00	<p>Achieving leadership goals and thriving when working with others</p> <p>Addressing Challenges</p> <p>Complete Evaluation Assessment</p>	


Pre Assessment:

Please Complete the Pre Assessment Below:

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest:
What is your understanding of Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation?  Dropdown

Mark only one oval.

- 1
 2
 3
 4
 5

2. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest:
What is your understanding of Maslow's Theory of Hierarchy of Needs?  Dropdown

Mark only one oval.

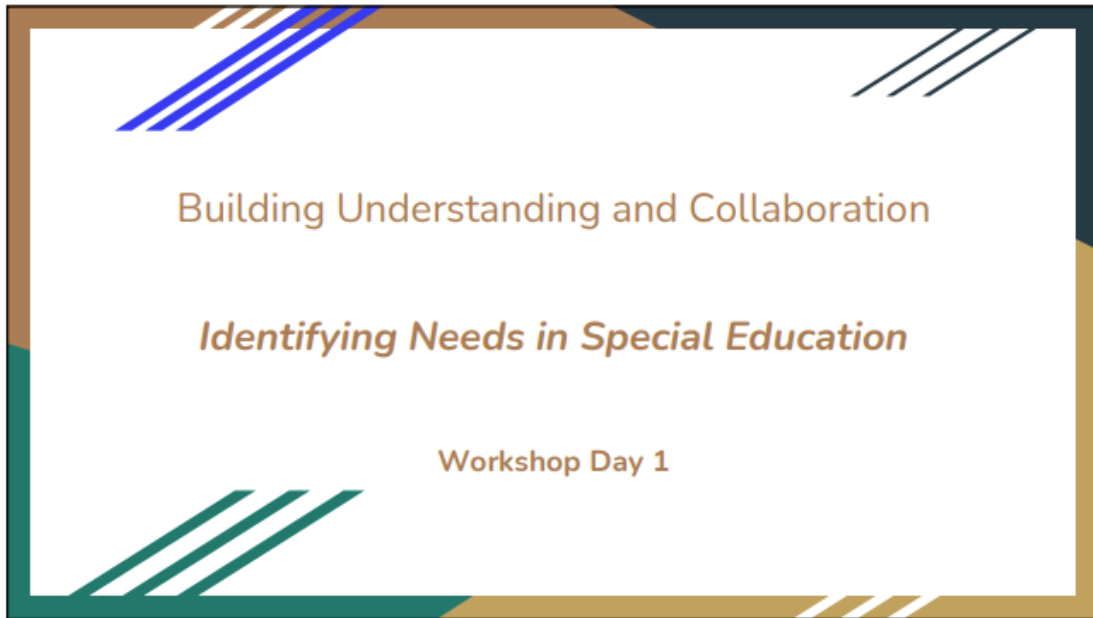
- 1
 2
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 5

3. How is Maslow's Theory of motivation and hierarchy of needs applicable in a school setting?

4. What is the main responsibility of the special education teacher, in a school setting?

5. As an administrator, what is your main responsibility in a school setting?

6. What do you wish to gain from this workshop? What additional supports do you need as an administrator to assist your special education teachers?

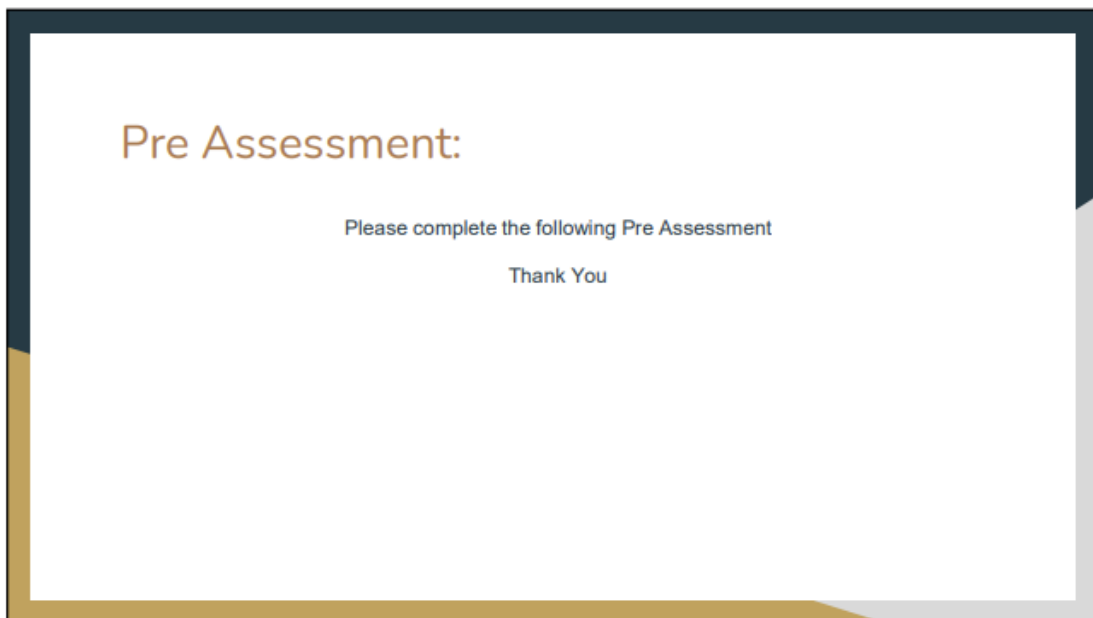


Building Understanding and Collaboration

Identifying Needs in Special Education

Workshop Day 1

1



Pre Assessment:

Please complete the following Pre Assessment

Thank You

2

Agenda:

- Complete Pre Assessment
- Welcome/Warm-up Activity (One Word Wonders)
- Current Trends in Turnover with Non-Public School
- Pros and Cons relating to Communication; Collaboration; and Classroom climate
- Break
- Data Findings within Non-Public School
- Applying Theory to the Classroom

3

Warm-Up:

- Each participant write one word on a sticky note describing current emotion about working in special education.
- Discuss as a small group the choice for selected words

Large Group Discussion:

- Discuss the pros and cons of what is currently in practice within the realm of special education
- What changes have you seen in special education since your start
- What changes have you seen relating directionally to communication, teacher/administrative collaboration and overall classroom climate?



5

Recent Study Overview:

- *Recent Study: Factors in Teacher Turnover within a Non-Public Special Education Setting*
- Increased teacher turnover has led to negative effects on the school community
- High rates of teacher turnover are directly linked to teacher shortages nationally, accounting for close to 90% of annual teacher demand
- Educators within nonpublic settings are responsible for making curriculum meaningful through real world experiences, and applicable to students' lives, while also demonstrating effective teaching strategies to promote overall positive behaviors

6

Research:

- In the United States, widespread teaching shortages have become a topic of concern for all educators (Gui, 2024).
- The need for qualified educators continues to grow to better support students in all educational settings (Day et al. 2024).
- Many states continue to struggle to supply teachers with their workforce needs, and therefore many school systems are nonetheless facing a teacher shortage crisis (Green, 2024).
- Many states have taken local action to address the teacher shortages by altering the job description of teachers, varying the requirements for hiring to make it more appealing to potential candidates (Jackson, 2018).
- Target on-site teaching programs often focus on development of teaching skills while the teacher candidate is working in a classroom compared to skill attainment through more traditional teaching programs provided at a college or university prior to entering the classroom (Jackson, 2018).
- Other states have decreased standards for teacher preparation and increased the use of emergency certifications or conditional certifications to have teachers in the classroom at a quicker rate (Amitai & Van Houtte, 2022).

7

The Study:

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of special education teachers regarding the factors that influence their retention decision.

Research Questions: (1) : What do experienced special educators perceive as contributing factors that increase the likelihood of their leaving or remaining within the classroom environment beyond 5 years, in non-public special education settings? (2) What are novice teachers' experience about the factors that influence teachers to leave the profession? (3) What suggestions do teacher participants offer that might decrease teacher turnover among their colleagues? (4) What contributing factors do administrators identify as those that increase the likelihood of special educators leaving or remaining within the classroom

Main Focus of Data Analysis: Goal to obtain a purposeful sampling of data from a variety of educators to better share the scope of experiences and backgrounds among the educator population

Participants: 8 special educators: 4 within their initial 5-year period, 4 met criteria of being beyond that initial period to provide a varying experiences of educator needs; Administrative members consisted of 1 principal, 1 assistant principal and 2 program directors

8

Study Findings:

- Drawing upon Maslow's hierarchy of needs, these themes align with the fundamental requirements for human motivation and fulfillment
- Special education teachers require administrative support and involvement, a sense that their school leadership values their critical role and is invested in their success
- This could manifest through ample resources, manageable caseloads, and protected time for planning and collaboration
- Moving up the hierarchy, teachers deeply need opportunities for mentorship, peer support, and productive collaboration with colleagues
- Feeling isolated and unsupported is a major driver of burnout and attrition in this demanding field. Further up, the data revealed that competitive compensation, including opportunities for increased salary and benefits, is essential for attracting and retaining top talent in special education
- At the highest level of the hierarchy, self-actualization was addressed through a need for pathways to professional advancement and leadership roles
- Special educators want to grow, develop new skills, and have a voice

9

Maslow's Theory:

- Abraham Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation and hierarchy of needs was used as a model for the basis for the conceptual framework
- According to Maslow, humans strive to have basic needs met before seeking to fulfill higher needs within a hierarchy of needs.
- Maslow identified five motivational needs divided into two categories of basic needs and growth needs.
- Motivational needs, in order from the lowest to the highest, are physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization
- On the bottom on the hierarchy, creating the foundation of all needs, are physiological needs, defined as biological requirements for human survival such as air, food, drink, shelter, clothing, warmth, and sleep



10

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs:



- Maslow considered physiological needs the most important as all the other needs become secondary until these needs are met
- Security and safety become significant to individuals who strive to find personal fulfillment
- A person's social need to belong through a connection - interpersonal relationships motivates behavior and allows individuals to connect to a group affiliation
- When a person seeks esteem through the support of others, the individual is often striving to create opportunities for leadership
- Self-actualization requires a level of reflective thought and contemplation regarding actions, behaviors, and experiences

11

Small Group Discussion:

- How does Maslow's theory apply to the needs of our students?
- Why is Maslow's hierarchy of needs an important theory in the field of education?
- How can teachers use this theory in the classroom?
- How does Maslow's theory of needs apply to communication?
- How to use Maslow's hierarchy of needs relate to leadership?
- What would you identify as a need of special education teachers? Veteran educators vs. Novice



12

Common Themes & Teacher Needs:

- Administrative support and involvement
- Mentoring or Collaboration
- Opportunities for increased salary or benefits
- Opportunities for professional advancement



13

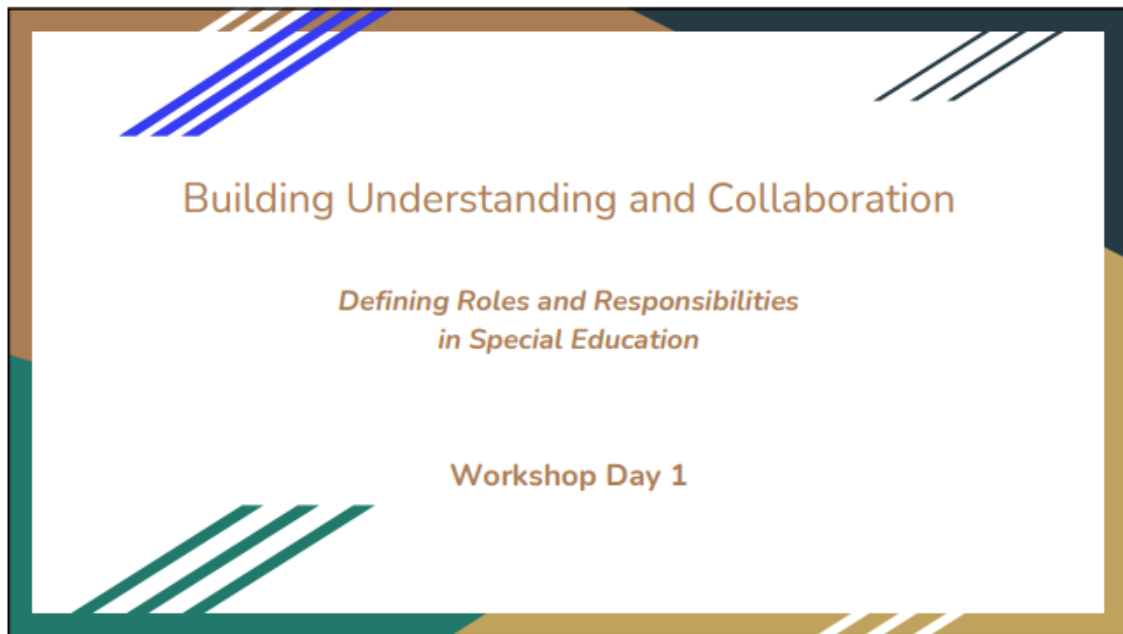
Teacher Needs:

- Inadequate administrative support and involvement was a key concern, as teachers often felt isolated and lacking the guidance and resources needed to effectively manage their classrooms and students
- The absence of structured mentorship programs and meaningful collaboration opportunities left many educators feeling unsupported in their professional development
- Compounding these issues were the limited prospects for increased compensation or career advancement
- Many noted a critical need for comprehensive support systems, enhanced professional growth pathways, and a greater emphasis on fostering a nurturing, collaborative environment for special education practitioners

14

Conclusion/Wrap up:

- Maslow's (1943) theory helped to identify what needs are required in order to feel motivated in the workplace. Maslow suggested motivating people based on the listed hierarchy of needs: (a) need to survive, (b) need to feel safe, (c) need to belong, (d) need of self-esteem, and (e) need for professional growth.
- To increase teacher satisfaction and quality of classroom instruction, teachers must feel motivated within a safe, positive school environment (Stone, 2024).
- Maslow (1970) believed that all people can reach self-actualization, but only a limited number of individuals will progress to the highest level based on personal fulfillment at each stage. Individuals must satisfy the lower-level basic needs before progressing to higher level needs (1970).
- By applying Maslow's theory of motivation in this study, the idea that teachers need to be supported at a more basic level before progressing to a greater level of satisfaction and self-actualization suggests that job satisfaction is a process in the teaching profession.
- To understand teacher retention, Maslow's hierarchy of needs model will guide this study based on teachers' perceptions regarding what motivates them and creates overall job satisfaction



Building Understanding and Collaboration

*Defining Roles and Responsibilities
in Special Education*

Workshop Day 1

1



Agenda:

- Warm-up - Small Group Discussion
- Recap
- How can administrators get involved to support
- Group Activity
- What is the Range of Responsibilities for Special Educators

2

Warm-Up:

Small Group Discussion

Needs of both novice and veteran teachers within your school setting.

How should you as an administrator support? how have you supported in the past?



3

Recap: Common Themes & Teacher Needs:

- Administrative support and involvement
- Mentoring or collaboration
- Opportunities for increased salary or benefits
- Opportunities for professional advancement



4

Novice Vs Experienced:

- *Novice teacher*: The term novice teacher refers to a teacher who is within the initial 5 years of teaching (Smith Washington, 2024)
- *Experienced special educators*: The term experienced teacher refers to a teacher who is beyond that initial 5 years of teaching.

Reflect: What expectations do we have for our novice and experienced teachers? How do we communicate those expectations?

5

Recap: Teacher Needs from Data:

- Inadequate administrative support and involvement was a key concern, as teachers often felt isolated and lacking the guidance and resources needed to effectively manage their classrooms and students
- The absence of structured mentorship programs and meaningful collaboration opportunities left many educators feeling unsupported in their professional development
- Compounding these issues were the limited prospects for increased compensation or career advancement
- Many noted a critical need for comprehensive support systems, enhanced professional growth pathways, and a greater emphasis on fostering a nurturing, collaborative environment for special education practitioners

6

Research:

- Special education programs experience higher rates of turnover, often due to increased workload paired with the overall increase in responsibilities which comes with supporting students with widespread disabilities (Van Droogenbroeck et al. 2021).
- It is uncertain whether the higher turnover rates consistent within special education reflect the specific challenges of teaching students with disabilities or those additional responsibilities (Gilmour & Wehby, 2019).
- Historically, general education and special education teachers have shared responsibilities for educating students with disabilities; however, with the increase of students, special education teachers have taken on larger caseloads creating an environment with less collaboration and a more isolated style of instruction (Hopkins et al., 2019).
- According to Amital and Van Houtte (2022), special educators who provide instruction to only one classification of disability have a higher rate of attrition compared to those who support a variety of students across a variety of academic settings.



7

Administrative Support:

- Job satisfaction of teachers can be anticipated by the administrative team, further creating a more positive work environment built on mutual respect (Myles, 2022).
- Administrative support is often deemed a workplace condition most predictive of teacher turnover due to the perceived lack of administrative support provided to special education teachers.
- Providing leadership, coaching and being present creates a basic sense of connection for teachers.
- Being supportive starts with being present - not all interactions need to be punitive but can also serve as connection and report building
- This means, being present in the classroom, observations, 'check-ins' and informally observing the classroom dynamic

8

Direct Novice Support:

- When novice teachers were given direct support, coaching and collaboration opportunities by supervising administrators, teachers felt more capable and connected to their teaching environment and more willing to remain in the field of education in order to further their skill set.
- Novice educators expressed great respect when administrators had demonstrated a willingness to provide support, collaborate on their current teaching methods and assist them through the evaluation process (Walker & Kutsyuruba, 2019).
- Administrators who were available to talk, checked in regularly, listened to novice teachers' concerns, and generally demonstrated a caring demeanor, in turn created educators who felt capable to remain within education for a longer period of time (Walker & Kutsyuruba, 2019).
- Setting up 'sacred time' to meet and problem solve serves as an ongoing support system

9

Sample Informal Observation:

Something this basic, creates a guide for making yourself present in the classroom starts the conversation for needs.

Teacher Observed _____ Content Focus _____ Date _____

Learning Environment <input type="checkbox"/> Routine Evident <input type="checkbox"/> Uses Technology <input type="checkbox"/> Displays student work <input type="checkbox"/> Report, support, and caring interactions are evident	
Notes:	
Types of Instruction Observed <input type="checkbox"/> Whole Group <input type="checkbox"/> Small Group <input type="checkbox"/> Guided Practice <input type="checkbox"/> Independent Practice <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperative Learning	
Notes:	
Teacher Behaviors <input type="checkbox"/> Maintained instructional focus <input type="checkbox"/> Assessed prior knowledge <input type="checkbox"/> Used modeling <input type="checkbox"/> Maximized instructional time <input type="checkbox"/> Differentiated lesson activities <input type="checkbox"/> Feedback is substantive, specific, and timely <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage higher level thinking/questioning techniques	Student Behaviors <input type="checkbox"/> Asked/ Answered Questions <input type="checkbox"/> Credit/ Contributed, Hands-On <input type="checkbox"/> Practiced Skill Individually/ Collaboratively <input type="checkbox"/> Engaged in lesson or activity <input type="checkbox"/> Participated respectfully
Strengths	Areas for Growth

10

Group Activity:

Create an outline for your special education teachers that identifies main responsibilities in addition to other job related requirements.

Next, identify how you would support and/or provide additional involvement for a teacher struggling with identifying responsibilities.



11

Realistic Responsibilities:

- Leaders who were able to demonstrate flexibility and creativity in style as well as balance proved to be a greater resource for their school community (Aziz et al., 2022).
- The principal's role becomes critical in directly creating opportunities for support, early in a teacher's career as well as creating a structured supportive induction process (Evashkovsky & Osipova, 2023).
- Setting up opportunities for mentorship and built in skill development starts the process going forward of what to do.
- Identifying realistic responsibilities for new teachers as well as those which sign with their strengths also serves as a means for connection



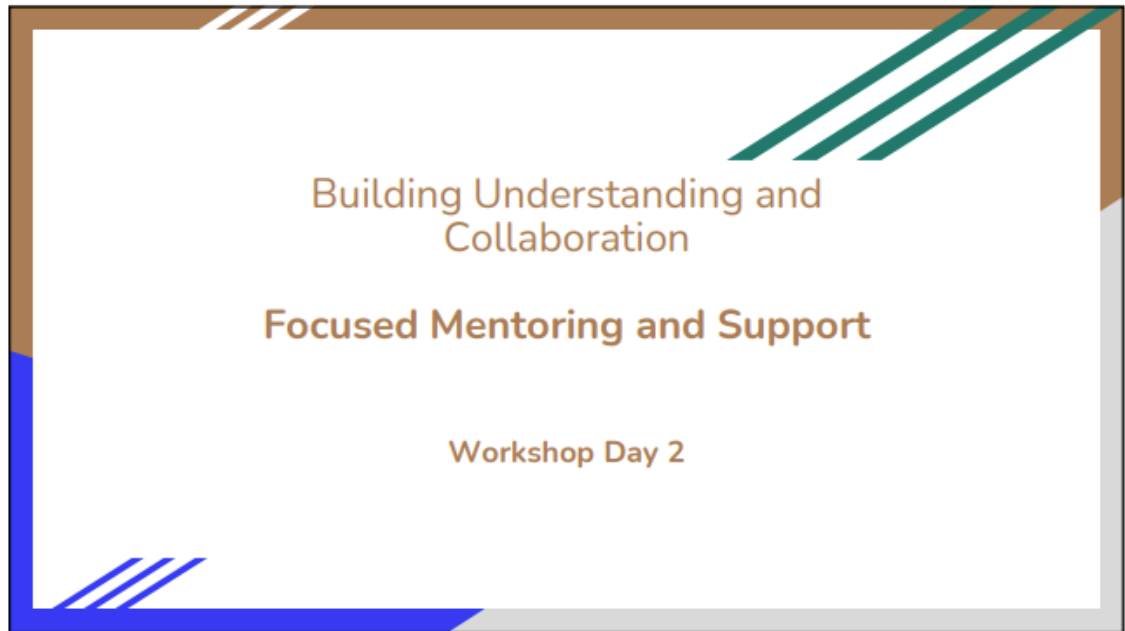
12

Reflection/Wrap-Up:

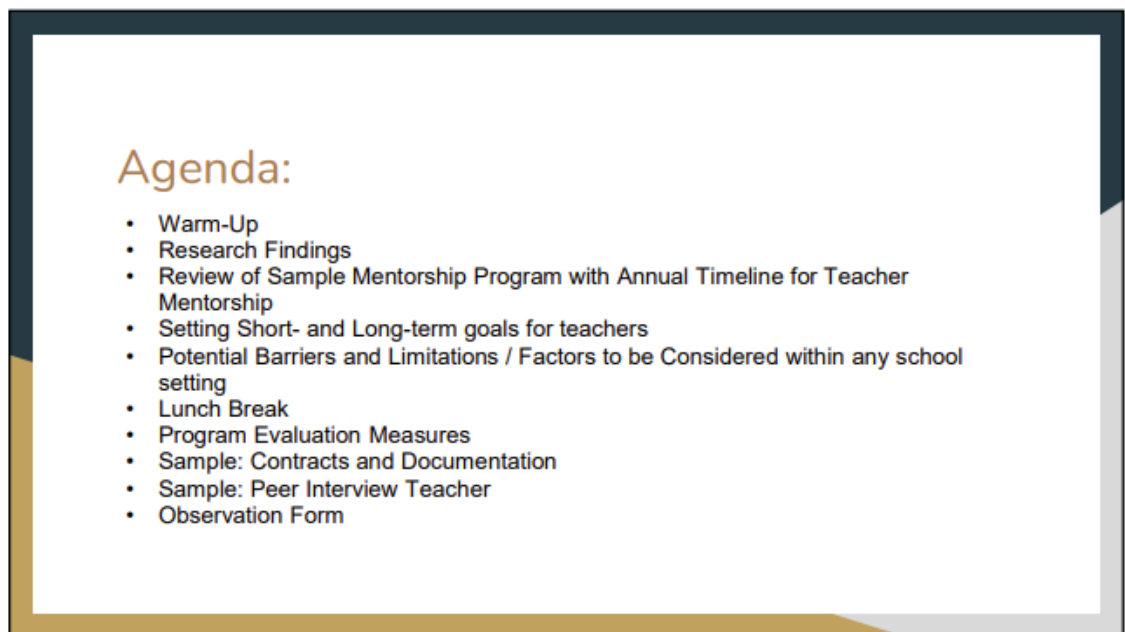
Special education teachers' time is spread across many daily responsibilities including paperwork, individualized education plans (IEP), meetings, parent communication, lesson planning, creating materials, collaboration, data collection and direct student instruction (Jeon et al. 2022).

- Recap: What basic expectations do we have for our novice and experienced teachers? how do we communicate those expectations?
- How do we set limits with workload and allow for work/home balance but also ensure that the job is complete?
- What is a realistic timeline for a novice teacher to accrue those first year skills?
- How do we model/teach our teachers new skills and/or expectations? How can we change our approach?





1



2

Warm-Up:

How do you assess knowledge and teach a new skill?

Recap: What basic expectations do we have for our novice and experienced teachers? how do we communicate those expectations?

3

Common Themes & Teacher Needs:

- Administrative support and involvement
- **Mentoring or Collaboration**
- Opportunities for increased salary or benefits
- Opportunities for professional advancement



4

Recent Study Overview:

- Recent Study: *Factors in Teacher Turnover within a Non-Public Special Education Setting*
- Establishing supportive, ongoing professional development opportunities through structured coaching sessions has been shown to increase an educator/s likelihood of long-term retention (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017).
- Programs which utilize small group coaching opportunities, learning communicates and/or peer mentorship programs have created greater opportunities for teacher success in supporting one another and the unique needs of their student population (Cornelius, 2020).



5

Recent Study Overview:

- Novice special educators have shown marked improvement with instructional practices, behavior management, and overall communicative skills following the implementation of a mentorship program by those who receive professional development and specialized coaching to better support colleagues (Cornelius, 2020).
- Creating a functional relationship between interventions, educators, and mentors has shown how to improve instruction within school settings and create a more cohesive school community (Cornelius, 2020).



6



Vinnie Malcolm is VP/General Manager at Tribune Broadcasting Co

7

Mentorship:

- Teacher induction programs are often provided to new employees upon hire in the form of supervisory meetings, small group sessions as well as orientations to become familiar with school-wide expectations (Aguilar, 2019).
- Create a model for the mentorship program with guidance and feedback from experienced special educators - outlining the needs of your program
- ***Review Sample on Handout***



8

Think, Pair, Share

Looking at this timeline, how does this align with the needs you need at your school? what would you adjust? where do you see gaps in the role of novice teacher to experienced teacher? what supports/training could be provided to close that gap?

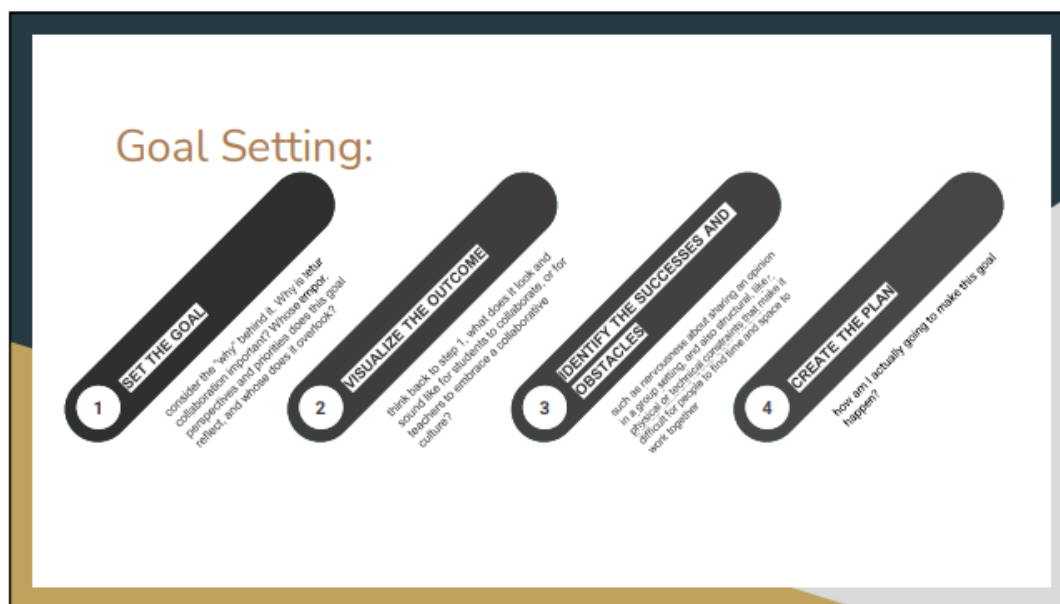


9

Goal Setting for Teachers:

- We have ambitious goals for our students what about ourselves?
- While we often have more direct control over making progress on our *personal* goals, helping *others* achieve ambitious goals is often part of what makes our experiences as teachers and leaders impactful and meaningful.
- Novice teachers should also be provided direct support on short- and long-term goal setting to create a focus on improvement in specific areas of personal need for long term career success (Meyer et al., 2023).
- Teachers need to set personal or professional goals, this can help them identify professional growth needs and/or small areas to improve instruction
- *i.e. I will explore and learn 3 new apps for writing*
- *i.e. I will identify what I want to do with my Masters in Reading*

10



11

Potential Barriers:

- Lack of buy-in or engagement from participants
- If administrators do not see the value in mentorship opportunities, teachers aren't motivated to fully participate
- What additional barriers and/or limitations do see being mentioned, how can we problem solve?



The illustration shows a man in a dark suit and tie running from left to right. He is carrying a briefcase in his right hand. He is jumping over a hurdle that has the word "PROBLEM" written on it in red capital letters. The background is a light teal color with some horizontal lines suggesting motion or a path.

12

Evaluation:

- Program Evaluation Measures
- Sample: Contracts and Documentation
- Sample: Peer Interview Teacher
- Observation Form



"Maybe I'm too good a mentor."

13

Conclusion/Wrap up:

- The absence of structured mentorship programs and meaningful collaboration opportunities left many educators feeling unsupported in their professional development.
- Compounding these issues were the limited prospects for increased compensation or career advancement, which further diminished job satisfaction and retention.
- ***How do you see yourself and/or your school adapting to support you veteran teacher/mentors?***

14

Sample Annual Timeline

This timeline outlines discussion topics and opportunities for focused training throughout the school year for novice teachers

September

- Introduction to the Mentorship Program
- Conduct needs assessment for novice teachers (sample included)
- Mentors will schedule bi-weekly meetings /check in opportunities
- Begin an outlined shared document of questions/ answers to improve programming (identify gaps and overlaps)
- Review roles and responsibilities- sign
- Establish September discussion topics:
 - Additional Items : Orientation to school, Budget, Forms/ paperwork, school handbook Overview (if applicable)
 - Informal Teacher observations

October

- Effective Teaching Strategies
- Establish October discussion topics:
 - Individualized Education Program (IEP) Writing Skills
 - I do, we do, you do model
 - Setting up classroom routines to optimize learning
 - Classroom management discussions
 - Parent teacher communication/ documentation

November

- Review observations/interview at bi-weekly Mentorship meetings - together discuss classroom needs and strengths
- Prepare for an evaluation by an administrator as part of annual evaluation
- Establish November discussion topics:
 - Curriculum
 - Effective instructional strategies
 - Differentiating lessons based on skill sets

December

- Review teacher observation data, discuss, and plan
- Establish December discussion topics:
 - Quarter 2: Curriculum
 - Unit plans- submit- long- and short-term lesson planning
 - Establish emergency sub plans

January

- Mentors will schedule mid-year teacher observation
- Establish January discussion topics
 - Data collection systems
 - What has protege learned? What does the protege hope to change?
 - Discuss problems encountered by teachers and possible solutions

February

- Establish February discussion topics:

- Classroom Management
- Establish data collection system

March

- Establish March discussion topics:
 - Managing Staff
 - Managing Parent needs

April

- Mentors will schedule end of year teacher observation
- Discuss goals for next school year - long term planning
- Mentor wrap- up meeting- discuss mentor successes and needs

May

- Complete exit survey
- Mentor wrap- up meeting- discuss mentor successes and needs
- Celebratory luncheon

Teacher Needs Assessment

In the space provided below, list the following skills in order from most confident to least confident in terms of your comfort level with them, with 1 being most confident and 15 being the least confident. Write the letter of the skill in the box to rank them.

- A. Collecting data for IEP goals and objectives.
- B. Writing an IEP.
- C. Testing students to determine present levels of performance.
- D. Updating IEP goals and objectives.
- E. Establishing and maintaining clear lines of communication with a student's team.
- F. Created and or finding adapted and curriculum aligned materials for your class.
- G. Lesson planning.
- H. Creating a scope and sequence.
- I. Creating and maintaining classroom schedules.
- J. Creating a positive learning environment in your classroom.
- K. Behavior management.
- L. Parent communication.
- M. Establishing and maintaining classroom expectations.
- N. Management of classroom support staff.
- O. Running weekly team meetings.

1-Most Confident-----15 Least Confident

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	I <input type="button" value="v"/>
12	
13	
14	
15	



Mentor-Protege Contract

This is to certify that _____ (novice teacher) and _____ (mentor) have agreed to work collaboratively throughout the current school year in conjunction with mentorship program.

By signing, mentor and protege both agree to the following agreement:

1. To attend required PD partnering orientation sessions.
2. To meet regularly at the established place and time agreed upon by both parties for the purpose of conferencing and supporting mentees.
3. To document and discuss in detail classroom observations.
4. To complete and submit an exit survey to further evaluate and develop the Mentorship Program.

Signature:

Mentor: Self- Reflection

Please respond to the following statement using a sliding scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being “Do Not Agree” and 4 being “Strongly Agree”. Numbers 6-8 require a typed or written answer.

I felt well prepared to be a mentor following the mentorship program.	1 2 3 4
I was able to provide guidance in:	1 2 3 4
• Writing an IEP	1 2 3 4
• Presenting an IEP	1 2 3 4
• Giving student assessments	1 2 3 4
• Creating a goal tracking form for IEPs	1 2 3 4
• Developing content specific scope and sequences	1 2 3 4
• Developing unit/ lesson plans	1 2 3 4
• Adapting and/or modifying lesson plans to fit target skill sets	1 2 3 4
• Finding and developing resources	1 2 3 4
• Developing master and student friendly schedules	1 2 3 4
• Developing IEP data collection systems	1 2 3 4
• Coaching on effective instructional strategies/practices	1 2 3 4
• Developing target classroom rules and student expectations	1 2 3 4
• Developing target classroom trainings	1 2 3 4
• Developing resources to manage classroom staff and support on-going training	1 2 3 4
• Understanding the budget	1 2 3 4
• Communicating with parents	1 2 3 4
• Becoming oriented to the school	1 2 3 4

• Completing forms and paperwork	1 2 3 4
I provided helpful feedback during observations	1 2 3 4
I learned things from this experience that enhanced my own teaching.	1 2 3 4
I experienced professional growth as a teacher by participating in this program.	1 2 3 4
Topics or activities that were least helpful to me or my proteges included:	
Suggestions I have for improving the mentorship program include:	

Novice Teacher: Exit Survey

Please respond to the following statement using a sliding scale of 1 to 4 with 1 being “Do Not Agree” and 4 being “Strongly Agree”. Numbers 6-8 require a typed or written answer.

I felt my mentor was willing and available to support me.	1 2 3 4
The mentor program helped me to enhance my teaching practices and student programming.	1 2 3 4
I received sufficient guidance from my mentor in the area of :	1 2 3 4
• Writing an IEP	1 2 3 4
• Presenting an IEP	1 2 3 4
• Giving student assessments	1 2 3 4
• Creating a goal tracking form for IEPs	1 2 3 4
• Developing content specific scope and sequences	1 2 3 4
• Developing unit/ lesson plans	1 2 3 4
• Adapting and/or modifying lesson plans to fit target skill sets	1 2 3 4
• Finding and developing resources	1 2 3 4
• Developing master and student friendly schedules	1 2 3 4
• Developing IEP data collection systems	1 2 3 4
• Coaching protege on effective instructional strategies/practices	1 2 3 4
• Developing target classroom rules and student expectations	1 2 3 4
• Developing target classroom trainings	1 2 3 4
• Developing resources to manage classroom staff and support on-going training	1 2 3 4
• Understanding the budget	1 2 3 4
• Communicating with parents	1 2 3 4

• Becoming oriented to the school	1 2 3 4
• Completing forms and paperwork	1 2 3 4
• I received helpful feedback during observations from my mentor.	1 2 3 4
• I felt comfortable and able to seek help from my mentor.	1 2 3 4
• I experienced professional growth as a teacher by participating in this program.	1 2 3 4
• Topics or activities that were most helpful to me include:	
• Topics or activities that were least helpful to me include:	
• Suggestions I have for improving the mentorship program include:	

Teacher Observed _____ Content Focus _____ Date: _____

Learning Environment: <input type="checkbox"/> Routines Evident <input type="checkbox"/> Uses Technology <input type="checkbox"/> Displays student work <input type="checkbox"/> Rapport, support, and caring interactions are evident
Notes:

Types of Instruction Observed: <input type="checkbox"/> Whole Group <input type="checkbox"/> Small Group <input type="checkbox"/> Guided Practice <input type="checkbox"/> Independent Practice <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperative Learning
Notes:

Teacher Behaviors <input type="checkbox"/> Maintained instructional focus <input type="checkbox"/> Assessed prior knowledge <input type="checkbox"/> Used modeling <input type="checkbox"/> Maximized instructional time <input type="checkbox"/> Differentiated lesson/ activities <input type="checkbox"/> Feedback is substantive, specific, and timely <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage higher level thinking/ questioning techniques	Student Behaviors <input type="checkbox"/> Asked/ Answered Questions <input type="checkbox"/> Created, Constructed, Hands-On <input type="checkbox"/> Practiced Skill Individually/ collaboratively <input type="checkbox"/> Engaged in lesson or activity <input type="checkbox"/> Participated respectfully
Strengths	Areas for Growth



Building Understanding and
Collaboration

**Providing Feedback & Growth
Opportunities**

Workshop Day 3

1



Agenda:

- Warm-Up / Discussion
- Research Findings
- Providing Professional Compassion
- Giving Feedback
- Discussion
- Coaching Strategies
- Wrap-up

2

Warm-Up: Let's Discuss

How do we decide what to prioritize with working with teachers, empathy or performance? Especially when we have teachers who are working hard but just can't get it all done.

3

Research Findings:

- Recent Study: *Factors in Teacher Turnover within a Non-Public Special Education Setting*
- Establishing supportive, ongoing professional development opportunities through structured coaching sessions has been shown to increase an educator/s likelihood of long-term retention (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017).
- Programs which utilize small group coaching opportunities, learning communicates and/or peer mentorship programs have created greater opportunities for teacher success in supporting one another and the unique needs of their student population (Cornelius, 2020).

4

Recent Study Findings:

- Novice special educators have shown marked improvement with instructional practices, behavior management, and overall communicative skills following the implementation of a mentorship program by those who receive professional development and specialized coaching to better support colleagues (Cornelius, 2020).
- Creating a functional relationship between interventions, educators, and mentors has shown how to improve instruction within school settings and create a more cohesive school community (Cornelius, 2020).

5

Recent Study Findings:

Thinking about our teachers....

- With the perception of change, teachers are continuously facing new responsibilities in the form of ongoing school reforms and educational innovations with less time to complete daily responsibilities needed to effectively manage and support the needs of an evolving classroom (Räsänen et al., 2020).
- Educators must now focus on developing skills needed to create more flexibility within their daily workload as well as the overall expectations of the changing school climate (Husu & Toom 2016).
- According to Graham et al. (2020), less educators are being provided with basic professional development opportunities, which once sought to provide a foundation for teaching for that corresponding while also enhancing their classroom skills for the overall good of the student population.
- Educators become frustrated and demoralized when they are targeting a given topic and/or student skill with limited knowledge, specified training and restrictive resources simply make a quota for the school program

6

Developing Professional Compassion:

- Compassion is developed through practice and intentional effort - adopting a growth mindset when providing support
- Some strategies for developing compassion include - active listening, solution perspective, seeking diverse perspectives
- Recognizing our abilities can grow and development which can become an opportunity for greater compassion and understanding



7

Active Listening:



8

Active Listening Strategies:

- Being present
- Paying attention to verbal and nonverbal cues
- Asking open-ended questions
- No Judgement
- Respect others opinions
- Offer validation and enrichment
- Reflect on what we hear to understand the message



9

Whis is Effective Feedback?

Brainstorm with your team what effective feedback looks like.

What aspects of the classroom are we giving feedback on?

Why do we need effective feedback?

How does feedback promote change?

10

Before You Give Feedback:

- **Think about timing:** feedback needs to be as immediate as possible but not when you or the staff member is still upset about the issue
- **Focus on growth:** frame the conversation as an opportunity for growth, not just criticism
- **Be specific:** Target your feedback to a specific behavior, lesson or incident
- **Consider the context:** Be mindful of the staff member's experience, workload, and recent challenges

11

Giving Feedback:

SBI - Situation, Behavior, Impact

- **Situation** - anchor in time, place
- **Behavior** - observed actions, don't assume the intent just identify the actions
- **Impact** - share what you thought or felt in relation to the impact on others or on the task



12

Feedback Best Practices:

- Timeliness
- Reflect - Review the situation in hand, have data to support what you observed
- Stick with the information that you know. Dragging a third party's name into the mix only confuses the recipient, who then wonders why others are talking about them behind their back.
- Avoid the feedback sandwich
- Explain why you're giving feedback and/or Explain in detail what needs to be happening and the goal
- Make a plan to follow-up; this allows you the opportunity to praise efforts or provide more training as needed
- Avoid "always" and "never." It puts people on the defensive because there's usually that *one* time
- Know when to stop. People need time to process the information they've received

13

Receiving Feedback:

Things to consider ...

- Keep in mind:
 - constructive criticism enables learning and growth
 - we all have weaknesses and biases that we need to face and overcome
 - asking for feedback is a sign of respect and it opens you to receiving feedback
 - giving feedback is a sign of trust
- Listen to the feedback and ensure the message is understood
- Be aware of how you respond
- Be open to new ideas and different means for problem solving
- Follow-up

14

Practice Concepts:

1. One staff member consistently dominates all conversations and staff meetings, discuss providing them feedback.
1. A team member struggles with communicating timely and professionally with parents.

15

What is Workplace Coaching?

- Coaching in the workplace occurs when one person, usually a manager, helps an employee grow and make the most of his or her skills. Managing and coaching are not the same
- An ongoing process, intended to enable success
- Involves listening, curiosity, goal setting and identifying resources for goal achievement and follow-up
- Personalized and tailored
- Used as a tool for retention
- Not disciplinary!
- More time upfront but less, in the long run

*****Coaching Conversation Sheet**

16

What Makes a Good Coach?

- They see their employees as capable and resourceful
- They are clear and open
- They listen well. Good coaches use good listening techniques to understand how an employee thinks.
- They don't confuse coaching with training. This concept may seem like traditional training, but it's not. Training is about transferring knowledge, while coaching is about enhancing the ability to learn; it's more development-focused
- They challenge traditional thinking - prompt employees to see the gaps and make change

17

Break Out Groups:

1. New Teacher, arrives late for meetings and appears to always be rushing. She is enrolled in graduate school and is a new mom. Her classroom feels disorganized but she seems strong in her teaching. Discuss what her needs may be in terms of coaching?
2. Experienced teacher seems to be struggling with general communication - with her students' parents as well as with her staff. Many issues become pushed to the wayside and then misconstrued. When information is shared, it's short notice with not additional information, and has created tension with this strong educator and her team. Discuss what her needs may be in terms of coaching?

18

Conclusion/Wrap up:

- The absence of structured mentorship programs and meaningful collaboration opportunities left many educators feeling unsupported in their professional development.
- Compounding these issues were the limited prospects for increased compensation or career advancement, which further diminished job satisfaction and retention.
- *How do you see yourself and/or your school adapting to support you veteran teacher/mentors?*
- How do we support without being overwhelmed and burning out?

19

Coaching Preparation

✓ The goal is to be able to check off each of the boxes below before starting your coaching meeting.

- Have a positive frame of mind
- Be ready to focus on the employee
- Be present mentally, emotionally, and physically
- Practice a mindfulness technique (i.e., box breathing,
- Limit distractions (i.e., put away cell phone, silence email/Teams notifications)
- Maintain curiosity and ask open ended questions
- Be aware of your body language and tone

Assess whether coaching is the right strategy. If the employee can come up with their own solution or goal, consider utilizing the questions below.

- Tell me what's happening.
- What got in the way of you completing the task?
- What have you tried so far?
- How are you feeling about it?
- If you were to try again, what would you do differently? What would you do the same?
- How can I help you move from where you are now to where you want to be?
- Would you like my perspective?
- What if we kept things the way they were?
- What resources do you need?
- What will you do next?
- How can you hold yourself accountable? OR How can I hold you accountable in a way that will be supportive?
- When should we reconnect to ensure you have achieved the result you want?

Evaluation Assessment

Please Complete the Post-Assessment Below:

1. Name:

2. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest:
What is your understanding of Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation?

Mark only one oval.

- 1
 2
 3
 4
 5

3. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest:
What is your understanding of Maslow's Theory of Hierarchy of Needs?

Mark only one oval.

- 1
 2
 3
 4
 5

4. How is Maslow's Theory of motivation and hierarchy of needs applicable in a school setting? How does this relate to the needs of our special educators?

5. As an administrator, how do you see yourself applying the tools presented in this workshop to support teacher retention?

6. What additional information and/or supports would be helpful and was not addressed on this workshop?

Appendix B: Special Educator Interview Questions

Teacher Turnover within a Non-Public Special Education Setting Interview Guide

1. What are some of the positive experiences you have had as a special education teacher within the nonpublic setting? (Ask the participant for more explanation and clarification)

What are some of the negative experiences you have had as a special education teacher within the nonpublic school setting? (Ask the participant for more explanation and clarification).
2. What personnel or resources at your school helped you feel supported in your current position? How have they provided that need support? (Ask the participant for more explanation and clarification)
3. How did school administration and fellow colleagues support you as a newly hired teacher? What resources were most effective for you as you transitioned into your new teaching role? (Ask the participant for more explanation and clarification)
4. What are your perceptions of the students at your school in terms of their behavioral and program needs, as well as those specifically within your current classroom setting?
5. What has been your experiences with daily expectations and accountability from your school supervisor? (e.g. conferences, documents you need to complete, deadlines, data collection, lesson planning, classroom management, department and meetings, student individualized programing).

6. How does your school continue to support your integration into the school's professional community? Do you feel that other teachers, administrators and parents see you as a professional, why or why not?
7. During the past year have you considered leaving your current school, current position and/or the teaching profession? Why or why not? (Ask the participant for more explanation and clarification)
8. What experiences have you had that made you consider leaving or remaining within your current position? (Ask the participant for more explanation and clarification)
9. As a newly hired teacher what were your experiences with the mentoring process, did you have a mentor or support team within the school community?
10. As a current novice teacher or veteran teacher what were your experiences with professional development programs and the process for taking part in professional development opportunities?
11. Describe how professional development programs have helped you to develop as a professional.
12. What long term goals do you have for yourself in terms of career within the realm of special education and/or teaching?
13. What recommendations would you make to improve the present support programs offered for newly hired teachers?
14. What other supports and/or specific factors could be offered to retain your professional/teaching services for 5 or more years?

15. What other comments would you like to add about your experiences as they relate to teaching special education within a nonpublic setting?

Appendix C: Administrator Interview Questions

Teacher Turnover within a Non-Public Special Education Setting Interview Guide

1. What personnel or resources at your school have helped you feel supported in your current position? (Ask the participant for more explanation and or continue to probe for more information).

How do provide training and support to newly hired teacher?
2. What are your perceptions of your students at your school in terms of their behavioral and program needs, which students do you view as the most demanding population?
3. What is the current process and/or plan for providing supervision and support to all teachers within the school community and specially those you directly supervise?
4. How is professional development currently provided to teachers? Does it differ based on years of experience, interest level or student programing?
5. What recommendations would you make to improve the present support programs offered for newly hired teachers?
6. What other comments would you like to add about your experiences as an administrator?

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Preliminary Information:

1. Describe study and review consent form to ensure full comprehension.
2. Request permission to record and take field notes during interview.
3. Reinforce that all participant beliefs and perceptions will contribute to the study.
4. Determine if the participant has any questions and if they would be available for follow up questions or clarification if needed by the researcher.
5. Obtain contact information to send transcribed interview to the participant for member checking.

Introduction to Study:

The purpose of this study is to investigate special education teachers' perceptions about factors that influence their retention decision. Special education teacher turnover rates have had a significant impact on the school system and its successes. There has been much research conducted as to the reasons for teacher turnover and common factors have submerged.

Participation in the study will hope to provide valuable insight as to why teacher leave the special education classroom setting. Participation is voluntary and you are not required to answer any question that you are not comfortable with. There are no anticipated risks with this study. All names and corresponding information will be kept anonymous and confidential. No individually identifiable data will be included in the findings and data will not be associated to a particular individual.

Participant Name and Signature: _____

Date/Time: _____

E-mail address _____

Phone Number _____ St