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A Comparison of special education teachers' and administrators' perceptions of school climate factors leading to teacher attrition

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A COMPARISON OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' AND
ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF
SCHOOL CLIMATE FACTORS
LEADING TO TEACHER
ATTRITION

by

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A dissertation in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

**Doctor of Philosophy in Special Education
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ABSTRACT

A Comparison of Special Education Teachers' and Administrators' Perceptions of School Climate Factors Leading to Teacher Attrition

by

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This study examined (a) the difference between special education teachers' and administrators' perceptions of school climate factors that influence special education teacher attrition and (b) differences among the four school climate factors perceived by school personnel. School climate was measured in professional development, collaboration, working conditions, and leadership. Participants were 29 administrators and 62 special education teachers from a large metropolitan school district in the Southwest United States. A 52 item online questionnaire was used for data collection. Special education teachers perceived school climate factors as more influential in promoting teacher attrition than did administrators. When the four school climate factors were compared for their mean differences, both administrators and teachers rated working conditions as the most influential factor of special education teacher attrition and professional development and leadership as the least influential. Finally, school personnel did not moderate the difference among the four climate factors. Both

administrators and special education teachers reported school climate factors along a similar trend.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Teacher attrition and retention statistics are staggering. At least 1,000 teachers leave classroom instruction each day with no intention of returning to teaching. An additional 1,000 teachers transfer to different teaching positions within schools or school districts (Heiny, 2008). Over 30% of newly trained teachers leave the profession within their first year (Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riodan, Lyter, & Orlofsky, 2006) and an additional 50% leave by their fifth year (Ingersoll, 2003). Only 20% of teachers working in the classroom can be considered veteran teachers with more than eight years of experience. In a profession that employs nearly 4% of the nation's working population or 3.8 million people (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2006); it is safe to say that teacher attrition is a national concern.

Attrition issues abound regardless of school. Schools in low socio-economic and urban settings, however, experience a 4% increase in attrition rates when compared to suburban area schools (Jalongo & Heider, 2006). California and Texas, where educational systems often set the pace for education reform, have also had attrition issues. Darling-Hammond (2003) noted that in Texas, the annual turnover rate is 15% with an estimated 40% by the end of the third year of teaching. In California, more than 20% of schools have functioned with nearly a quarter of their personnel uncertified. When teachers who lack full certification or who have emergency certifications were included, the attrition rates escalate to nearly 80% in these states (Darling-Hammond).

The loss of teachers whether they were emergency-certified or traditionally certified deeply affects high-needs areas such as special education. Disproportionate

ratios of special education to general education teachers (i.e., two to one) have left teaching every year (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1997). This left over 12,000 special education teaching positions to be filled by emergency certified and substitute teachers in many of our nation's schools (Berert & Burnett, 2001). This phenomenon has generated a national dilemma in which most special education teachers leave the classroom within their first five years of teaching (Kaufhold, Alvarez & Arnold, 2006). Across the nation in urban, rural, and high-need areas, teachers have been leaving the profession and the costs are high.

Cost of Attrition

Attrition has been a costly expense not only in teacher shortages but also in the financial stress it places on schools, districts, and state educational systems. In a brief for the Alliance for Excellent Education (2005), it was noted that the expense of replacing teachers was estimated at \$2.2 billion nationally, with an additional \$4.9 billion directed at replacing transfer teachers. A more recent estimate by Kopkowski (2008) indicated that attrition expenditures had grown to \$7 billion dollars. Since individual states maintain different teacher overhead costs, an actual cost analysis may deeply underestimate the financial losses generated by replacing certified teachers especially when most districts fail to report the sign-on bonuses and subject-area stipends offered in original employment packages. Carroll and Fulton (2004) suggested that school districts spend nearly \$50,000 on each teacher they recruit, hire, prepare, and then lose. Despite the setback the nation is experiencing with budget cuts and teachers' potential job loss (Butler, 2009), Hull projected in 2004 that an additional 3.5 million teachers need to be hired by the year 2013. Already struggling districts may be in dire financial straits.

The economic cost of teacher attrition has been only part of the problem. Teacher attrition affects instruction. Jalongo and Heider (2006) advised, “With so many qualified teachers leaving the profession, many students have been experiencing a substandard education in a considerable number of districts” (p. 380). Instructional experience has been linked to teacher quality and higher student performance (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004). The longer a teacher remains in the classroom, the greater the likelihood the students will score higher on curriculum based and standardized tests (Goldhaber, 2002). This revolving door of teachers has not only disrupted student academic progress but has limited opportunities for curriculum planning, teacher collaboration, and professional development.

School Climate as a Factor Leading to Attrition

Research in teacher attrition and retention indicated that teachers have left the profession for a variety of reasons. Many left teaching to address personal and family needs (Boe, Barkanic, & Leow, 1999). McKnab (1983) noted young female teachers left the profession to marry and raise families, while more seasoned teachers retired. However, recent research indicated that there are other reasons for attrition beyond retirement and family. Difficult working conditions, lack of professional development opportunities, limited administrative support, and excessive isolation have been identified as common themes when factors affecting teacher attrition and retention are examined (Boe, Shin, & Cook, 2007; Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007). These factors, described as *school climate* by a number of researchers (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; George, George, Gersten, & Grosenik, 1995; Singh & Billingsley, 1996), have influence on teacher attrition and retention.

An effective school climate has been found to be instrumental in the reduction of teacher attrition. “Teachers who feel connected to a school, who feel that their work is important and recognized, are more likely to remain vital members of the school” (Sargent, 2003, p. 47). School climate has been defined in various ways by researchers and scholars (Peterson & Deal, 1998; Phillips, 1992). Sergiovanni and Starratt (2002) defined school climate as “psychological character” reflected in the behaviors and interactions of teachers and students. Moos (1979) asserted that school climate represented the organization, relationships, and professional development. Ultimately, the climate of the school has reflected the reality of how the school functions as well as the teacher community’s beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Peterson & Deal, 1998).

The climate of the school has been founded in leadership, developed through collaboration between teachers, maintained in effective working conditions, and supported by opportunities for professional development. In the section below, literature reviews on the relationships of professional development, collaboration, working conditions, and leadership to attrition and retention are presented.

Professional development. Universities, teacher preparation programs, and school districts have had the opportunity to develop and maintain quality teachers through effective and appropriate professional development. Boe (2006) suggested that financial incentives entice teachers to embark on a career in special education. However, acquiring the tools needed to be successful begins during pre-service courses and continues throughout a teacher’s career.

In studies that include both special and general education teachers, certification status has shown to be an early indicator of teacher attrition (Boe, Barkanic, & Leow

1999; Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Barkanic, 1999; Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, & Weber, 1997; Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999). Teachers who were identified as being under-certified were more likely to leave than those who had full certification. Darling-Hammond (1999) advised that it is more beneficial to spend both the time and resources in developing teachers through appropriate course assignments, providing them with effective content knowledge, and training in pedagogy. She asserted that “It makes an enormous difference not only in their effectiveness in the classroom, but also whether they’re likely to enter and stay in teaching.” (p.16)

Professional development has been continued through mentoring, induction, and other post-professional training opportunities. New teacher mentoring and induction may offer assistance with pedagogical development as well as provide teachers with personal and emotional support. These programs have shown to be vital components in the reduction of both general and special education teacher attrition (Billingsley, Carlson, & Klein, 2004). Teacher attrition decreased an additional 50% when new and novice teachers were provided with mentors from the subject or exceptionality area (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Whitaker (2000) also noted a significant relationship between mentoring and the reduction of new and novice special education teacher attrition.

Policies, research, and practice have continued to influence the evolution of instructional and behavioral strategies employed in the classroom (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008). Universities and professional associations have provided opportunities for training these strategies. Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, and Harniss (2001) observed that teachers who actively pursued professional development opportunities were less likely to leave teaching. However, professional development

opportunities may need to take into consideration new techniques and advanced skills for more experienced special education teachers (Morvant & Gersten, 1995). Some teachers have found that professional development was directed at either career advancement (Gersten et al., 2001) or for the development of novice teachers (Morvant & Gersten, 1995).

Collaboration. Little attention has been directed at the effects of collaboration and collegial support on the reduction of special education teacher attrition. However, some research can be found embedded in larger studies assessing the factors that lead to attrition. Miller, Brownell, and Smith (1999) found a relationship between limited collegial support and an increased likelihood for attrition or transfer to different schools and general education teaching positions. Special education teachers who taught students with behavioral and emotional disorders in self-contained classrooms reported the highest rates of dissatisfaction, noting specifically the lack of opportunities for collaboration (George et al., 1995; Kaff, 2004).

Collaboration has been found to give teachers the opportunity to demonstrate professional strengths (Miller, 2008), create “synergy” (Good & Bennett, 2005), reduce attrition (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Kaff, 2004; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004), and promote job satisfaction (Billingsley & Cross, 1992). Certo and Fox (2002), using a small sample of both special and general education teachers, noted that increased opportunities for collaboration increased job satisfaction and retention. Special education teachers reported feeling most comfortable working in school climates where there were ample opportunities to communicate with their peers (Sutherland, Denny, & Gunter, 2005). Although autonomy has been promoted in education, common planning periods and time

to work with colleagues in subject areas and specializations have offered avenues to expand professional effectiveness.

Working conditions. When considering working conditions as a factor of school climate, researchers have addressed variables such as salary, student behavior, occupational stress, and access to student materials. These variables were frequently reported, as well as highly related to teacher attrition rates (Hirsch & Emerick, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2007).

Salary has often been one of the most recognized factors of attrition (Kelly, 2004). Most teachers entered education fully prepared for minimal salaries, but the reality of the low wages can be shocking (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, & Weber, 1996). Boe et al. noted that as salary increased, the rate of attrition decreased, arguing that increasing teacher salary may be the key to a reduction in attrition of special education teachers. Conversely, Johnson (2006) indicated that salary was a secondary factor to teacher dissatisfaction and stress.

Teacher dissatisfaction and stress due to working conditions has come in multiple forms. Limited materials, role overload such as excessive paperwork, large caseloads, and class sizes, diversity of student needs, and student behavior have been identified as a few of adverse working conditions (Billingsley, Pyecha, Smith-Davis, Murray, & Hendrick, 1995; Kaufhold et al., 2006). Billingsley et al. noted that over half of the special education teachers in their study were concerned with the amount of paper work and limited materials that detracted from time on instruction. Kaufhold et al. found similar results in a study with over 200 special education teachers in Texas. Participants reported excessive paperwork, large student caseloads and class sizes, along with

inadequate materials to support the curriculum and curriculum modification as factors which lead to their attrition.

Additional research found student issues as the genesis to special education teacher attrition. Brownell, Smith, McNellis, and Miller (1997) reported stress and increased rates of attrition due to violent and aggressive students in unsafe classroom organization (i.e., lacking additional adult assistance). A High Quality Teacher for Every Classroom (as cited in Billingsley, 2004) noted that nearly all special education teachers worked in classrooms that served more than one disability group at a given time. One third of who reported working in classrooms with more than four different disability groups.

In some cases, schools that exhibited effective climates, had successfully addressed the challenges of working conditions by providing school-wide behavioral support systems, limiting occupational stressors such as student caseloads, paperwork (Plash & Piotrowski, 2006), and securing instructional materials (Kaufhold et al., 2006). With teachers working an average 50 hours a week, Leithwood and McAdie (2007) argued that time may be better spent on instruction and away from procurement of materials and behavior management.

Leadership. The lack of administrative support at school has been connected to the attrition of special education teachers across the nation. Studies indicated that effective leadership from building administrators has been the key factor in the reduction of job dissatisfaction and attrition (Anhorn, 2008; Brownell, Smith, McNellis, & Lenk, 1995; Schlichte, Yssel, Merbler, 2005). In a study with both special and general education teachers that investigated the effects of leadership on attrition, Littrell,

Billingsley, and Cross (1994) indicated that principal support, specifically emotional support, was most instrumental in the reduction of stress and ultimately in the reduction of attrition. Special education teachers have identified administrative leadership as the primary contributor to retention (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). In Utah, nearly 88% of special education teachers who left classroom positions, stated that they would have considered staying, had they received greater support from their building administrative staff (Adams, Menlove, & Salzberg, 2001).

Ultimately, there is a need for strong leadership within school settings (Billingsley & Cross, 1991). School administrators are instrumental to the development of a positive and effective school climate. An efficacious administrator encourages staff and students (Miller, 2008) and provides appropriate professional development (Hirsch & Emerick, 2006a). This type of administrative support has been found to reduce attrition of personnel across specializations, environments, and grade levels (Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007) through communication, feedback and clear expectations (Miller, 2008).

An innovative and goal-oriented administrator meets the multiple demands of leadership by promoting collaborative relationships for learning and decision-making (Schlichte et al., 2005). These relationships begin with administrators modeling collaboration, sharing leadership duties, and offering empowerment roles. The researchers at the Hirsch and Emerick (2006a) advised that teachers reported greater job satisfaction when the school climate encouraged collaborative contributions to a school's curriculum and behavioral standards. Billingsley (2004) noted that the "Importance in creating a positive climate is reciprocity of support among special and general educators, administrators, parents, paraprofessional, and other service providers" (p. 46).

Significance of the Study

Numerous research studies have examined the perceptions of special education teachers on school climate (Billingsley, 2004; George et al., 1995; Miller et al., 1999) and the factors associated with special education teacher attrition and retention (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Boe, Cook, & Sutherland, 2008; McCreight, 2000; Thornton et al., 2007). However, the administrative perspective continues to be lacking in these studies.

Only recently has survey research been conducted for assessing both the teachers' and the administrators' perceptions of working conditions that lead to attrition (Hirsch & Emerick, 2006a; 2006b; 2006c, 2007). In all of these studies, Hirsch and Emerick found significant differences in the perspectives of principals and teachers on the working conditions within schools. However, although special education teachers were included in the participant sample, no information was provided specific to special education teacher responses.

Researchers that examined school-climate factors that affect teachers have not looked at school climate in a comprehensive manner, investigating one or two factors (e.g., working condition). The current study was designed to examine four factors simultaneously. The four factors studied were professional development, collaboration, working conditions, and leadership. In addition, research comparing perspectives of teachers, especially special education teachers and administrators on the four school climate factors was not found.

The findings of the proposed study will add to the literature comparing administrators' and special education teachers' perceptions of these four school-climate factors that affect special education teacher attrition.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate administrators' and special education teachers' perceptions of school climate factors (professional development, collaboration, working conditions, and leadership) that have been found to lead to teacher attrition. The research questions were:

1. Is there a difference between administrators' and special education teachers' perceptions in the four school climate factors (leadership, collaboration, working conditions, and professional development) that lead to teacher attrition?
2. Are there differences among the four climate factors rated by school personnel? That is, would ratings of the four school climate factors by school personnel be different?
3. Is there a difference between administrators' and special education teachers' perceptions in their ratings of the four school climate factors? That is, are ratings of the four factors moderated by the types of personnel?

Definition of Terms

Attrition. Attrition represents the loss of a teacher. For the purposes of this study, Billingsley's (2004) definition of special education teacher is used. *Attrition* is any special education teacher who leaves an assignment, regardless of destination (e.g., the teacher leaves the profession, the state, district, school, or teaching exceptionality area).

Retention. Retention is used to describe a teacher who remains in an assignment (Texas Education Agency, 1993).

School climate. School climate involves empirically measurable perceptions (Hoy & Feldman, 1999). In this study, school climate relates to the measurable

perceptions of the four factors of leadership, collaboration, working conditions, and professional development.

Leadership. Chemers (2002) described leadership as the ability to influence a group to achieve a common task. In the context of public schools and this study, it is the building administrator's ability to influence teachers to function in classrooms and on school campuses for the common goals of student growth and success.

Collaboration. Collaboration is when two or more educators, either teachers or administrators, work together towards a common goal of educational betterment while enhancing each other's intellect and creativity.

Working conditions. Working conditions represent the environment in which a teacher works and is influenced by salary, availability of materials, number and attitudes of students, implied and articulated expectations, required paperwork, as well as physical building conditions.

Professional development. The term professional development includes the pre-service development (university training), induction, mentoring, training, and opportunities for advancement provided to teachers after completion of their teacher preparation programs.

Teachers. Teachers are persons from all school environments (public, private, or charter) who teach full- and part-time across grade levels, subject areas, and ethnicities regardless of certification status (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1997).

Special education teachers. This term refers to teachers whose primary function is to provide academic instruction to students with disabilities as identified by Public Law 94-142 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) within the 13 exceptionality

areas. School psychologists, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists are not identified as special education teachers.

Administrator. Any building administrative person that maintains a level of authentic authority over school staff is considered an *administrator*. This term includes principals, assistant principals, and deans. Although the principal is ultimately responsible for establishing school climates, the administrative staff is charged with the implementation of school policies as the agent of the principal.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The main purpose for this chapter was to review, summarize, and analyze special education teacher attrition and retention. Attrition and retention are discussed as interrelated concepts throughout this chapter. Existing professional literature related to special education teacher attrition trends, school climate factors that have lead to special education teacher attrition, and specific school climate dynamics in professional development, collaboration, working conditions, and leadership as factors leading to attrition were reviewed.

Literature Review Procedures and Selection Criteria

A review of the literature was conducted using databases including Academic Search Premier, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse (ERIC), Sage publications, and Professional Collections. The following descriptors were used: special education teacher, school climate, attrition, and administrator. Reference pages in relevant literature were utilized to generate a list of articles related to professional development, leadership, collaboration, teacher burnout, and working conditions. Article selection was extended to googlescholar.com when articles suggested on reference pages were difficult to locate. Finally, manual searches were conducted in recent issues of Educational Leadership and Exceptional Children.

Only empirical studies were included for review when they met the following criteria: (a) conducted after 1990 and published in peer-reviewed journals, (b) included subjects who worked or had recently worked in public schools, and (c) focused on investigations of leadership, collaboration, professional development, or working

conditions as factors or trends of attrition. Studies excluded from review included unpublished dissertations as well as studies that specifically failed to identify special education teachers in their sample populations.

Attrition

Students are exposed to a “continual parade of ineffective teachers” (Darling-Hammond, 2003, p. 9) due to excessive teacher shortages and the never ending revolving door of special education (Billingsley, 2004). In a ten year period, over 19,000 special education classroom teachers left teaching while an additional 50,000 special education teachers migrated between schools (Boe, Cook, & Sutherland, 2008). This accounted for an average yearly attrition of nearly 70,000 special education educators and 7,000 special education classrooms without a teacher (Boe, 2006).

Trends. In a series of studies over several years, Boe, Bobbitt and Cook (1997) and Boe, Cook, and Sunderland (2008) compared attrition trends for special education teachers and general education teachers. In their studies, Boe and his colleagues noted multiple trends in attrition of special educators when compared to their general education colleagues.

In 1997, Boe, Bobbitt, and Cook used nationally generated data collected through the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and the Teacher Follow-up survey (TS) of 1987-1988. The sample of 4,798 public school teachers was used not only to compare attrition rates but also to develop a national picture of special education teacher attrition and retention issues. Results indicated that more special education teachers than general education teachers left public education positions or transferred schools at a ratio of 2:1.

Nearly a decade later, Boe, Cook, and Sunderland (2008) used SASS data from 1991 -2001 with nearly 50,000 participants to assess attrition trend data and found that the ratio continued. Results of the study showed attrition continued to remain high with 23% of special education teachers having left the profession or having migrated between schools. In finding that special education teachers were more likely to leave, Boe et al. suggested that more proactive professional development and offering a means to ease transfer between general and special education positions would reduce the stress special education teachers feel and subsequently reduce attrition.

Boe, Barkanic, and Leow (1999) used the SASS and TFS from 1987 through 1995, and categorized teachers into: (a) voluntary movers, (b) involuntary movers, (c) leavers (those who left the profession for reasons other than retirement), and (d) personal action leavers (those who retired). Using a logistic regression analysis, Boe et al. found that 7% of all teachers transferred each year. Four percent of those transferred teachers were involuntary and other 3% voluntarily migrated to another school. The authors found that an additional 6% of teachers completely left the teaching profession. This 16% attrition rate accounted for over 300,000 teachers having left the profession during a six-year period.

Factors Influencing Attrition

With an annual attrition rate between 13% (Boe, Barkanic, & Leow, 1999) and 20% (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1997) several researchers (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Certo & Fox, 2002) have attempted to identify the multitude of factors that led to the consistent exodus of special education teachers.

Certo and Fox (2002) examined attrition using focus groups in Virginia. Eighty participants, both special and general education teachers, were solicited from rural, suburban, and urban classrooms across all grade levels. Participants were divided into two groups. Group one was comprised of 42 participants who remained in teaching positions and Group two consisted of 23 former teachers who had left teaching for reasons other than retirement. Semi-structured interviews that examined personal and projected perceptions of factors leading to attrition and retention were conducted with both groups. Group one reported salary as the primary perceived factor of attrition. Group two, the teachers who had left education, reported lack of administrative support and excessive stress as leading factors for attrition. Although each group reported different primary factors for attrition, similarities were noted, specifically with concerns related to working conditions, collaboration, and administrative support.

McCreight (2000) used interviews of pre-service and novice teachers to examine factors leading to attrition. During interviews, novice teachers cited that the reality of teaching (e.g., salary, working conditions, paperwork, and lack of support) overwhelming, working conditions unbearable when confronted with inadequate resources, excessive paperwork, and limited time for planning. Finally, novice teachers reported that they received little or no administrative support. Most reported being despondent that their building administrators expressed little interest in their growth.

Busch, Pederson, Espon, and Weissenburger (2001) also examined the perceptions of first year special educators through a case study of one teacher. The teacher was a former general education teacher who taught special education students while getting an additional endorsement in special education. After generating

background information on both the teacher and the school where the teacher worked, Busch et al. interviewed the participant about instructional style, instructional content, and school climate. The authors found that she felt well prepared to teach the academics in the specialized environment, but was ill prepared for behavioral issues, Individualized Education Plan (IEP) development, isolation, limited administrative support, and formalized assessment procedures. This study offered a unique perspective because it involved a general education teacher who migrated into a special education position. Generally, special education teachers migrate into general education positions. Regardless, the results and comments were consistent with research that found working conditions, professional development, collaboration, and leadership as significant factors of attrition.

To investigate factors leading special education teachers to leave the classroom for general education positions, Billingsley and Cross (1991) surveyed a stratified random sample of 633 teachers who were endorsed in the nine exceptionality areas. The authors conducted multiple interviews with teachers who had special education teaching endorsements but were working in a general education setting. They also generated a questionnaire that consisted of questions about demographic information, potential incentives for retention, teaching deterrents, and teaching satisfaction. Billingsley and Cross found that stress, too much time with the same students who demonstrated limited growth, too many students on a caseload, and lack of administrative support as factors causing special education teacher attrition.

Kaff (2004) examined factors leading to the attrition of classroom teachers who taught specialized classrooms (i.e., self-contained) for student with emotional disabilities,

learning disabilities, mental retardation, or interrelated (cross-categorical). Using Kansas Board of Education lists, 400 participants were equally selected from each exceptionality area. The groups were administered a questionnaire that was divided into three parts: demographics, roles and responsibilities, and future plans. Responses were analyzed and coded for 25 attrition factors and 15 future attrition factors. The data indicated that, overall, teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities were twice more likely to consider attrition than their colleagues in other areas. Among the factors listed by all groups, lack of administrative support, working conditions, lack of collaboration, and personal issues were rated as most influential in promoting attrition. All participants remarked that assistance in any or all of these areas, excluding personal issues, would increase their consideration of retention.

George et al. (1995) completed a study examining the conditions that lead to job dissatisfaction, lower commitment, and subsequent attrition of teachers of students with emotional behavioral disorders. Ninety-six teachers who had indicated a desire to leave their jobs at the end of the year were randomly selected to participate in the study. A large percentage (44%) worked in self-contained classrooms on comprehensive campuses. George et al. used a 63-item questionnaire and an additional follow-up phone interview to elicit information on demographics, instructional practices, and working conditions that may have led to the teachers' intent to leave. Results indicated that administrative factors, not student factors were linked to the reasons for leaving. However, results of this study should be interpreted with caution due to sample used. Although the participants were selected from multiple states and districts, 70% of the participant group was from rural school districts with school districts' student populations

ranging from 400 to 78,000 total students. Teachers were equally represented between elementary and secondary schools; however, teacher certification status must also be considered because 26% of the leaving teachers possessed only emergency or temporary teaching certifications.

Singh and Billingsley (1996) compared teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities and other special education teachers' perceptions of factors leading to attrition. Using work related factors such as job satisfaction, commitment, and background information, authors analyzed a random sample of 658 special education teachers, 159 of whom taught students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. There was no significant difference between special education teachers and teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities in perceptions of factors leading to attrition. The factors leading to attrition, regardless of disability group and instructional environment, were related to school climate. Specifically, stress and unclear job design were cited as factors leading to attrition in both groups; however, lack of administrative support expressed by all special education teachers was highly correlated to the intent to leave. Return rates and sample size strengthen the study. Singh and Billingsley suggested that retention and attrition depend heavily on school climate, which was generated by the building administrator.

DeMik (2008) used a qualitative discussion on attrition with a narrative inquiry of five special education teachers. The study was designed to promote an open discussion of factors leading to attrition. Using interviews, discussions, and an exploration of experiences, DeMik found that the participants were frustrated with special education demands, specifically in the areas of working conditions, excessive paperwork, planning

time, and difficulty meeting the individual needs of students. Several of the participants lamented that they even lacked time to eat lunch. Writing IEPs, behavior plans, transition plans, along with all the required documentation of progress lead to excessive stress. Finally, participants reported resentment from general education teachers who had special education students in their classroom.

Common themes are evident in the literature reviewed. Included among these themes were professional development (Boe, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2003b), collaboration (Billingsley, Bodkins, & Hendrick, 1993), working conditions (Boe, Bobbit, Cook, Whitener, & Weber, 1997; Certo & Fox, 2002; Kaff, 2004; Kelly, 2004), and the lack of administrative support (Billingsley, 2004).

School Climate Factors and Special Education Teacher Attrition

Professional development. Boe (2006) used nationally generated data through Data Analysis System (DANS) to assess the professional development trends and rates of special education attrition. Sixteen years of data were used to answer six questions related to attrition trends: (a) to what extent is fully certified teacher attrition chronic and increasing, (b) is it related to a type of teacher, (c) how do new teachers affect the shortages, (d) are shortages related to the source of supply, (e) do shortages affect first-year teachers, and (f) are shortages related to mis-assignment of teachers. Boe found that fully certified teaching shortages doubled over an eight-year period, “the shortage of fully certified special education teachers has been chronic, increasing, and serious” (p. 455). Consequently, 46 % of those teachers hired to fill empty positions were first year teachers, another 44% were only partly certified, and final 10% had no teacher preparation. Boe suggested incentives be put into place that encouraged special

education teachers to stay in special education. Additionally, universities need to increase professional development and pre-service preparation programs.

Greiner and Smith (2006) used test scores and undergraduate grade point averages as potential predictors of attrition. Texas university graduates with a minimum of two years of consecutive teaching were selected for the study. An analysis of 418 participants found that test scores and personal traits were not significant predictors of special education teacher attrition, whereas course content of professional development and teacher preparation programs were more influential in the reduction of teacher attrition, specifically interactive pre-service experiences and placement. Although, much attrition occurs within the first couple of years, most occurs near the fifth year; a natural extension to the study would be to assess the population after five years.

Pre-service training and certification. Marvel et al. (2007) assessed the mobility of teachers working in all elementary and secondary classrooms using the 2004-2005 Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS). The Authors reviewed the surveys of 7,429 current and former teachers for characteristics and factors of attrition and retention. The sample was divided into three groups: *stayers*, *leavers*, and *movers*. Stayers remained in their teaching position while leavers completely left the profession and movers transferred between schools. Marvel et al. found that nearly half of all the leavers (45%) held either an emergency or a probationary license granted to them by local agencies or states.

Filling the positions, Boe, Bobbit, Cook, Whitener, and Weber (1996) argued, did not relieve the shortages. In an analysis of nationally generated data (SASS 1987-1988) with over 5,000 teacher participants, Boe et al. compared environments, years of instruction, and levels of certification to develop potential correlations between these

factors and the probability of attrition. Among many factors associated with increased likelihood of attrition (age, children's age, and salary), certification status was noted as a prominent factor. Eighty-seven percent of fully certified teachers reported their intent to stay in their current position at their current school, while 81% of teachers who were not fully certified reported that they were likely to pursue other careers shortly after beginning their profession. Boe et al. suggested that to reduce attrition, school districts should seek to employ experienced teachers who are fully certified, place them in full-time assignments, and pay them generous salaries. Additionally, Boe et al. insisted that effective mentoring and induction programs assisted in linking novice teachers to school communities, potentially reducing attrition.

Induction and mentoring programs. Whitaker (2000) investigated mentoring as a potential factor in the reduction of special education teacher attrition by surveying 156 randomly selected first year teachers from South Carolina. The questionnaire assessed overall program effectiveness by rating eight specific areas of mentoring: (a) emotional support, (b) assistance with district information, (c) assistance with special education information, (d) availability of mentors, (e) availability of resources and materials, (f) assistance with instruction, (g) assistance with student issues, and (h) assistance with administration. Sixty percent of the new special education teachers rated the program as effective as long as they had adequate contact with their mentors.

Billingsley, Carlson, and Klein (2004) used the Study of Personal Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE) to investigate 1,532 new special education teachers' perceptions of mentoring and induction programs. Unlike the findings of Whitaker (2000), participants in Billingsley et al. reported that mentoring and induction had little

effect on their perception of attrition. In a follow-up study, researchers investigated program availability and teachers' perceptions of working conditions. Participants indicated that new special education teachers were unlikely to receive formalized mentoring or induction, even though 61% of them reported having a formal mentor. Instead, a majority of the support was achieved through information, informal induction, and collaboration with colleagues. Those participants who were unable to collaborate with colleagues reported high rates of job dissatisfaction.

Collaboration. Most research on collaboration as a factor of attrition has been embedded within studies which assessed multiple attrition factors. Miller, Brownell, and Smith (1999) conducted a study to determine which school climate factors were most significant in promoting special education teacher attrition. Authors tracked a random sample of 1,576 special education teachers from across all exceptionality areas over a two year period. Career decisions and external school settings were assessed for collegial support. Bivariate and multinomial logit analysis identified collaboration as a predictor of special education attrition.

Margolis (2008) studied the effects of collaboration through mentoring on career path choices, job satisfaction, professional development opportunities, and experiences of the mentor teachers. Seven experienced teachers who had between four and six years were assigned positions as mentors for incoming teachers. Mentors were required to provide workshops, seminars, and website discussion boards. From pretest and posttest interviews, Margolis found that participants felt an increase in job satisfaction by sharing their educational experiences with novice teachers.

Good and Bennett (2005) designed a university level outreach and collaboration program for first year teachers. First year teachers were given a safe environment where they could confide and collaborate with other first year teachers. The outreach program divided novice teachers into cohort groups based on grade level and subject area taught as well as assigning a more experienced mentor teacher for additional one-on-one assistance. Instructional classes conducted by mentors were offered to the cohort groups on multiple subjects related to articulated needs of novice teacher. Monthly Likert scaled questionnaires were offered to the novice teachers on the usefulness of the program and mentors. Results from each month indicated a 98% approval rating on the usefulness. A one-year follow-up study conducted to assess the attrition and retention of the novice elementary teachers reported that only one teacher left the profession due to her spouse's job relocation needs.

Working conditions. Schools often reward experienced teachers with more compliant students and easier caseloads while their new colleagues wrestle with not only difficult students but also the prospects of developing lesson plans for the first time. In a fight or flight professional beginning, most new teachers, especially those who are not fully certified are finding that “flight” is the better option. Taking a more in-depth look at the data, researchers have attempted to find correlation between working conditions and attrition.

Finances. Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, and Weber (1997) used nationally generated data from the 1989 SASS and TFS suggested that salary as the most consistent factor leading to attrition, reporting that “attrition declines systematically and substantially with increases in salary levels” (p. 406). Salary was also a key factor when

special education teachers considered transfer from the classroom into more administrative positions or into the general education classroom.

Kelly (2004) added school economics as an additional financial factor of attrition. Although, salary was the greatest and most obvious predictor of teacher attrition, a school's level of social disadvantage played an equally influential role in teacher attrition. Kelly used the 1990-1991 SASS and 1992 TFS to investigate whether salary is a factor for teacher attrition in socially disadvantaged schools. The sample consisted of 4,761 public school teachers who were equally distributed between those who had left the profession (92%) and those who remained in teaching positions (97%). An analysis of the data found that both salary and subject area taught had a direct effect on teacher attrition. Greater salaries lead to lower attrition rates until retirement age, when higher salaries lead to faster attrition. Kelly suggested that salary-based attrition primarily occurs directly out of college when novice teachers are comparing themselves to their peers. Supportive school climates as well as more pedagogical pre-service training and certification programs were noted as keys to reducing attrition.

Materials, students, and resources. Billingsley, et al. (1995) used a report generated for Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to analyze data from four years of teacher attrition research in Memphis schools. Open-ended interviews were conducted with 11 general and 60 special education teachers. Participants were divided into three groups they referred to as *stayers*, *leavers*, and *undecided*. Fifty-one percent of special education leavers reported a high rate of dissatisfaction. When asked to clarify their dissatisfaction, leavers noted the lack of collaboration, dysfunctional classrooms, limited administrative support, and working conditions. Working conditions were rated

the highest, with teachers specifically noting paperwork, student behavior, limited student progress, and lack of materials such as pencils and paper.

Kaufhold et al. (2006) assessed the working conditions of 228 special education teachers from 48 school districts in Texas. The participants taught in a variety of specialized programs and across exceptionalities. A two-part questionnaire was administered. The first part of the questionnaire assessed background and professional information and the second section contained a Likert scale assessing the teachers' perception of the availability of supplies and materials. All of the participants indicated that they had an inadequate supply of resources and materials, and 50% reported that they lacked enough supplies and materials to conduct a class. Although less than half of those surveyed completed and returned the questionnaire, it is important to note that 100% of those participants responded that they required additional materials. Kaufhold et al. asserted that some teachers may never be completely satisfied with the amount of resources and materials; however, enough materials to appropriately conduct instruction are a basic need.

Brownell, Smith, McNellis, and Miller (1997) conducted phone interviews with 93 randomly selected special education teachers from Florida to investigate factors leading to attrition. Participants who represented multiple exceptionality areas and service delivery models were asked to respond to a scripted list of questions about current employment, primary and secondary reasons for leaving teaching, potential retention incentives to stay and return, future career plans, and regrets. Qualitative data were coded and participants were categorized as *disgruntled leavers*, *non-disgruntled leavers*, and *unable to discern*. Disgruntled leavers (49% of the sample) identified

working conditions as the most influential factor of their attrition. Specifically, participants reported problems dealing with multiple students with no instructional aide, violent and aggressive students who caused personal injury, and students with diverse needs who were improperly placed. Conversely, non-disgruntled leavers (30% of the sample) reported limited problems with working conditions. Instead, they reported having left the classroom to pursue professional advancements.

Administrative leadership. Attrition is often connected to teacher perception of administrative support. Brownell, Smith, McNellis, and Lenk (1995) conducted a study comparing special education teachers who had left the profession to those who remained. Fourteen stayers and 10 leavers, representing all grade levels and specialization areas, participated in the study. Interviews were conducted using 15 semi-scripted questions, and data were analyzed with a qualitative format. Brownell et al. identified two general categories (teacher characteristics and working conditions) in which a number of factors were categorized. These factors included commitment to teaching, preparation for teaching, collaboration with colleagues, and administrative support. Both groups reported dissatisfaction with components of their working conditions; however, unsatisfactory administrative support and an inability to participate in school-wide decision making were identified as significant influences of attrition.

Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross (1994) assessed special and general education teachers' perceptions of building administrators' support related to stress, job satisfaction, and intent to stay in the profession and the school. A sample of 698 general education teachers and special education teachers who taught students with emotional disturbance (ED), learning disabilities (LD), or mental retardation (MR) was randomly selected to

participate in the study. A questionnaire was sent to the 385 special education teachers and 313 general education teachers with 62% and 51% return rates respectively. The questionnaire was developed to assess principal support types: emotional, instrumental, appraisal, and informational against teachers' perceived job satisfaction, stress, school commitment, and intent to stay. An analysis of the variance was conducted across all four participant groups and among three special education groups (ED, LD, MR). Results indicated a significant relationship between perceived principal support and job satisfaction across teacher specializations. All participants rated emotional support as most important in increased job satisfaction and reduction in stress.

Gersten et al. (2001) investigated factors leading to special education teacher attrition using *job design* as the root of attrition. Researchers described job design as the structure that supports instruction, the way that classrooms are staffed, schedules, and general organization. Researchers sampled 887 special education teachers from three large school districts in the western United States. A 125-item questionnaire with a .92 reliability coefficient was used to assess job design, administrative leadership and support, professional development opportunities, role dissonance, stress, job satisfaction, and professional commitment. Using LISREL covariance structural modeling procedures, direct and indirect connections were found between all aspects of job design and building-level administrative leadership and support. Gersten et al. replicated the study three times in three distinctly different school districts. The authors suggested that a more complete understanding of job design and the role of leadership would reduce teacher stress and dissatisfaction.

Schlichte, Yssel et al. (2005) examined the relationship between teachers' perceptions of teaching and collaboration and administrative support.. Five special education teachers were interviewed using a semi-scripted interview format. Data were audio taped, transcribed, and analyzed for common themes. Only one participant reported a positive first year experience during which he felt a connection to the school because of administrative support. The other four participants reported a lack of leadership and guidance from the building administration. Specifically, participants reported feelings of insecurity, isolation, and insignificance, especially when approaching an administrator with concerns or with praise. One participant felt so isolated and disconnected that she resigned with no intention of returning to teaching. Although common themes were identified across the small group, it would be beneficial to further compare and analyze the experiences described by all teachers, as well as the leadership style and school climate experienced by the one successful participant. Schlichte et al. recommended that administrative leadership be more proactive in the induction and mentorship of novice teachers to improve retention.

Anhorn (2008) investigated the experiences of six first-year teachers in the central and west regions of North Dakota using informal interviews, focus groups, electronic bulletin boards, and survey questions related to their teacher preparation programs and plans for the profession. Responses from the group centered on both positive and negative components of teacher orientation experiences, time, isolation, classroom management, salary, pre-service teaching experience, fellow teachers, and the principal. All of the participants indicated they entered education with high expectations of support and wisdom from their building level administrators, but were disappointed by the

limited guidance offered to them. One participant noted, “The lack of support from the administration is probably the reason I am leaving this school and teaching altogether” (p.18). However, results should be viewed with caution because the study was limited by the number of participants and the electronic bulletin boards used for data collection.

Starlings, McLean, and Moran (2002) randomly sampled 225 special education teachers from Alaska. The sample included teachers from urban and remote areas who had left the state after the 2001 school year. Participants were asked to respond to survey questions identifying possible factors leading to attrition and retention. Forty-one percent of the participants indicated that school administration contributed to their decision to leave the profession.

Teacher migration and school administration. In response to the extensive attrition of special education teachers, researchers in several states have investigated retention of special education teachers related to the school administrator and school climate. Edgar and Pair (2005) conducted a follow-up study at Washington University of 161 students who had participated in seven of their cohort programs. The authors found that many graduates had migrated among schools, but only 8% of their former students were leaving the profession. . These teachers cited administration as their reason for leaving the profession.

Additional state-level research was conducted in South Carolina and Utah with similar results; administrators were reported as a factor in attrition, retention, and migration of special education personnel. Eggen (2002) interviewed 359 former teachers in South Carolina and found that the dominant factor leading to their attrition was lack of administrative support. In Utah, Menlove, Garnes, and Salzberg (2003) conducted an in-

depth survey of 51 experienced, well-trained special education teachers who transferred into general education positions during the 1999-2000 school year. Forty percent of the teachers surveyed reported that their jobs were stressful and the lack of administrative support promoted attrition. The teachers who left Special Education noted that they received little or no support from their building administrators.

Ingersoll (2003) used 6,733 respondents from the national 1991-1992 SASS and found that nearly 1,500 were teachers who migrated between schools and another 1,962 teachers completely left teaching. When analyses controlled for demographics and school organizational factors, results indicated that special education teachers were the most likely to migrate to other schools or other teaching positions. Twenty-seven percent of those who migrated reported lack of administrative support as a determining factor.

Principals' perspective. Miller (2007) attempted to gain a perspective on retention from the administrative view. The author assessed administrators' perceptions regarding the importance of providing support to teachers, their ability to provide such support, and the subsequent relationship of these supports to teacher retention and attrition. Results indicated that "within teacher retention models, administrative support was related to teacher satisfaction and commitment while within attrition models; it was related to burn-out and dissatisfaction" (p.7). That is, administrators reported teacher retention was associated with administrative support while teacher attrition was associated with working conditions.

Similar results were found in a study by Hirsch and Emerick (2007) that compared general and special education teachers' and principals' perceptions of working conditions and the effects of working conditions on teacher retention and attrition. In

North Carolina, over 77,000 educators (both teachers and principals) responded to 39-item instrument titled The North Carolina Teacher Working Condition Survey. All participants reported administrative leadership as the most influential factor leading to teacher retention, followed by empowerment, materials and resources, and professional development. The results also indicated that administrators and special education teachers disagreed about the influence of working conditions on attrition and retention. That is, while principals felt that they empowered teachers as collaborative participants working in safe and productive environments, teachers did not. Twice as many principals than teachers reported positive working conditions, appropriate planning time, demonstrated mutual respect, and opportunities for professional development. Hirsch and Emerick reported similar results from studies conducted in North Carolina (2006a), Arizona (2006b), and Nevada (2006c). In these studies, little information was provided about participant solicitation procedures and follow-up procedures to ensure adequate sample populations. However, it is important to note that similar results were found in multiple states that served a diverse group of educators and students. Hirsch and Emerick suggested that schools and districts become more reflective about authentic school climates. Further, they recommended that school- and district-level focus groups need to be developed to help bridge the differences in perceptions of working conditions as a means of reducing teacher attrition.

Summary

School district personnel have expressed concerns about the relationship between certification status and attrition. The Council for Exceptional Children (2000) reported that over 30,000 teachers were working in classrooms with inappropriate licenses for

teaching students with disabilities. Twenty-nine percent of novice teachers left the profession within the first five years; half of whom were never certified (Darling-Hammond, 2003). National reporting systems (SASS and TFS) have substantiated that certification is an issue noting that 81% of uncertified special education teachers leave the profession within the first year (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, & Weber, 1996). However, teachers continue to enter the profession at varied ages with diverse professional backgrounds and experiences; therefore, effective mentoring and induction programs are essential (Billingsley, Carlson, & Klein, 2004). Many schools and districts are attempting to adjust and amend attrition issues by offering mentoring and induction programs to new or struggling teachers. In California, nearly \$70 million is spent each year to address mentoring. Merely assigning mentors is not enough, although; research has indicated that teacher collaboration proves to be beneficial to both new and novice teachers as well as mentor teachers (Good & Bennett, 2005).

It was shown through a reviewed the literature that special education teachers attrition was influenced by the lack of professional development and collaboration, as well as working conditions, and leadership. Often, working conditions were reported as the most significant factor in promoting attrition. Salary continues to be a concern for special education teachers; however, issues with students, excessive meetings, and lack of instructional supplies and materials have been viewed as more important. Many special education teachers indicated they lacked the materials to provide appropriate instruction (Kaufhold et al., 2006). Furthermore, non-instructional issues, such as numerous meetings and phone calls, increased dissatisfaction as they redirect teacher time away from instruction (Billingsley et al., 1995).

Many teachers would have remained in their special education positions if they were provided with additional administrative supports (Adams, E., Menlove, R., & Salzberg, C., 2001).. Excessive paperwork, student discipline, support from others, caseloads, class sizes, student placements, meetings, and legal issues have been found to lead to excessive frustration. Many studies revealed that administrative support was most influential in teachers' attrition; however, no sufficient administrative supports were provided (e.g., Gersten et al., 2001). Unfortunately, although administrators thought that they were influential in teacher retention (e.g., Miller, 2007); they failed to understand that they might play a part in attrition.

Nearly twenty years of research has indicated that various factors influence attrition, retention, and transfer of special education teachers. Researchers have grouped these factors into categories such as personal or impersonal, instructional or non-instructional, and external or internal. However, regardless of how the constructs are classified, the common factors throughout have been related to the school climate.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate administrators' and special education teachers' perceptions of the school climate factors that have been found to lead to teacher attrition. This study addressed the following questions:

1. Is there a difference between administrators' and special education teachers' perceptions in the four school climate factors (leadership, collaboration, working conditions, and professional development) that lead to teacher attrition?
2. Are there differences among the four climate factors rated by school personnel? That is, would ratings of the four school climate factors by school personnel be different?
3. Is there a difference between administrators' and special education teachers' perceptions in their ratings of the four school climate factors? That is, are ratings of the four factors moderated by the types of personnel?

The chapter is organized into three sections: (a) setting and participants, (b) instrument, and (c) procedure.

Setting and Participants

Participants were selected from a large school district located in the southwest United States. Noted as being one of the largest school districts in the nation, the district covers nearly 8,000 square miles of metropolitan and outlying community areas, employs over 38,000 people as teachers, administrators, support staff, and school police, and serves over 300,000 students in four regional education service areas. The regional educational service areas share 210 elementary schools, 59 middle and junior high

schools, 45 high schools, and 33 alternative and special schools (Fast facts, 2009). A southern service region was selected for this study due to the support offered by the area superintendents. Within this region were 39 elementary schools, 12 middle and junior high schools, and seven high schools comprised of a diverse ethnic student body with over 65% of the student population representing minority groups.

The school district's publically accessible website and individual schools' websites were used to generate a list of administrators and special education teachers working in the selected educational service area. School administrators were contacted to confirm school site participation. Five administrators asked to have their schools excluded from the participant pool. The initial participant pool consisted of 337 persons; 109 administrative personnel and 217 special education personnel. After removing 9 cases that only finished the demographic part of the questionnaire and 3 cases missing a large number of items, the final participant pool consisted of 90 participants, representing a response rate of 30%. Participant group one, administrative personnel ($n = 29$), were licensed by the state and worked as principals, assistant principals, or deans on comprehensive campuses that serve both general and special education students. Table 1 provides demographic information for participant administrators. Participant group two, special education teachers ($n = 62$), worked directly with students with disabilities in collaborative consulting (CC), resource (R), or self-contained (SC) classrooms (see Table 2).

Table 1
Administrator Demographics

Demographics	<i>n</i>
Gender	
Male	11
Female	18
Total	29
Ethnicity	
African American	1
Caucasian	26
Hispanic/Latino	2
Asian Pacific Islander	0
Total	29
Age	
30-34	2
35-39	8
40-44	7
45 or older	12
Total	29
Current Administrative Level	
Elementary	17
Middle/Junior High	10
High School	2
Total	29
Current Administrative Assignment	
Dean	3
Assistant Principal	12
Principal	14
Total	29
Year in Administration	
0-3 yrs	5
4-7 yrs	11
8-12 yrs	8
13-20 yrs	5
Total	29

Table 2

Special Education Teacher Demographics

Demographics	<i>N</i>
Gender	
Male	9
Female	53
Total	62
Ethnicity	
African American	5
Caucasian	55
Hispanic/Latino	1
No Answer	1
Total	62
Age	
20-24	1
25-29	8
30-34	7
35-39	7
40-44	7
45 or older	32
Total	62
Current Instructional Level	
Elementary	28
Middle/Junior High	21
High School	13
Total	62
Licensure Status	
Conditional License	4
Fully Licensed	58
Long-term Substitute	0
Total	62
Years of Teaching	
0-3 yrs	8
4-7 yrs	15
8-12 yrs	11
13-20 yrs	11
21-25 yrs	6
26+ yrs	7
No Response	4
Total	57

Instruments

The instruments used in this study were *Administrators' Perceptions of Factors Leading to Attrition* (APFLA) and *Teachers' Perceptions of Factors Leading to Attrition* (TPFLA). Described in the section below is the instrument development procedure, along with specific information on each questionnaire.

Instrument development. The development of the two instruments began with an extensive review of the literature for existing instruments. Muturia (2007) used questions to assess perceptions of teachers and administrators in an effort to identify factors leading to retention and transfer of special education teachers. The 25-item questionnaire by Muturia was based on her review of factors that historically have led to teacher retention, such as campus-wide support and stress. The questionnaire used by Muturia consisted of four parts: (a) Likert-scale questions used to assess frequency and importance of retention factors, (b) a survey of job satisfaction, (c) motivational factors leading subjects to pursue a position in special education, and (d) demographic information. Muturia reported internal consistency estimates ranging between .72 and .85 when outliers were removed.

Based on Muturia's and other literature, questionnaire items were developed for the study. The concepts from the Muturia questionnaire were adapted to reflect the focus of the proposed study on attrition and the four school climate factors of professional development, collaboration, working conditions, and leadership. Muturia's Likert response scales were maintained for questions regarding participants' perceptions of influence of school climate factors. However, they were adjusted from a five point scale to a four point scale, removing "undecided" as an option. Additionally, items related to

family issues and pre-service career choices were eliminated from this study's questionnaire, as the study focused on school climate.

Additional items were generated through a review of literature and findings from a pilot study (discussed later in this chapter). Although Mutoria's work was used as the foundation for instrument development, additional questions were required to ensure that items were equally distributed across attrition factors. See Appendix A for a complete set of items.

Professional development. Many of the questions related to professional development were adapted from Mutoria (2007), Ingersoll and Smith (2003), Darling-Hammond (2001), or were suggested through focus-group participants (e.g., assigned mentor within subject area or discipline). Ingersoll and Smith, in an assessment of non-specific teacher retention, noted extensively that mentoring and induction were highly correlated with teacher retention. Darling-Hammond noted that relevant pre-service professional development was primary to teacher retention (e.g., availability of advanced training in curricular development). Finally, the pilot study focus group of teachers noted that they were more likely to leave due to the limited number of relevant professional development opportunities (e.g., irrelevant topics presented at professional development).

Collaboration. Additional items were generated through a review of Billingsley et al. (1995) and Billingsley and Westat (2001) as well as the findings from the pilot study. Billingsley's articles assisted in the addition of items encouraging teacher opportunities to share their professional skills with others and the availability of collaborative support for student inclusion (e.g. common planning time with general

education staff). The pilot study focus group provided a foundation for questions related to teacher and student isolation (e.g., availability of school social networks).

Working conditions. All additional items were generated using the Schools and Staffing Survey questionnaires (Boe et al., 1997, 1999, 2008) as well as Billingsley and Cross (1991). In all studies, authors noted not only salary, but also teacher stress related to student interactions, limited academic growth, number of students on caseloads, and student behavior (e.g., poor student motivation and lack of student progress).

Leadership. Billingsley and Cross (1991) was referenced to develop additional items focusing on administrative communication and support (e.g., administrative dissemination of information). Littrell et al. (1994) was used to generate items related to emotional supports and stress (e.g. administrative support with difficult issues).

Demographic information. Demographic information was solicited in both questionnaires. Solicited personal information was related to age and ethnicity while professional information was generated to establish individual work experience, years working, and current working assignments. Additional school demographic information was solicited in the administrator's questionnaire to describe the instructional and employment foundations on each campus.

Participants' comments. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were presented with an optional item called "Comments." The Comments window was provided in case participants had additional insights on school climate or other remarks. As can be seen in the short, one-word stem ("comments"), the item was included for exploratory purposes but not for a specific research question. The anecdotal information that participants entered was to be used in discussion of results, if relevant.

Final questionnaires. Based on the findings from a pilot study on the questionnaires (see subsequent Pilot, study discussion), the final questionnaires, *Administrators' Perceptions of Factors Leading to Attrition* and *Teachers' Perceptions of Factors Leading to Attrition*, were developed. The two forms were designed as online questionnaires to distribute and collect data through an online questionnaire distribution and collection system (surveymonkey.com).

The APFLA and the TPFLA were both similar in format and design. Minor differences were present in demographic items. The APFLA (see Appendix B) was divided into three sections—demographic information, school demographic information, and perception of factor influence—whereas the TPFLA (see Appendix C) was divided into two sections—demographic information and the perception of influence. In both questionnaires, the final section consisted of 52 questions, with 13 questions for each factor (professional development, collaboration, working conditions, and leadership) that assessed the participants' perception of the four school climate factors. The response choices for influence were: strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. High/low scores indicated greater or lesser influence of items representing reasons for special education teacher attrition as perceived by participants. Internal consistency estimates (coefficient alpha) of scores for the four constructs ranged from .80 to .95 for administrators and from .74 to .89 for special education teachers (see Table 4).

Procedure

Instrument pilot study. To assess the readability and functionality of the questionnaire, the questionnaire was pilot tested with administrators and special education teachers. Group one, consisted of three administrators, one each from an

elementary, middle, and high school. Group two consisted of 19 special education teachers: 10 elementary, three middle, and six high school teachers. The participants were given one week to review the questionnaire, answer the questionnaire items, and make comments. All participants noted difficulty understanding an item comparing climate factors from former schools to current schools. This item was eliminated because it assessed perceptions of factors leading to transfer rather than attrition. The findings from this pilot study and those from the focus group (see below) were used to improve the instrument.

Focus group. A small focus group of three special education teachers (one Caucasian male high school teacher, one African American female middle school teacher, and one Caucasian female elementary school teacher) and one administrator (Caucasian female middle school dean) were selected from the pilot sample. The focus group participants met over three days to review the results and comments of the entire pilot population. Grammatical errors, word choice, and question statements were identified. The questionnaire items were modified based on the findings to enhance user readability. Participants also commented on several influential factors that were not included in the initial questionnaire. Specifically, they included items related to teacher isolation, isolation of students with disabilities, conflicts with administrations, and relevance of professional development for experienced teachers.

Expert input. A faculty member who has expertise in measurement further reviewed items. Item modifications were made to ensure that items for each climate factor were equally represented within each section of the instrument and that items were phrased to limit negative bias. In addition, to balance the importance of the four factors,

items were compared across four factors to accomplish balance not only by the number of items but also significance of the item content. The final instruments included items of climate factors that lead to attrition rather than both attrition and transfer.

Data Collection

The research protocol, the two questionnaires, a copy of the informed consent, and a request to waive a written consent were submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Nevada Las Vegas for its approval on the research proposal (see Appendix D).

An application for research (see Appendix E) was submitted to the school district's research committee along with the two questionnaires to request an approval to conduct the study in the district. Upon receiving the approval from the district, the stamped consent forms were also filed along with the consent forms from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Prior to notices being sent out, administrators (principals) from each of the sample schools were notified with a letter describing the study and offered the opportunity to remove their schools from the sample population. Two high schools and three elementary schools were subsequently removed. Letters describing the study and a URL link to the survey website (see Appendix E and F) were sent, using standard U.S. mail, to the administrators and special education teachers identified in the website search. Participants were asked to use the URL link to access the appropriate questionnaire using an Internet survey system called Survey Monkey. Once online, participants reviewed the notice of consent and marked the appropriate box to indicate agree or disagree to

participate in the study. Only the participants who marked “agree” had access to the questionnaires.

Participants were given six weeks to complete the questionnaire. Follow-up letters were sent out at the beginning of each week to increase the number of participants in the study. Data from incomplete questionnaires were removed from the study.

Data Analysis

Data were downloaded from the online survey service and entered into the Statistical Program for Social Science (SPSS 17). A multivariate approach to repeated measures analysis of variance was conducted using one within-subject factor (school climate with four indicators: professional development, collaboration, working conditions, and leadership) and one between-subject factor (school personnel). An interaction effect was tested first, followed by main effects of climate factors and school personnel. Practical significance (η^2) was reported, along with statistical significance for each statistical test.

Outliers were determined on the measured variables within each group. Skewness and kurtosis, univariate outliers, and multivariate outliers (Mahalanobis distance) were examined. Skewness for administrators and teachers ranged from -.98 to -.31 and -.43 to .27, respectively. Administrator score distribution of professional development was slightly kurtotic (2.88) in the variable of personal development. Kurtosis for the other three variables in administrator group ranged from -.42 to -.67; kurtosis for the teacher, group range from -.51 to .65. Thus, in general, the normality assumption was satisfactory. No univariate and multivariate outliers were found. Assumptions for the main analysis were tested including linearity, homogeneity of variance and covariance

matrices for multivariate analysis and homogeneity of variance for univariate situation, and multicollinearity. Sphericity tests were not applicable due to using the multivariate approach to repeated measures. Assumptions were met.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This study was designed to differences in administrators' and special education teachers' perceptions of school climate factors that influence special education teacher attrition. Differences among the four factors—leadership, collaboration, working conditions, and professional development—were also examined to determine whether the four factors differentially affect teacher attrition. Administrator and special education teacher perceptions related to teacher attrition were measured using two 52- item instruments (a) Administrators' Perceptions of Factors Leading to Teacher Attrition (APFLA) and (b) Teachers' Perceptions of Factors Leading to Teacher Attrition (TPFLA).

Descriptive Results on School Climate Factors

The means and standard deviations of four school climate factors are presented by school personnel in Table 3. Overall means ranged from 2.47 to 2.96. Leadership ($M = 2.62$, $SD = .59$), collaboration ($M = 2.74$, $SD = .49$), working conditions ($M = 2.96$, $SD = .45$), and professional development ($M = 2.47$, $SD = .39$). In general, working conditions had the highest means among the four factors in both groups of personnel (see Table 3). Statistical significance tests are subsequently presented. Table 4 provides correlation coefficients and internal consistency estimates among four school climate factors for administrators and teachers. Strong intercorrelations among the four climate factors were demonstrated in the administrators' group as compared to the teachers'. In both groups, the relationship between leadership and working conditions was the lowest, $r = .20$ and $r = .25$, for administrators and teachers, respectively.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of Climate Factor Scores by Personnel Groups

	Admin.	Teacher	Total
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
Leadership	2.46 (.68)	2.70 (.54)	2.62 (.59)
Collaboration	2.60 (.51)	2.81 (.46)	2.74 (.49)
Working conditions	2.83 (.45)	3.02 (.43)	2.96 (.45)
Professional development	2.41 (.43)	2.50 (.38)	2.47 (.39)

Note. Administrator = 29; Teachers = 62; Total = 91.

Table 4

Correlations of School Climate Factors for Administrators (Upper Triangle) and Teachers (Lower Triangle) and Internal Consistency Estimates (Coefficient Alpha)

	1	2	3	4	α (Administrators)
1. Leadership	--	.73*	.20	.71*	.95
2. Collaboration	.56*	--	.53*	.76*	.89
3. Working conditions	.25	.40*	--	.57	.80
4. Professional development	.49*	.50*	.46*	--	.88
α (Teachers)	.89	.83	.74	.78	--

* $p < .01$. $n = 29$ for administrators; $n = 62$ for teachers.

Research Question 1: Personnel Difference in School Climate Perceptions

Is there a difference between administrators' and special education teachers' perceptions in the four school climate factors (leadership, collaboration, working conditions, and professional development) that lead to special education teacher attrition?

The main effect for school personnel was statistically significant, $F(1, 89) = 4.79$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = .05$, a small effect size. The combined school climate factor scores were significantly different between the two groups, with special education teachers' ratings showing higher combined rating mean ($M = 2.76$; $SE = .05$) than that of administrators ($M = 2.57$; $SE = .07$). The result indicates that special education teachers regard school climate, represented by four factors to contribute to teachers' attrition more so than do administrators.

When each climate factor was analyzed to test personnel group difference, none of the four climate factor ratings demonstrated statistical significance, $p > .05$. Although mean ratings indicated that special education teachers consistently rated each of the four climate factors higher than administrators (see Table 3), the difference was not statistically significant.

Research Question 2: Differences among the Four Climate Factors

Are there differences among the four climate factors rated by school personnel? That is, would ratings of the four school climate factors by school personnel be different?

The main effect of school climate factors was statistically and substantially significant, $F(3, 87) = 35.25$, $p < .0005$, $\eta^2 = .55$. Pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni adjustments indicated that all were significantly different ($p = .001$ to $p < .0005$), except for two nonsignificant pairs, leadership and collaboration, $p = .11$, and leadership and

professional development, $p = .16$. School personnel as a whole rated working conditions the highest ($M = 2.96$, $SD = .45$), followed by collaboration ($M = 2.74$, $SD = .49$). Although ratings of leadership ($M = 2.62$, $SD = .59$) and professional development ($M = 2.47$, $SD = .39$) were lower than ratings of working conditions, they were not statistically different from each other. The profile of four school climate factors is presented in *Figure 1*.

As indicated in mean ratings and Figure 1, both administrators and special education teachers rated school climate concerns between “agree” and “disagree”, although the ratings were close to agree, especially on the working conditions factor.

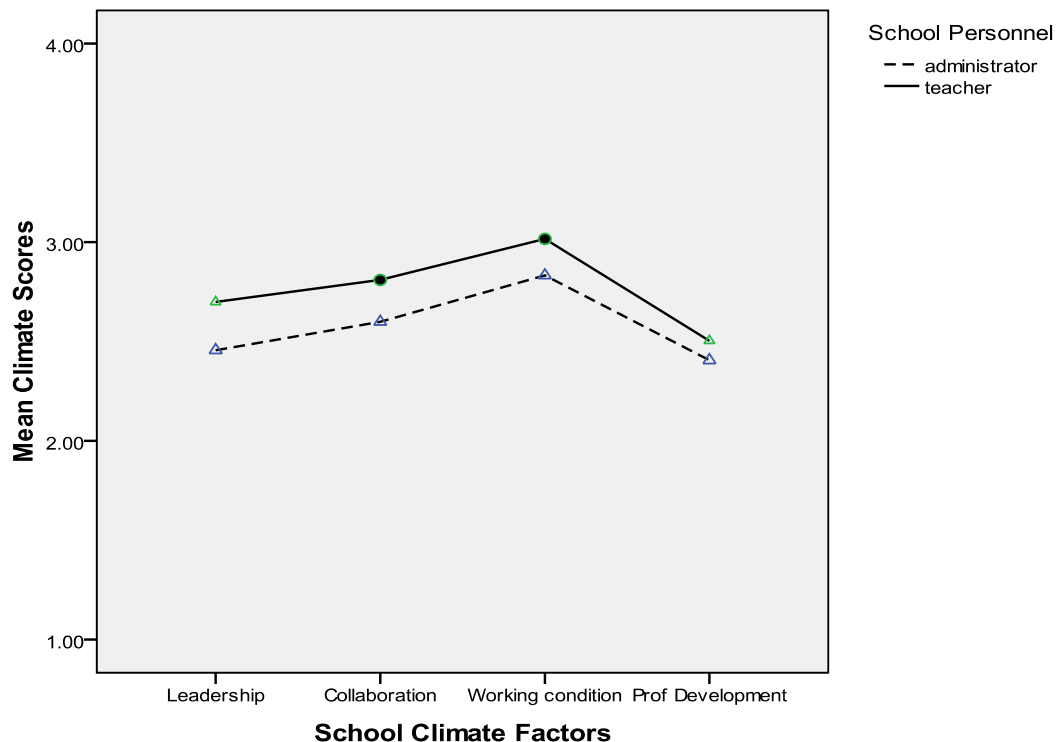


Figure 1. School climate factor scores by school personnel

Research Question 3: Interaction between School Personnel and School Climate

Is there a difference between administrators' and special education teachers' perceptions in their ratings of the four school climate factors? That is, are ratings of the four factors moderated by the types of personnel?

The interaction between school personnel and school climate factors was not statistically significant, $F(3, 87) = .93, p = .43$. School personnel type had no significant moderating effect on school climate factors. That is, as shown above (Questions 1 and 2), both administrators and special education teachers rated the four school climate factors similarly, with the highest and lowest ratings on working conditions and professional development, respectively (see Figure 1).

Anecdotal Information

Twenty-two teachers and 8 administrators chose to make comments on their experiences with attrition or about the questionnaire. Anecdotal information was collected through the comments sections of the questionnaire. Comments are presented verbatim for administrators (see Table 5) and special education teachers (see Table 6).

Table 5

Administrator Comments on Perceived School Climate Factors.

Participant	Comment
105	I feel attrition is more influenced by the administration than almost anything else that could cause teachers to leave.
108	I feel that one of the areas of greatest frustration is the number of students with such diverse abilities that a special education teacher is given either in a resource or self contained setting. Our SLD classes are full of MR and Multiple impaired students who should be receiving a functional community bases curriculum. I feel that we need MR classes for the higher functioning MR students so that they are not placed in the SLD classes that are supposed to have more of an academic emphasis. Having students with IQ scores in the 40's and 50's in my SLD programs is stretching the teacher's time and resources too thin. I wish the staff at other schools had the courage to be honest with parents and write present levels and goals that reflected students limited abilities so that they would be placed in the appropriate settings. My teachers are extremely frustrated with the process that they have to go through to have a students reassigned to another more appropriate self contained setting. SLD classes have become a dumping ground for too wide a range of student abilities and academic needs.
111	Being a special education teacher can be overwhelming: amount of paperwork; skills to co-teach; team effort from staff members; etc.
112	These responses are based on reasons teachers left my schools in the past. Schools vary how much time is available for collaboration, access to other colleagues, etc, which are not issues here but could be at other schools with different schedules.
115	I think that special education teachers get burnt out when there isn't understanding or support - whether it is from teachers (gen ed) due to lack of understanding of student needs or resources, or other staff/admin/etc. who don't realize the amount of work it really takes to individualize curriculum to meet student needs while at the same time exposing students to gen ed curriculum and assisting them in achieving grade level proficiency. One of the least addressed issues that I believe to be a great concern is planning. Co-teaching/collaborative teaching (or so called) goes on when the teachers have absolutely no time to plan together - which is not in line with the true model. Also, I have heard of situations where sped teachers manage a case load of kids that are not even the kids they work with - how is that going to work? Basically, I think that teachers leave one

place in hopes of finding it better elsewhere. The trouble is, these issues are everywhere, and due to the lack of funding for training, time, and personnel, we are hard-pressed to find gen ed/special ed nirvana anywhere.

116 Special education teachers have too much paperwork and worry about lawsuits. The area's are constantly giving them changes in how to write things. They do not have enough time to do all the paperwork, meetings, and give services.

120 It is a challenge to retain, but being able to ensure a collegial environment, provide access to administration for support, and ensure support of difficult decisions help out substantially.

125 Clientele at schools differs and can have an impact on attrition

Note: *Administrator* = 8

Table 6

Special Education Teacher Comments on Perceived School Climate Factors

Participant	Comment
201	Grading students with an IEP is a major problem. Having to give students Ds & Fs because they are meeting Standards is demoralizing for students who have an IEP and work very hard.
202	Since the district is focused on DATA DATA DATA in order to place a student. other students are losing out instead of approving change of placements. I want to teach..not just collect and graph data to prove myself.
203	We, as SE educators, are responsible for too much paper work and tracking, plus a full teaching load.
204	I teach in a school that provides all opportunities for Inclusive Education.
210	A large frustration for me is a lack of expectations from administration has to how they want co-teaching to be conducted in the classroom. I have one co-teacher who is open to me teaching the whole class, designing and implementing lesson plans and other co-teachers who make it clear that I am a "guest" in their classroom. The only direct statement I received was recently in a Sped Dept meeting, where we advised that we are expected to create and implement lesson plans in our cc classes . I think this is something that needs to be addressed to the gen ed cc teachers and the gen ed dept chairs so that we are all on the same page and have the same expectations.
212	More moderately disabled students are being kept out of self-contained classrooms and in a general education/resource combination. The special education teacher is to help support the students in general education as well with general education teachers who have little to no training to deal with students with disabilities. Students in special education are a constant thhat general education teachers will encounter every year. So why are general education teachers required to take only one course in helping students with disabilities?
213	In autism it would be better for the students and the teachers if the students were grouped more according to level of their disability. Low students with low students and higher students with higher students.

- 216 There is a strong feeling amongst special education teachers that we are not viewed as professionals by the district as well as by district special education personnel.
- 224 Special Education Teachers are required to teach curriculum at grade level though they do not receive adequate training in curriculum instruction. Special Education Teachers are frequently overlooked as building leaders due to a notion that these teachers do not have the educational background to assist with areas outside of special education. There is a lack of planning time available to meet all required duties of special education teachers; lesson planning, IEP preparation, collaborating with general education cc teachers, and common department preps. Paraprofessionals only meet minimum requirements to provide student assistance, but frequently do not have the necessary skill sets to assist students in core subject areas within the resource room, especially at the middle and high school levels when the content becomes more complex.
- 229 My comments are specific to my situation only.
- 232 Administration to me means the region, not my site. Every facilitator meeting brings a different set of rules to follow from the previous meeting. We keep going around in circles with the way to complete certain aspects of our paperwork. Very frustrating! Just let us teach!
- 233 These are only within school building questions...most of special education policy, placement and operation is pre-determined at region and mid management level. MDTs, teachers, & principals are disempowered.
- 237 The main concern I believe is the paper work. IEP's, lesson plans (3 different levels at least sometimes many more, meeting arrangements. Progress reports
- 238 Every year there is more to do and less time to do it in. Direct teaching gets lower on the priority list. Impossible expectations of students with disabilities. The lack of understanding that students with disabilities vary in the level of severity and need. The same testing used for disabled students that is used for nondisabled students. The lack of understanding that requiring students to participate in testing that they can't possibly read, may be damaging and hurtful for them. The idea that full inclusion is the answer to what they really need. These students burn out because they are being asked to do things that they can't possibly do. Therefore, they always feel less than, unsuccessful, and embarrassed.
- 244 You should have 'no opinion' or something to that effect because some I do not know. The way I answered the questions was how much I thought

this statement led to quitting sped. I hope that was the right way to answer the statements.

- 245 When it comes to Special Education, nothing is consistent across this district. Everyone is afraid to give you a direct answer and no answer is ever the same. Students failing and not passing AYP is always the Special Ed. Teacher's fault. The General Ed. Teachers don't get questioned when these students don't pass their class. When are students and parents going to take any of the responsibility for the child's education? This district gave up on its teachers years ago and turned the buildings over to the parents. I am so tired of weak administrators that give into parents. When these students leave high school the police and future employers will not ask them where their IEP is!
- 254 At my current job the administration is very supportive. But previously this was not the case. If you are excluded, kept in a little room and given no supplies why would you stay?
- 258 When I am in my classroom with my students, I love what I do. It is not the actual teaching which overwhelms us; it is the constant day-to-day grind of meetings, phone calls, conferences, paperwork, record-keeping, etc. which is necessary to keep everyone else happy. I feel as if the teaching gets lost in all the minute details. Parents make unreasonable demands, advocates support them, and we look like the mean bad guys trying to deny services to poor little handicapped kids. I love my students and would do anything for them, but I am increasingly unhappy with all the demands placed upon me and my time. It is a wonder that anyone enters the field of special education anymore. I am glad that I have been able to "last" as long as I have! Hopefully I have a few more good years in me to still make a difference for some wonderful kids. The system hasn't beaten all the joy out of me yet, and I'm just stubborn enough not to let it!!!
- 255 I answered as best I could. It was difficult since I could see any number of these contributing to the attrition of others. Most of these questions were very general in nature.
- 260 There simply is too much paperwork and too many meetings that I have to attend. I feel like I don't even have time to actually teach. More pay or extra prep time would at least make my 55 + hours a week I put in worth it.
- 261 Too Many students!!!! Too much paperwork!!!!

Note: *Special Education Teacher* = 22

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Although the trend in special education teacher attrition remains relatively consistent with 7% of teachers leaving each year, student populations continue to grow. As universities and school districts unfortunately have not been able to produce enough qualified teachers to lead classroom instruction (Boe, 2006), the financial and academic costs of teacher attrition are astounding (Carrol & Fulton, 2004; Jalongo & Heider, 2006; Kopkowski, 2008). Early research on attrition found that teachers were leaving their profession to build families, to move to other areas, or for retirement. Research within the last 20 years demonstrated a significant shift in the causes for teacher attrition, moving from personal reasons to job related reasons that include difficult working conditions, student behavior, limited student progress, lack of administrative support, and/or limited professional growth opportunities (Boe, Shin, & Cook, 2007; Menlove et al., 2003; Thornton et al., 2007).

Numerous researchers characterized these job- or school-based causes for teacher attrition as school climate (Billingsley & Cross, 1991). School climate encompasses leadership, collaboration, working conditions, and professional development (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; George et al., 1995; Kaff, 2004). Unfortunately, little attention has been directed toward assessing these factors associated with special education teacher attrition. Further, research investigating many factors together in a single study is rare. The current study attempted to extend previous research by examining perceptions of the four well-recognized factors of special education teacher attrition. This approach allows for comparisons among the four factors in participants' perceived level of climate factors'

influence on teacher attrition. Additionally, this study attempted to compare the administrators' and special education teachers' perceptions.

In this chapter, a brief summary of the results will be presented followed by a discussion of the differences across personnel in perceived influence (question 1), the differences among the school climate factors (question 2), and the interaction between personnel and school climate factors. Anecdotal information from the *comments section* of the questionnaire is provided to substantiate the findings. Conclusions are provided followed by limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

Summary of the Findings

First, when the combined school climate ratings were tested for the difference between special education teachers and administrators, their rating were significantly different. However, when each factor was compared individually, the difference was not statistically significant. That is, although a trend existed that special education teachers rated each factor consistently higher than administrators, the mean difference was not significant. Secondly, school personnel rated working conditions as most influential in promoting special education teacher attrition, whereas professional development and leadership was rated as least influential. Finally, there were no significant differences in the manner that special education teachers and administrators rated the four school climate factors. That is, perceptions of influence by administrators and teachers demonstrated a similar pattern.

Discussion

Research question 1: Personnel differences. Special education teachers perceived the school climate to be more influential in promoting special education

teacher attrition than did administrators. One possible explanation for the difference in ratings by the two groups is the continued interest in assessing teacher perception of attrition. Annually, teachers are asked to participate in a national study assessing perception on attrition through the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) which is generally followed with the Teacher Follow-up Study (TFS). Additional perceptual queries are also offered by local and regional agencies or through exit interviews. This offers special education teachers ample opportunity to reflect not only personal experiences but also the expressed experiences of colleagues as well. Conversely, administrators regard special education as only one aspect of the school community, reflecting on special education issues only on a case by case occasion.

The second possible reason special education teachers rated school climate factors higher may be that these issues directly affect them. If they have never worked in special education, administrators may not understand the demands and can only speculate on issues that special education teachers are confronted with on school campuses. This is reflected in the research by Billingsley, Carlson and Klein (2004); they indicated that although teachers rated school climates as supportive, they asserted that “principals do not understand what they do” (p. 344).

Finally, although teachers rated each factor consistently higher than administrators on average, when each factor was tested for group difference, it was not statistically significant. This may be due to the sample size in this study or because the difference between factors have minimal practical significance. Previous research indicated that special education teachers often feel that they are not getting enough supports and services (Billingsley, Carlson, & Klein, 2004). Administrations recognize

the need for these supports and services (Hirsch & Emerick, 2007); however they may feel that they are providing these supports. That is, administrative perception of need may not meet the actual need. These subtle differences may be the source of the small effect size found in this study. However, with a large sample, more accurate findings could result in terms of statistical significance and effect sizes. In Hirsch and Emerick's studies (2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2007), twice as many principals than teachers reported schools having more positive working conditions, additional planning time, and opportunities for professional development, indicating a discrepancy between principals' and teachers' perceptions, as found in this study with overall school climate scores.

Research question 2: Differences among the four factors. School climate factors were measured in leadership, collaboration, working conditions, and professional development. When the four school climate factors were compared for their mean differences, participants rated working conditions and professional development the most and least influential factors of special education teacher attrition, respectively. Because the mean rating on the subscale *working conditions* was 2.96 (2.83 for administrators and 3.02 for teachers), with 2 being "disagree" and 3 being "agree" it seems that participants nearly all agreed that working conditions was most influential of the four factors. That is, school personnel, regardless of position, asserted that working conditions were most likely to promote and affect a special education teachers' decision to leave their teaching assignment.

These findings replicated previous working conditions studies with general education teacher, special education teacher, and administrative participants (Billingsley et al., 1995; Brownell, Smith, McNellis, & Miller, 1997; Kaufhold et al., 2006; Kelly,

2004). Previous studies on working conditions indicated that educators were dissatisfied with salary (Kelly, 2004), excess paperwork (Billingsley et al., 1995), lack of materials and supplies (Kaufhold et al., 2006), and diverse student needs (Brownell, Smith, McNellis, & Miller, 1997).

Kelly (2004) noted that special education teachers often lament their salaries. Special education teachers indicated that time spent on planning, meetings, modifying curriculums, and managing student behavior far exceeded compensation when compared to general education teachers. Billingsley et al. (1995) asserted that working conditions such as excessive amount of paperwork and required meetings, which took time from instruction and reduced student progress, were considerations beyond salary. Lack of instructional supplies and materials (Kaufhold et al., 2006) as well as the complexity of student populations (Brownell et al., 1997) also contributed to adverse working conditions.

Working conditions often define the immediate environment and daily activities that directly affect a teacher's ability to teach. Most special education teachers enter teaching aware of the curricular demands of the classroom. One teacher wrote in the comments that "It is not the teaching that overwhelms us;" commented one teacher, "it is the constant day-to-day grind of meetings, phone calls, conferences, paperwork, record-keeping, etc. which are necessary to keep everyone else happy." Over time the diversity of needs, inadequate resources, limited student progress, and inappropriate student behavior may begin to weigh on the initial optimism. A teacher stated, "Every year there is more to do and less time to do it in, direct teaching gets lower on the priority list."

Finally, administrators are acutely aware of the conditions since they are often called to *put out the fires* related to student behavior issues, material, and meetings (Miller, 2007). Miller noted administrator perception of attrition was directly related to burn-out and dissatisfaction with working conditions related to students. In this study, one administrator commented that “students are often inappropriately placed in classrooms which require additional time and resources from teachers; the subsequent processes to then have students reassigned are frustrating and exhausting [for teachers].”

When compared to other school climate factors, professional development and leadership were rated as least influential. Because the lowest mean on the subscale *professional development* was 2.47 (2.41 for teachers and 2.5 for administrators), with 2 being “disagree” and 3 being “agree” it appears that all participants were divided on professional development as a factor of influence.

This finding is contrary to what has been previously noted in the literature. Previous empirical research in pre-professional training and mentoring indicated that professional development was vital in the reduction of teacher attrition (Boe et al., 1997, 1999; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). An explanation for this variation may be in the development of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was directed at assessing post-employment training rather than pre-professional development and certification status. Nearly all the special education teacher participants (92.6%) reported being fully certified. The literature (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, & Weber, 1997; Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Barkanic, 1999; Boe, Barkanic, & Leow 1999; Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999) more clearly identifies teacher certification status as the professional development indicator of attrition. That is, special education teachers who lack full certification are

more likely to leave their positions than those who have been licensed or certified as special education teachers.

In this study, post employment training was found to be irrelevant and not applicable to special education teacher growth. One teacher described professional development as “going around in circles. Each meeting brings a different set of rules to follow from the previous meeting.” Irrelevant topics also pose a concern. It appears that teachers are offered the same information continuously without the proper tools to implement the new skill. One teacher pointed out, “Special education teachers are required to teach curriculum at grade level though they do not receive adequate training in curriculum instruction.”

Effective leadership, as asserted by numerous researchers (Anhorn, 2008; Brownell, Smith, McNellis, & Lenk, 1995; Schlichte et al., 2005), is a key factor in the reduction of teacher attrition. However, the leadership factor was rated lower than working conditions, especially among administrative participants. It appears that administrators rated leadership as less influential in promoting attrition than did teachers, mean ratings of 2.46 and 2.70 respectively, although they were not statistically different.

Ironically, one administrator who commented strictly on *leadership* assumed full responsibility for attrition stating “I feel attrition is more influenced by the administration than almost anything else that could cause a teacher to leave.” While teachers did not place the total responsibility of attrition on administration, a few teachers commented on the “unclear expectations” administrators had, particularly with regard to co-teaching. Billingsley (2004) asserts that clear and consistent expectations from administration promotes job satisfaction and subsequently reduces attrition.

The average collaboration rating was second to working condition (the first in means ratings). To repeat, the average rating of collaboration was significantly different from that of working conditions and professional development, but it was not significantly different from leadership (the third in mean ratings). Collaboration and collegiality were often attrition issues embedded within previous studies. Few researchers purposefully pursued an assessment of collegiality as a factor in teacher attrition. Previous researchers reported special education teachers felt most comfortable in schools where collaboration is promoted (George et al., 1995; Kaff, 2004). Additional support for collaboration was evident during the pilot, in which teachers reported feeling segregated from their colleagues with little opportunity in planning curriculum or mainstreaming students. These feelings of isolation were also suggested in both teacher and administrator comments. One teacher commented, “Special education teachers are frequently overlooked.” An administrator affirmed this by commenting “Other staff doesn’t realize the amount of work it really takes to individualize the curriculum.”

Research question 3: Interaction effect. There was no interaction effect found between school personnel and school climate factor. That is, school personnel did not moderate the differences among the four climate factors. As discussed above, both administrators and special education teachers reported school climate factors along a similar trend. Administrators and teachers view the school climate problems similarly on all factors, but teachers tend to look at school climate as more influential in teacher attrition than do administrators.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates a gap in school climate perceptions by school personnel, with special education teachers viewing overall school climate as more influential in promoting teacher attrition than do administrators. This suggests that some special education teachers, more so than administrators, perceive school climates as more adverse when the involvement of students with disabilities both in the classroom and on comprehensive campuses is considered less than ideal. Administrators by either disconnection or by choice do not perceive school climate issues as harmful as do teachers. Administrators' role in improving school climate is paramount. By increasing awareness in school climate factors, administrators can begin to assess the climate's impact on special education teachers. Increased awareness may be the foundation to direct strategies for positive change. Unfortunately, nothing will be done to positively affect school climate and subsequently change working conditions, professional development, and collaboration until leadership recognizes the need for improvement.

Administrative exposure to school climates that include special education is relatively new. It has only been within approximately the last 30 years since the enactment and release of "The Education for All Handicapped Children Act" that special education professionals have been included as members in comprehensive schools. Special education remained relatively isolated until 1997 when the reauthorization of IDEA required general education teachers to become more involved in the special education process. The 2001 enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) further involved special education in schools by asserting that special education could no longer be the "Elephant in the Room." Administrators were required to address the instructional needs of special education so that students with disabilities could become proficient in

both math and science by 2014. The testing requirements of NCLB, which affect the annual yearly progress (AYP) of entire schools, now only amplifies a complicated climate that finds it difficult to relate to special education. Special education has drastically evolved over the last 13 years, and school climates have struggled to keep up with change.

The climate change can occur when administrators as well as special education teachers become equally aware of climate issues. The change may begin with both parties understanding how each school climate factor influences attrition, especially the perception of working conditions which was indicated as the most influential in promoting teacher attrition. Often special education teachers seek the counsel and support of the administration when legal requirements and district policies are changed or when student issues seem overwhelming. Unfortunately, although many administrators recognize that working conditions can be difficult, they may feel powerless to address these needs, especially those associated with state and district policy.

Bridging the gap in perception is the first step in reducing special education teacher attrition. Then, developing strategies to address school climate, specifically working conditions can begin at the campus and district levels, and may translate to state and national levels. Additionally, professional development, which was perceived by all personnel to be the least influential in promoting special education teacher attrition, often receives a great deal of district funds and resources. Districts may consider conducting *needs* assessments of professional development programs and the re-appropriation of resources. Administrators need to facilitate the growth of encouraging and supportive school climates, not only by accepting special education as an aspect of the school, but

also by empowering special education teachers and students. Certainly, special education teachers need to continue to adjust and grow with the demands of the classroom, while empowering administration with knowledge.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

The small sample size represents a limitation. As discussed, where trends may appear to be developing, the statistical significance was not evident. Further studies with larger sample sizes are warranted. Participants were solicited from one region of a school district. Special education guidelines, mentorship, classroom supports for teachers, building supports for administrative personnel, as well as student identification and placement are often dictated by individual regions. This study should be replicated by either carrying out the study across the same school district or within another entire school district. Additionally, conducting a study similar to this across multiple school district types (e.g., small, rural, suburban, coastal, and other large metropolitan) could demonstrate potential similar or varied attrition issues across the United States. A subsequent comparative study assessing a large metropolitan school district against a small school district may demonstrate unique results.

A natural extension to this study would be to investigate differences among the perspectives of special education teachers sampled. Earlier research (George et al., 1995; Kaff, 2004; Singh & Billingsley, 1996) indicated that teachers working within self-contained environments are more likely to leave a teaching assignment than their peers who teach in resource rooms. Grade-level comparisons among and between special education teacher and administrative personnel would shed light on grade-level effects on teacher attrition.

Finally, the term *administration* should have been more clearly defined in the questionnaire. This concern was noted by a participant “administration to me means region, not my site.” Consideration may need to be placed on either better defining terms or adjusting titles to reflect principals, assistant principals, and deans.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Question Distribution across Climate Factors

Leadership

1. Administrative dissemination of information
2. Administrative exclusion of special education programming
3. Administrative familiarity with special education law
4. Administrative encouragement of staff and students
5. Administrative communication of expectations
6. Administrative support with difficult issues
7. Administrative recognition for accomplishments
8. Quality of administrative supervision
9. Approachability of administrators
10. Tension with administration
11. Consistency of performance evaluations
12. Opportunity for teachers to participate in leadership roles
13. Administrative empowerment of teachers

Collaboration

1. Opportunities to share professional skills with administration and staff
2. Conflict with other teachers
3. Difficulty scheduling meetings with general education staff
4. General education teachers unfamiliar with special education student needs
5. Isolation from general education staff
6. Availability of planning time with general education staff
7. Common planning time with other special education staff
8. Collegial support with student progress monitoring
9. Availability of in school social networks
10. General education teachers' resistance to co-teaching
11. Availability of collaboration to support student inclusion
12. Special education teachers feel isolated from other special education teachers
13. Ample opportunity to communicate with peers

Working Conditions

1. Large Class size
2. Diversity of student needs
3. Amount of Paperwork
4. Number of required meetings
5. Amount of planning time
6. Lack of student progress
7. Availability of curriculum resources
8. Availability of materials for students
9. Poor student motivation
10. Low Salary
11. Availability of professional development for teachers with varying experience
12. Opportunity for professional development designed for career advancement
13. Limited pre-service professional development

Professional Development

1. Irrelevant topics presented at professional development
2. No site-based mentor to continue support in professional development
3. Availability of disability specific professional development opportunities
4. Availability of advanced training in curricular development
5. Assigned mentor within subject area or discipline
6. Availability of induction programs for new teachers
7. Availability of training in IEP development
8. Availability of advanced training in pedagogical skills
9. Professional development to assist with certification requirements
10. Availability of professional development to prepare for diverse populations
11. Student behavioral issues
12. The number of students on caseloads
13. Availability of additional adult assistance

Appendix B Administrators' Perception of Factors Leading to Attrition (APFLA)

2. Participant Consent

*** 1. Purpose of the Study:** You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to examine special education teachers' and administrators' views on factors leading to attrition. For the purposes of this study, "attrition" is defined as teachers' departure from a teaching assignment to change schools, teaching specializations, or districts, or from the profession.

Participants: Your participation in the study would help develop a better understanding of attrition and retention in the field of Special Education. Participants are either special education teachers or administrators working within the Clark County School District.

Procedures: You will be asked to access an online questionnaire, provide basic demographic data about yourself and your professional career, and complete 52 questions. Rating the influence a number of factors have on special education teacher attrition. You will rate each item on the following scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree.

Benefits of Participation: We hope to learn about the factors that lead special education teachers to leave special education teaching assignments. Participant benefits may include the opportunity to reflect on your perceptions of factors associated with attrition and retention of special education teachers. Your participation in the study will help educators understand primary reasons for attrition.

Risks of Participation: This study may include only minimal risks such as fatigue during or after the questionnaire completion.

Cost / Compensation: There will be neither a financial cost nor compensation for your participation in this study. The study will take approximately 20 minutes of your time to complete.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study time during the research study.

Confidentiality: All information gathered in this study will be kept completely

confidential. No reference will be made in written or electronic materials that could link you to this study. Only average rating will be reported. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for 3 years after completion of the study. After the storage time, the information gathered will be destroyed.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Jennifer Boeddeker at 702-521-7943. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 702-895-2794.

Participant Consent: I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age.

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

3. Demographic Information

1.

Gender

☐ Male ☐ Female

2. Ethnic Background

☐ African American ☐ Hispanic/Latino ☐ Would rather not answer
☐ Asian ☐ Native American/Pacific Islander
☐ Caucasian ☐ Other

3. Age

☐ 20-24 ☐ 35-39
☐ 25-29 ☐ 40-44
☐ 30-34 ☐ 45 or older

**4. Highest Degree
Obtained**

☐ Bachelors ☐ Doctorate
☐ Masters

5. What is your current administrative level?

☐ Elementary ☐ Middle/Junior High ☐ High School

6. What is your current administrative assignment?

☐ Principal ☐ Assistant Principal ☐ Dean

7. Number of years in administration

☐ 0-3 ☐ 8-12 ☐ 21-25
☐ 4-7 ☐ 13-20 ☐ 26+

**8. Number of years in your current
assignment**

☐ 0-3 ☐ 8-12 ☐ 21-25
☐ 4-7 ☐ 13-20 ☐ 26+

9. Prior to entering administration, my teaching assignment was:

- ☐ Special education
☐ General Education

10. Number of years in teaching

- ☐ 0-3 ☐ 8-12 ☐ 21-25
☐ 4-7 ☐ 13-20 ☐ 26+

11. Subjects I taught

- ☐ Elementary
☐ Electives
☐ Math
☐ English
☐ Reading
☐ Language Arts
☐ Social Studies
☐ Science
☐ Special education

12. Grade levels I taught

- ☐ Elementary ☐ Middle School ☐ High School

13. In which type of teacher preparation program did you receive your training?

- ☐ 4-year traditional
☐ 5-year traditional
☐ Masters program
☐ Alternative Route to Licensure/Certification

4. School Demographics

1. Which special education programs are offered at your school? (Indicate all programs present)

☐ KIDS program

☐ Autism

☐ Learning Disabled (SLD)

☐ Early Childhood Special
Education

☐ Resource

☐ Mental Retardation (MCS)

☐ Full Inclusion

☐ Multiple Impairment/Profound
(MCS-DD)

☐ Emotional Disturbance
(SEC/SDE)

2. How many special education teachers left your campus last year?

5. Questionnaire

1. Using the scale, please indicate your perception of whether the following factors influence special education teacher attrition.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

Administrative dissemination of information	<input type="text"/>
Opportunities to share professional skills with administration and staff	<input type="text"/>
Large Class size	<input type="text"/>
Irrelevant topics presented at professional development	<input type="text"/>
Administrative exclusion of special education programming	<input type="text"/>
Conflict with other teachers	<input type="text"/>
Diversity of student needs	<input type="text"/>
No site-based mentor to continue support in professional development	<input type="text"/>
Administrative familiarity with special education law	<input type="text"/>
Difficulty scheduling meetings with general education staff	<input type="text"/>
Amount of Paperwork	<input type="text"/>
Availability of disability specific professional development opportunities	<input type="text"/>
Administrative encouragement of staff and students	<input type="text"/>
General education teachers unfamiliar with special education student needs	<input type="text"/>
Number of required meetings	<input type="text"/>
Availability of advanced training in curricular development	<input type="text"/>
Administrative communication of expectations	<input type="text"/>
Isolation from general education staff	<input type="text"/>
Amount of planning time	<input type="text"/>
Assigned mentor within subject area or discipline	<input type="text"/>
Administrative support with difficult issues	<input type="text"/>
Availability of planning time with general education staff	<input type="text"/>
Lack of student progress	<input type="text"/>
Availability of induction programs for new teachers	<input type="text"/>
Administrative recognition for accomplishments	<input type="text"/>
Common planning time with other special education staff	<input type="text"/>
Availability of curriculum resources	<input type="text"/>
Availability of training in IEP development	<input type="text"/>
Quality of administrative supervision	<input type="text"/>
Collegial support with student progress monitoring	<input type="text"/>

Availability of materials for students	<input type="text"/>
Availability of advanced training in pedagogical skills	<input type="text"/>
Approachability of administrators	<input type="text"/>
Availability of in school social networks	<input type="text"/>
Poor student motivation	<input type="text"/>
Professional development to assist with certification requirements	<input type="text"/>
Tension with administration	<input type="text"/>
General educators' resistance to co-teaching	<input type="text"/>
Low Salary	<input type="text"/>
Availability of professional development to prepare for diverse populations	<input type="text"/>
Consistency of performance evaluations	<input type="text"/>
Availability of collaboration to support student inclusion	<input type="text"/>
Student behavioral issues	<input type="text"/>
Availability of professional development for teachers with varying experience	<input type="text"/>
Opportunity for teachers to participate in leadership roles	<input type="text"/>
Special education teachers feel isolated from other special education teachers	<input type="text"/>
The number of students on caseloads	<input type="text"/>
Opportunity for professional development designed for career advancement	<input type="text"/>
Administrative empowerment of teachers	<input type="text"/>
Ample opportunity to communicate with peers	<input type="text"/>
Availability of additional adult assistance	<input type="text"/>
Limited pre-service professional development	<input type="text"/>

2. Comments

Appendix C: Teachers' Perception of Factors Leading to Attrition (TPFLA)

2. Participant Consent

*** 1. Purpose of the Study:** You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to examine special education teachers' and administrators' views on factors leading to attrition. For the purposes of this study, "attrition" is defined as teachers' departure from a teaching assignment to change schools, teaching specializations, or districts, or from the profession.

Participants: Your participation in the study would help develop a better understanding of attrition and retention in the field of Special Education. Participants are either special education teachers or administrators working within the Clark County School District.

Procedures: You will be asked to access an online questionnaire, provide basic demographic data about yourself and your professional career, and complete 52 questions. Rating the influence a number of factors have on special education teacher attrition. You will rate each item on the following scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree.

Benefits of Participation: We hope to learn about the factors that lead special education teachers to leave special education teaching assignments. Participant benefits may include the opportunity to reflect on your perceptions of factors associated with attrition and retention of special education teachers. Your participation in the study will help educators understand primary reasons for attrition.

Risks of Participation: This study may include only minimal risks such as fatigue during or after the questionnaire completion.

Cost / Compensation: There will be neither a financial cost nor compensation for your participation in this study. The study will take approximately 20 minutes of your time to complete.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study time during the research study.

Confidentiality: All information gathered in this study will be kept completely

confidential. No reference will be made in written or electronic materials that could link you to this study. Only average rating will be reported. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for 3 years after completion of the study. After the storage time, the information gathered will be destroyed.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Jennifer Boeddeker at 702-521-7943. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 702-895-2794.

Participant Consent: I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age.

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

3. Demographic Information

1.

Gender

☐ Male ☐ Female

2. Ethnic Background

☐ African American ☐ Hispanic/Latino ☐ Would rather not answer
☐ Asian ☐ Native American/Pacific Islander
☐ Caucasian ☐ Other

3. Age

☐ 20-24 ☐ 35-39
☐ 25-29 ☐ 40-44
☐ 30-34 ☐ 45 or older

4. Highest Degree Obtained

☐ Bachelors ☐ Doctorate
☐ Masters ☐ Other

5. What is your current teaching grade level?

☐ Elementary ☐ High School
☐ Middle/Junior High

6. What is your current Special Education licensure/endorsement status?

☐ Fully endorsed/licensed ☐ Emergency
☐ Conditional ☐ Long-term substitute

7. Number of years in teaching

☐ 0-3 ☐ 8-12 ☐ 21-25
☐ 4-7 ☐ 13-20 ☐ 26+

8. Number of years in Special Education

- ☐ 0-3 ☐ 8-12 ☐ 21-25
☐ 4-7 ☐ 13-20 ☐ 26+

9. Number of years in your current assignment

- ☐ 0-3 ☐ 8-12 ☐ 21-25
☐ 4-7 ☐ 13-20 ☐ 26+

10. In which type of teacher preparation program did you receive your training?

- ☐ 4-year Traditional
☐ 5-year Traditional
☐ Alternative Route to Licensure/Certification
☐ Masters program
☐ None of the above

11. Which special education programs are offered at your school? (Indicate all programs present)

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> KIDS program | <input type="checkbox"/> Autism | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning Disabled (SLD) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Early Childhood Special Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Mental Retardation (MCS) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Full Inclusion | <input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Impairment/Profound (MCS-DD) | <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional Disturbance (SEC/SDE) |

12. Do you plan to stay in your current assignment?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Undecided

13. Do you plan to stay in Special Education?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Undecided

14. How long do you plan to stay in Special Education?

- ☐ Leaving as soon as possible ☐ 5-10 years ☐ 16-25 years
☐ 2-4 years ☐ 11-15 years ☐ until retirement

15. If you are planning to leave special education in the next 5 years, it would be for: (Check all)

- ☐ Building level administration ☐ More time with family ☐ Not listed
☐ General education classroom ☐ Retirement
☐ District level administration ☐ A position outside of education

4. Questionnaire

1. Using the scale, please indicate your perception of whether the following factors influence special education teacher attrition.

Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

Administrative dissemination of information	<input type="text"/>
Opportunities to share professional skills with administration and staff	<input type="text"/>
Large Class size	<input type="text"/>
Irrelevant topics presented at professional development	<input type="text"/>
Administrative exclusion of special education programming	<input type="text"/>
Conflict with other teachers	<input type="text"/>
Diversity of student needs	<input type="text"/>
No site-based mentor to continue support in professional development	<input type="text"/>
Administrative familiarity with special education law	<input type="text"/>
Difficulty scheduling meetings with general education staff	<input type="text"/>
Amount of Paperwork	<input type="text"/>
Availability of disability specific professional development opportunities	<input type="text"/>
Administrative encouragement of staff and students	<input type="text"/>
General education teachers unfamiliar with special education student needs	<input type="text"/>
Number of required meetings	<input type="text"/>
Availability of advanced training in curricular development	<input type="text"/>
Administrative communication of expectations	<input type="text"/>
Isolation from general education staff	<input type="text"/>
Amount of planning time	<input type="text"/>
Assigned mentor within subject area or discipline	<input type="text"/>
Administrative support with difficult issues	<input type="text"/>
Availability of planning time with general education staff	<input type="text"/>
Lack of student progress	<input type="text"/>
Availability of induction programs for new teachers	<input type="text"/>
Administrative recognition for accomplishments	<input type="text"/>
Common planning time with other special education staff	<input type="text"/>
Availability of curriculum resources	<input type="text"/>
Availability of training in IEP development	<input type="text"/>
Quality of administrative supervision	<input type="text"/>
Collegial support with student progress monitoring	<input type="text"/>

Availability of materials for students	<input type="text"/>
Availability of advanced training in pedagogical skills	<input type="text"/>
Approachability of administrators	<input type="text"/>
Availability of in school social networks	<input type="text"/>
Poor student motivation	<input type="text"/>
Professional development to assist with certification requirements	<input type="text"/>
Tension with administration	<input type="text"/>
General educators' resistance to co-teaching	<input type="text"/>
Low Salary	<input type="text"/>
Availability of professional development to prepare for diverse populations	<input type="text"/>
Consistency of performance evaluations	<input type="text"/>
Availability of collaboration to support student inclusion	<input type="text"/>
Student behavioral issues	<input type="text"/>
Availability of professional development for teachers with varying experience	<input type="text"/>
Opportunity for teachers to participate in leadership roles	<input type="text"/>
Special education teachers feel isolated from other special education teachers	<input type="text"/>
The number of students on caseloads	<input type="text"/>
Opportunity for professional development designed for career advancement	<input type="text"/>
Administrative empowerment of teachers	<input type="text"/>
Ample opportunity to communicate with peers	<input type="text"/>
Availability of additional adult assistance	<input type="text"/>
Limited pre-service professional development	<input type="text"/>

2. Comments

Appendix D: Institutional Review Board Approval



Social/Behavioral IRB – Expedited Review Modification Approved

NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:

Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the Institutional Officer.

DATE: November 9, 2009
TO: Dr. Sherri Strawser, Special Education
FROM: Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
RE: Notification of IRB Action by Dr. Paul Jones, Chair *PJL*
Protocol Title: **A Mixed Methods Comparison of Special Education Teachers' and Principals' Perceptions of Factors Leading to Attrition and Retention**
Protocol #: 0903-3045

The modification of the protocol named above has been reviewed and approved.

Modifications reviewed for this action include:

- Wording in the Informed Consent and items on the questionnaires are modified.

This IRB action will not reset your expiration date for this protocol. The current expiration date for this protocol is April 20, 2010.

Should there be *any* change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a **Modification Form** through OPRS. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until modifications have been approved by the IRB.

Should the use of human subjects described in this protocol continue beyond April 20, 2010, it would be necessary to submit a **Continuing Review Request Form** 60 days before the expiration date.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at OPRSHumanSubjects@unlv.edu or call 895-2794.

Appendix E: Clark County School Approval

BOARD OF SCHOOL TRUSTEES

Terri Janison, President
Carolyn Edwards, Vice President
Sheila Moulton, Clerk
Chris Garvey, Member
Larry P. Mason, Member
Deanna L. Wright, Member
Dr. Linda E. Young, Member

Dr. Walt Rulffes, Superintendent

July 20, 2009

Jennifer Boeddeker
9283 Ansley Court
Las Vegas, NV 89148

Dear Jennifer:


The Research Review Committee office of the Clark County School District has received your request entitled: *A Comparison of Special Education Teachers' and Administrators' Perceptions of Factors Leading to Attrition and Retention*. We are pleased to inform you that your sponsored proposal has been approved with the following provisos:

1. Participation is strictly and solely on a voluntary basis,
2. Provide letter of acceptance from principals who agree to be involved with the study.

This research protocol is approved for a period of one year from the approval date. The expiration of this protocol is July 19, 2010. If the use of human subjects described in the referenced protocol will continue beyond the expiration date, you must provide a letter requesting an extension *one month* prior to the date of expiration. The letter must indicate whether there will be any modifications to the original protocol. If there is any change to the protocol it will be necessary to request additional approval for such change(s) in writing to the Research Review Committee.

Please provide a copy of your research findings to this office upon completion. We look forward to the results. If you have any questions or require assistance please do not hesitate to contact Brett Campbell at 855-7783 or e-mail at bdcampbell@interact.ccsd.net.

Sincerely,


Arlene Lewis
Director
Research and School Improvement
Chair, Research Review Committee

AL:ck

Cc: Kaweeda Adams
Brett Campbell
Research Review Committee
Eva White – SUPPORT
Paul Garbiso – SUPPORT

RRC-85-2009

Main Office: 5100 WEST SAHARA AVENUE • LAS VEGAS, NEVADA 89146 • TELEPHONE (702) 799-5000

Appendix F: Administrator Recruitment Letter

Greetings administrators,

My name is Jennifer Boeddeker and I am a special education teacher with the Clark County School District (Sawyer Middle School) and a student at the University of Nevada Las Vegas.

I am inviting you to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to examine special education teachers' and administrators' views on factors leading to attrition. For the purposes of this study, "attrition" is defined as teachers' departure from a teaching assignment to change schools, teaching specializations, districts, or from the profession. Your participation in the study would help develop a better understanding of attrition and retention in the field of special education. To participate, you must be either a site administrator (e.g. principal, assistant principal, or dean) or a special education teacher who works directly with students with disabilities.

It will take approximately 20 minutes of time to complete the questionnaire. You are asked to access an online questionnaire, provide basic demographic information data about you and your school, and complete 52 questions; rating the influence a number of items have on special education teacher attrition. You will rate each item on the following scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree.

The questionnaire and study procedures have been developed to keep total anonymity. The investigators of the study will neither attempt to identify the participants nor link participants to their schools.

Your participation in this study is totally voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study. Please note that only two weeks are available to complete the on-line questionnaire. I ask that you complete the questions within one session when possible.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your support in this investigation. If you have any questions regarding the survey or the investigation, please contact the researchers via email or telephone.

Thank you,

Jennifer Boeddeker, M.Ed.
JCBoeddeker@interact.ccsd.net
702-895-1109

Administrator Link:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=RSzVIZczO0OKQPZxIee_2fEw_3d_3d

Appendix G: Teacher Recruitment Letter

Greetings teachers,

My name is Jennifer Boeddeker and I am a special education teacher with the Clark County School District (Sawyer Middle School) and a student at the University of Nevada Las Vegas.

I am inviting you to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to examine special education teachers' and administrators' views on factors leading to attrition. For the purposes of this study, "attrition" is defined as teachers' departure from a teaching assignment to change schools, teaching specializations, districts, or from the profession. Your participation in the study would help develop a better understanding of attrition and retention in the field of special education. To participate, you must be either a site administrator (e.g. principal, assistant principal, or dean) or a special education teacher who works directly with students with disabilities.

It will take approximately 20 minutes of time to complete the questionnaire. You are asked to access an online questionnaire, provide basic demographic information data about you and your school, and complete 52 questions; rating the influence a number of items have on special education teacher attrition. You will rate each item on the following scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree.

The questionnaire and study procedures have been developed to keep total anonymity. The investigators of the study will neither attempt to identify the participants nor link participants to their schools.

Your participation in this study is totally voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study. Please note that only two weeks are available to complete the on-line questionnaire. I ask that you complete the questions within one session when possible.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your support in this investigation. If you have any questions regarding the survey or the investigation, please contact the researchers via email or telephone.

Thank you,
Jennifer Boeddeker, M.Ed.

JCBoeddeker@interact.ccsd.net
702-895-1109

Teacher Link:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=D2SNiNqYcCYMvtvKSLYgsg_3d_3dR

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