Characteristics and profiles of teachers of severely and/or multiply disabled students

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UMI®
CHARACTERISTICS AND PROFILES OF TEACHERS
OF SEVERELY AND/OR MULTIPLY
DISABLED STUDENTS

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
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Characteristics and Profiles of Teachers of Severely and/or Multiply
Disabled Students

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Persistent Problems

By

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The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the demographic variables and to investigate in an explanatory fashion an array of factors and variables that may well influence career decisions of teachers working with students of multiple impairments. It was specifically focused on factors that are linked with perceptions of administrative support or lack of it, commitment to special education, work related stress, emotional stress, burnout, desire to change career and commitment to Clark County School District. It specially focused on teachers of students with multiple impairments who are working in regular and special schools.

Because retention and attrition rates vary depending on the specialty area, it will be important and imperative to understand, document, and describe in detail the work place conditions associated with the present study for this one important group of special educators.

The study conducted in the Clark County School District headquartered in Las Vegas, Nevada.
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DEDICATION

Dedicated to Mohammed Risheg "Mo," my best friend, for his love and belief in who I am.

Dedicated to my daughter, Hiba Risheg, my love and joy.

Dedicated to Zaid Risheg "Dido," my nephew, for his inspiration.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank Allah for helping me get through this degree process. My prayers were obviously heard.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Mo and Hiba who never thought twice about the sacrifices they made to help me through my entire education. Their love, support and encouragement will always be remembered and treasured.

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Special appreciation is expressed to C. Jean Reynolds, my school principal; to Janice J. McKiernan and Linda Abner, my best friends; to Candace Ling, my school nurse, for all her encouragement; and to those individuals whom I cannot name. Without their support, time and energy, this project would not have been possible.
CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND ITS PURPOSE

Introduction

Each day in the United States, millions of children go off to schools, each with different strengths and weaknesses, abilities and disabilities. Over five million of these children have been identified as having a specific disability such as traumatic brain injuries, autism, attention-deficit disorder, mild to severe mental retardation and specific learning disabilities (American Association on Mental Retardation, 1992; USDOE, 1998). These are just a few of the types and conditions that necessitate specialized instruction. In order to address the unique needs of these children, schools rely upon teachers who have been specifically trained to work with this special segment of students' population (May, Kunde & Akpan, 1994; Boe, Bobbitt & Barkanic, 1998; Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Barkanic & Maislin, 1999). These special education teachers play a vital, and one can say, an indispensable role in the daily lives of children and youth with disabilities, and their long-term achievements in learning.

Since the passage of the P.L.94-142, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (originally called the Education for the Handicapped Act), concern has been expressed that there are an inadequate number of appropriately qualified special education teachers (and related services personnel) to meet the needs of the constantly growing number of children covered by the law (Arnold & Serpas, 1993; CEC, 1996; Cook & Boe, 1995).
Special education teachers have been consistently in short supply and thus, in recent years this particular field has been designated as a “critical shortage” teaching area (Clinton, 1997). Within the special education field the most acute shortage are for teachers of children with physical and mental disabilities (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Henke, Choy, Geiss & Broughaman, 1996).

Mounting shortages of these special education teachers who work with physically and mentally disabled students is unfortunately occurring at the time when these same teachers are being asked to perform their roles under even more difficult and stressful bureaucratic conditions. While the shortage is partially a natural consequence of the increasing demand for the highly qualified and diverse pool of special education teachers, the increasing numbers of students who are being identified with severe mental and physical disabilities, as more effective and conscientious assessments are applied, is exacerbating it (Pickett, 1996).

The resulting shortages are more severe, perhaps even more critical than the rising need for new teachers, because of the loss of seasoned special education teachers who work with multiple disabled students. Teachers of the severely mental and physical disable students are leaving their jobs at an almost twice the rate of generalist special education teachers (May, Kundert & Akpan, 1994; Boe, Bobbitt, Cook & Weber, 1995). Therefore, some of the most difficult students to teach are often served by inexperienced and unqualified teachers who also lack the mentorship of more experienced special education teachers (Rosenberg, 1994; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff & Harniss, 2001).

Solving this personnel shortage problem is complex and requires multiple strategies, included but not limited to, more effective recruitment of qualified
personnel, powerful incentives for professional development and, most of all, retention of seasoned teachers. The latter is particularly important because attrition is a major contributor to this special education personnel shortage problem (Boe, Cook, Bobbitt & Webber, 1995; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff & Harniss, 2001; Rosenberg, 1994). However, simply retaining these teachers is not enough. It is critical to develop programs in such a way that teachers will remain committed and enthusiastic.

Statement of the Problem

The need for qualified special education teachers of severely disabled students continues to be a persistent problem in the delivery of special education services. Personnel shortages in this field, as well as the use of unqualified personnel to fill special education teaching positions, are widely acknowledged (American Speech-Language Hearing Association et al. 1989; Cook & Boe, 1995; Gonzalez, 1995).

Special education teachers are leaving the profession for various reasons. One of the contributing variables frequently discussed is professional stress and burnout (Brownell & Smith, 1992; Singer, 1993; Brownell, Smith, McNellis & Lenk, 1995). Over a period of time, the cumulative effect of stress will dampen a teacher’s commitment to remain in the classroom and the teaching profession (Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996; Gonzalez, 1995; Johnson, Gold, & Vicker, 1982; Littrell, Billingsley & Cross, 1994).

Eventually, this work environment will directly increase teacher attrition, affect current staffing patterns and adversely impact the quality of educational and related services for students with special needs. Research is needed to identify factors that are associated with job stress, and add, to the potential for burnout, affect professional
commitment, and impair the intent to continue in the teaching profession among special education teachers of students with multiple impairments. Because retention rates vary depending on the special education area, it will be important to understand, document, and describe in detail the workplace conditions and perceptions of the teachers in this highly specialized area.

Purpose of the Study

As stated, previous studies suggest that special education teachers leave teaching for a variety of reasons; some are personal and others are related to work conditions specific to special education. However, none of these studies have focused specifically on why special educators working with severe physically and mentally challenged students’ leave these teaching assignments (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Boe, Lovett, Cook, Barkanic & Maislin, 1999; Billingsley, 1993).

This study was designed to investigate in an exploratory fashion, an array of factors and variables that may well influence career decisions of teachers working with students of multiple impairments. It was specifically focused on factors that are linked with perceptions of administrative support or lack of it, commitment to special education, work related stress, emotional stress, burnout, desire to change career and commitment to the Clark County School District. The study was conducted in the Clark County School District headquartered in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Significance of the Study

This study should assist school district administrators, school site administrators, higher education institution policy makers, and state policy makers in determining ways
to decrease attrition and increase retention of teachers of physically and mentally
disabled students.

It should also provide insights as to the primary variables associated with selection
of this career specialty and thus has implications for recruitment strategies for new
teachers in this particular area of teaching.

Conceptual Framework

Educational research has produced several models intended to conceptualize career
decisions, occupational stress, burnout and attrition among special education teachers
(Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Littrell, Billingsley & Cross, 1994; Pullis, 1992). The
review of these and other literature in chapter II will be guided by these models and
will (a) identify the primary variables that influence career decisions among teachers
of students with multiple impairment (b) suggest relationships and interactions among
these variables and (c) provide the reader with a conceptual framework for interpreting
the research findings that follow.

Research Questions

The focus of the study was on teachers of students with severe mental and physical
disabilities and sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of teachers of the severely and/or multiply
disabled students in the Clark County School District?

2. Do the teacher characteristics vary by years of experience, age, gender,
education and salary level?
3. What is the demographic profile of the typical teacher of the severely and/or multiply disabled students in the Clark County School District?

4. Is there a discernable difference between groups of these teachers when compared by type of school, race or gender?

Design and Methodology

Subjects

The population or subjects for this study was identified from the Clark County School District headquartered in Las Vegas, Nevada. Two participant groups were identified. The first group was special education teachers who worked with students of severe multiple disabilities in self-contained programs in regular schools. Also, because the number was reasonably small, all special education teachers working in special schools were included in the study and constituted the second participant group.

In this study a teacher was defined as any full time special education teacher whose main assignment was teaching students with severe multiple disabilities in any of grades K through 12 in any self-contained classroom throughout the Clark County School District.

Instrument

A seventy-four item questionnaire was designed specifically for this study. The questionnaire measured seven levels; stress/burnout, job satisfaction, administration support, demographics, attrition, career decision and job commitment. The items were rated on a four-point scale with (4) strongly agree to (1) strongly disagree.
The questionnaire was developed with the help of the Cannon Research Center at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The focus of the study was on teachers of students with severe multiple disabilities and sought answers to the following variables:

1. Job stress/burnout: This variable was assessed with multiple questions that asked the respondents to indicate their feelings and the extent to which they felt tension, frustration, anxiety, and nervousness in relation to their work. The response scale ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

2. Job satisfaction: The respondents were asked to indicate their satisfaction with multiple questions related to their work, including salary, importance and challenge, recognition, working conditions, relationship with colleagues and the job as a whole. The scales ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

3. Administration support: The questions represent respondents' perceptions of administration support, consideration assistance, decision-making, freedom of teaching and problem solving. Response choices ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

4. Demographic information: Included gender, level of education, total number of years taught, salary range and ethnic background.

5. Attrition: Was assessed with questions to determine the extent to which lack of support from administration, stress, job dissatisfaction, lack of participation in decision making and inadequate resources affect their decision whether to change jobs or stay in the field of special education. Also the questions assessed if the risk of teachers leaving differs by the years of experience, personal characteristics, program location from the
perspective of teachers who worked in *regular schools* and *special schools*. The response scale ranges from (4) strongly agree to (1) strongly disagree.

6. Career choices: Items consisted of questions to determine if having a person with disability in the family influenced the teacher’s career choice, to the extent of which commitment and job satisfaction influenced teachers’ intent to stay in their teaching assignment. Responses choices ranged from (4) strongly agree to (1) strongly disagree.

7. Commitment: Two measures of commitment were used. One measured professional commitment to special education profession in general and to special education program in particular. The second measured teachers’ commitment to the employing school district. Response choices ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Collection of Data

The research reported in this study was based on data collected from 85 teachers working with students of severe multiple disabilities in self-contained classrooms in *regular schools* and 80 teachers working in *special schools* in the Clark County School District headquartered in Las Vegas, Nevada. A packet was mailed on September 20th, 2002 to the first participant group, special education teachers working in *regular schools*.

The packet included information about the study, an appeal for participating, commitment to confidentiality, and directions on how to complete the questionnaire. An appeal for participating letter and a self addressed stamped envelope was included to return the completed forms.
Because the number of special education teachers working in special schools was relatively small, a total of 80 teachers, the researcher sought the sight administrator's permission to personally survey the teachers in order to assure a high return on the completed forms. Teachers were asked to complete the forms and the researcher personally collected the completed forms.

Treatment of Data

Collected data were organized and subjected to the appropriate analytical/statistical analysis. Proper tests were applied to the data and the results generated were then properly interpreted. Several analysis methods were used to examine relationships between the scales and other factors. The main techniques used were correlation, using Spearman’s rho for ordinal, non-parametric data. Frequency Distribution was used to generate the bar charts, and for comparisons by school type and experience. Chi Square, Fisher’s Exact Test (1-sided), Pearson Chi-Square (2-sided), Linear-by-Linear Association (2-sided), and Likelihood Ratio (2-sided) were used to assess the validity of relationships not examined by correlation. Finally, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used for comparison, but the results were not significant and are not included.

Limitations

1. Data for this study were limited to the Clark County School District teachers that actually responded to the mailed survey.

2. Self-reports were dependent upon responding fully and accurately and that limitation applied in this study.
3. Uncertified personnel filling positions as long-term substitute teachers were not defined as qualified specialists and thus were not included as subjects in this study.

**Delimitation**

1. The study was delimited to one single, large, urban school district in the Southwest, the Clark County School District, with headquarters in Las Vegas, Nevada. Any attempt to generalize beyond that district must be done cautiously.

2. This study was further delimited to the school district teachers' of students of multiple disabilities who were currently employed by the district in both *regular* and *special schools*. Transition of special education teachers from classroom to administrative positions or to positions in general education within or outside of the Clark County School District or in other States was not a part of this study.

**Definition of Terms**

"**Attrition**" defined as a component of teacher turnover or changes in teacher status from year to year. Teacher turnover may include teacher exiting the profession, classroom, but may also include teachers who change fields.

"**Burnout**" defined as physical, emotional, and attitudinal exhaustion. It is a general concept which includes almost any negative reaction of teachers to pressure related to their work such as becoming frustrated, mentally exhausted, excessively
worried, feeling depressed and anxious, and acting defensively with others and mounts as the joy of teaching begins to gradually slip away.

"Job commitment" defined as "The relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization" (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982, p.27).

"Job Satisfaction" defined as a state of pleasure from the feeling of achievement and facilitating achievement of one’s values from a job (Locke, 1969).

"Mental Retardation" defined as a condition characterized by the possession of cognitive abilities, which are significantly below average, with deficits in adaptive behavior and academic or developmental achievement.

"Multiple Impairments" defined as the occurrence of mental retardation with another disability, the combination of which causes severe educational problems.

"Physical/Orthopedic Impairment" defined as an impairment, which adversely affects the ability of a person to benefit from or participate in an educational program without special education.

"Qualified Teachers" defined as teachers who have the prerequisite subject-content knowledge and skills in sufficient details to be able to teach the particular course effectively and with confidence (Little, 1995; Xin & MacMillan, 1999). It is the teachers’ ability to use their subject content knowledge in conjunction with instructional techniques to enable students to meet the standards for the course they are being taught (Xin & MacMillan, 1999).

"Race" defined as all respondents who selected an ethnic code other than Caucasian.
“Stress” defined as a response of negative affect that is developed when there are prolonged and increased pressures that cannot be controlled by the coping strategies that the individuals have.

“Special education instructions” defined as a resource programs, related services, unique materials, physical plant adjustments, and other education facilities, such as instruction in other settings, which modify, supplement, support, or are in place of the standard educational program in the public schools. The term includes speech pathology, physical education and vocational education (American Association on Mental Retardation, 1992).

“Severe Mental Retardation” defined as people with an intelligence quotient (IQ) below 35. An IQ of 70-130 is considered the normal range, and 100 are considered average (DSM-IV).

According to the definition in the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV), persons with severe and profound retardation, who account for 3-4% of the retarded population, have serious language and motor impairment. They usually do not speak in early childhood but can learn communication and basic self-care during the school years. Their language skills may be limited to the most basic functional words necessary to meet their daily needs. As adults, they live either with their families, in-group homes, or, when necessary, in facilities that can provide skilled medical or nursing care.

Profound Retardation, which accounts for 1-2% of the retarded population, is usually associated with neurological conditions. It is characterized by severe sensor motor difficulties beginning in early childhood and serious long-term limitations on both communication and the ability to care for oneself. Some profoundly retarded
individuals are never able to speak or to be toilet trained. Most need constant care throughout their lives.

“The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142)” of 1975 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), defined specific categories of disabilities under which children may be eligible for special education and related services. As defined by IDEA, the term “children with disabilities; means a child:

“With mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.”

Summary

Educating children with special needs who may not benefit from regular school education calls for unique applications in curricula, classroom arrangements, provision of aids, additional finances, appropriate teacher preparation, hiring and retaining qualified teachers (Biklen, 1991; May, Kundert & Akpan, 1994; Weintraub & McClain, 1994).

To understand special education teachers’ reasons for initial career selection, persistence and/or disengagement, it is important to determine differences between special educators teaching different types of students (e.g., those with severe physical and mental disabilities or visually impaired) and those working in different service delivery models such as a resource room, self-contained classroom, or consultation base (Singer, 1991; Siegel, Taylor & Greene, 1996; Brownell, Smith, McNellis & Lenk, 1995).
Efforts to retain seasoned and qualified special education teachers working with severe physical and mental disabilities are worthy of examination to assure success for all students in the future. Previous studies that have focused on problems with special education have suggested that special education teachers leave teaching for a variety of reasons, some are personal and others are related to teaching conditions specific to special education such as stress, burnout and work environments that special education teachers face each day, but none of these studies focused on teachers working with severe physically and mentally disabled students (Platt & Olson, 1990; Singer, 1993). Therefore, it was determined that it would be beneficial to study and identify factors and variables that may well influence career decisions of teachers working specifically with students with severe mental and physical disabilities. Also it appeared to be important to study the fit between the current corps of such teachers and their environments to point the way toward positive ways of helping these teachers not just survive, but thrive in the teaching environments in which they find themselves.

Examining, in depth, large numbers of special education teachers who regularly work with severe physically and mentally disabled students in varying school locations and analyzing their work conditions, environments and decisions seemed likely to provide us with important information. This information may help school district administrators, school site administrators, higher education institution policy makers, and state policy makers in determining ways to decrease attrition and disengagement, or at least set up opportunities to make the work environment more satisfactory for teachers as well as their school districts.

With fewer individuals going into special education teaching and many whom are already special education teachers leaving teaching entirely or leaving the field of
special education, educational community faces a shortage that jeopardizes the learning of an entire group of exceptional children.

Outline of the Report

This report was written in a five-chapter format. Chapter I presented a succinct introduction to the study. The problem and purpose of the study were discussed. Chapter II will cover a review of the related professional literature on key topics and issues. Chapter III will be devoted to a more detailed description of the procedures and methodologies employed in the study. The results are displayed in Chapter IV. Finally Chapter V recounts the critical elements and results of the study, discusses their implications and suggests future research still needed.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The problem underlying this study is that the number of special education teachers is dwindling and there appears to be fewer and fewer being trained to take their places.

Teachers make their decisions to leave the special education classroom for a variety of reasons. Comprehensive reviews of the teacher attrition literature suggest that researchers have been unable to articulate why special education teachers leave the classroom (Brownell & Smith, 1997; Brownell, Smith, McNellis & Lenk, 1995). Furthermore, researchers know little about the effect of teachers' attrition, stress and burnout in special education for students with special needs or the impact on individual schools and school systems because the majority of the studies have failed to document teachers' exit paths (Brownell et al, 1994).

The turnover and attrition of special education teachers can have a devastating effect on establishing high-quality programs for students with disabilities (Brownell & Smith, 1997; Zabel, Boomer & King, 1984; Billingsley, 1993). When district administrators are continually replacing staff, they may have difficulty ensuring that programs are consistent in philosophy and implementation. Of course, some teacher turnover is unavoidable and even beneficial. Indeed effective business organizations usually both
promote and benefit from a limited amount of employee turnover by eliminating low-caliber performers and bringing in new blood. Moreover, teacher’s attrition and turnover has the added benefit of keeping down salary costs by replacing senior teachers with less-expensive beginners (Ingersoll, 2001).

But high levels of teacher’s attrition are not cost free. It has been long recognized that high rates of employee departure incurs substantial training and recruitment costs and thus are both cause of and effect the productivity problems (Ingersoll, 2001).

In this regard, this study was intended to identify factors and variables that influence key career decisions of teachers working with severe mental and physical disabilities. It especially focused on factors that are linked with job stress, dissatisfaction, burnout, work environment and attrition.

In reviewing the literature, the researcher surveyed work dealing with special education and its history, the issue of where students with severe disabilities should be educated, and the nature of the work of special education teachers. The training and qualifications of special education teachers, the current challenge facing special education teachers, teachers’ attrition and reasons for attrition and shortage, special education teacher demographics, and the implications of attrition were also addressed in this review of literature.

Special Education and Its History

Public education is viewed as a birthright in our country that leads to an educated electorate without which there would be no viable democracy (Levine & Wexler, 1981; Yell, et al. 1998). A common misconception regarding public education is that our Federal Constitution guarantees it (Yell & Rogers, et al. 1998). In fact education is the
responsibility and the prerogative of the states. The Tenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution implies that education is the responsibility of states governments. That education is a state, not federal, matter was seen as essential by the founders of this country (Levine & Wexler, 1981; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1994; Yell & Rogers et al. 1998).

Children and youth with disabilities have historically received unequal treatment in the public education system. In the early 20th Century, the enactment of compulsory education laws in the states began to change the educational opportunities for these students (Yell, et al. 1998; Haring, McCormick & Haring, 1994; Hewett & Forness, 1984). Opportunities for admittance to public schools were greater, but many disabled students nevertheless did not receive an effective or appropriate education (Winzer, 1993; Weintraub & Ballard, 1982).

Despite the enactment of compulsory education laws, for most of our nation’s history, schools were allowed to exclude, and often did, certain children, especially those with disabilities (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1981).

Beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s parents and advocates for students with disabilities began to use the courts in an attempt to force states to provide an equal educational opportunity for these students. These efforts were very successful and eventually led to the passage of several pieces of Federal Legislation to ensure these rights (Winzer, 1993; Weintraub & Ballard, 1982). This commitment to provide greater than-usual educational and related services that enable students with special needs to experience schooling success has been a guiding force in the design and implementation of special compensatory and remedial education programs (Wang & Baker, 1995/1986; Winzer, 1993; Weintraub & Ballard, 1982).
The emergence of special education as a firmly entrenched arm of public schooling has constituted a remarkable story in the history of 20th Century American education (Osgood, 1999). There is now an extensive body of professional literature as well as a number of professional associations devoted solely to the education of children with disabilities (Osgood, 1999). In addition, substantial numbers of individuals hold full-time assignments in schools, agencies, and universities as special education teachers, specialists, administrators, consultants, and researchers. Thus, in many ways, the education of children with disabilities has become its own powerful and influential world, one exhibiting a unique professional identity and status (Osgood, 1999; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995).

In response to the deplorable conditions that their children with special needs had to endure in schools, as well as the increasing exclusion of children with disabilities from schools, parents began to band together. They came together as support for one another and to work for change (Levine & Wexler, 1981; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990; Winzer, 1993). In 1933 the first such group formed in Cuyahoga County, Ohio. The Cuyahoga County Ohio Council for Retarded Children consisted initially of five mothers of children with mental retardation who banded together to protest the exclusion of their children from school (Levine & Wexler, 1981; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990; Winzer, 1993). This protest resulted in the establishment of a special class for the children, sponsored by the parents themselves. These local organizations served several purposes. They provided an avenue to express frustration; afforded an opportunity to band together to make change locally and ultimately set the stage for the national advocacy movement on behalf of individuals with disabilities (Winzer, 1993).
During the 1960s educators, parents, and professionals began to seriously question society's stereotypes about exceptional persons (Winzer, 1993). The Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, made society think about equal rights for everyone. The movement sought changes in society that would allow minorities, particularly African Americans, equality of opportunity and led to litigation and changes in legislation. This legislation provided greater constitutional protection for minorities and eventually also to persons with disabilities. A landmark case, Brown v. Board of Education (1954: hereafter Brown), was a major victory for the Civil Rights Movement and has been the major underpinning for further civil rights actions. The Brown decision not only had a tremendous impact on societal right for minorities, but also affected many aspects of educational laws and procedures (Turnbull, 1993; Yell, et al. 1998; Winzer, 1993). Although it took time, the precedents set in Brown resulted in sweeping changes in schools' policies and approaches to students with disabilities.


Moving on historically, the Kennedy era marked a period of considerable federal interest in special education, vocational education, vocational rehabilitation, and other programs designed to assist unemployed, disabled youths and adults (Rusch & Phelps, 1987; Winzer, 1993). In 1961, President John F. Kennedy created the President's Panel
on Mental Retardation, and called upon America to address the significant needs of people with mental disabilities and their desire to be part of everyday life in America. The federal government thus began to move slowly into a supportive role in both financially and through the encouragement of research (Rusch & Phelps, 1897; Winzer, 1993). Mentally retarded citizens especially benefited, for they finally had found their own spokespersons and advocates. President Kennedy's interest in the problems of mental retardation stemmed, at least in part, from him having a mentally retarded sister.

Throughout the 1960s federal and state assistance contributed to further expansion of special education. In October 1963 President Kennedy signed Public Law 88-164, which broadened the earlier legislation to include most children with severe disability. The new law also defined the target population that included not only the mentally retarded but also children who were hard of hearing, deaf, speech impaired, visually handicapped, seriously emotionally disturbed, crippled, or other health impaired children who by reason thereof require special education (Rothstein, 1995; Turnbull, 1993; Burke, 1976; Winzer, 1993).

In 1966, President Lyndon B. Johnson formally established the President's Committee on Mental Retardation (PCMR). He called upon experts in the field to launch prevention measures and annually evaluate the adequacy of existing services (Rothstein, 1995; Turnbull, 1993; Burke, 1976; Winzer, 1993).

In the 1970s, President Richard Nixon called upon Americans to welcome citizens with mental retardation into their home communities by dramatically reducing the tremendous number of people who had been institutionalized because of an absence of community and home-based services (Ballard, Ramirez & Weintraub, 1982; Rothstein, 1995; Turnbull, 1993; Burke, 1976; Winzer, 1993). In 1973, the first major effort to
protect persons with disabilities against discrimination based on their disabilities took place when Congress passed Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. President Nixon signed the Act into law on September 26, 1973 (Zirkel & Kincaid, 1995).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is the Civil Rights declaration of the handicapped. Americans who had the distress of physical or mental handicaps greeted it with great hope and satisfaction. These Americans have identified Section 504 with access to vital public services, such as education. They consider it their charter, key and symbol of, their entries as full participants in the mainstream of national life (Senator Huber H. Humphrey, principle Senate author of Section 504, Congressional Record, April 26, 1977, p12216).

The primary purpose of Section 504 was to prohibit discrimination against a person with a disability by any agency receiving federal funds. These agencies are any that receive funds, personal services, and/or interest in property, whether receiving these benefits directly or through another recipient (Congressional Records, April 26, 1977). Section 504 requires the recipients of federal financial assistance to provide assurances of compliances, to take corrective steps when violations are found, and to make individualized modifications, and accommodations to provide services that are comparable to those offered to persons without disabilities (Congressional Records, April 26, 1977; Webber, 1992; Levine & Wexler, 1981; Zirkel & Kincaid, 1995).

Public Law 93-380 was another significant piece of legislation for both children with disabilities and children who are gifted and talented (Weintraub & Ballard, 1982; Rothstein, 1995; Turnbull, 1993; USDOE, 1992). The amendment acknowledged the rights of students with disabilities to an education, provided funds for programs for the education of students with disabilities under Title IV-B, specified due process
procedures, and addressed the issue of least restrictive environment (Rothstein, 1995; Turnbull, 1993; USDOE, 1992). This amendment provided the first national initiative that addressed the needs of students who were gifted and talented as well as those with disabilities (Rothstein, 1995; Turnbull, 1993; USDOE, 1992). The act, however, was not sufficiently enforceable in the eyes of many advocates for students with disabilities (Webber, 1992). Furthermore, very few teachers were being trained to work with students with special needs or disabilities and extremely small amounts of funds were available to universities to support needed research (Levine & Wexler, 1981).

*The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EAHCA)* was another piece of important legislations. In early 1973, four bills were before the Senate regarding the education of students with disabilities. These four bills were the subjects of Senate hearings held in 1973. Eventually, conference committees crafted a bill that became known as the Education Amendments of 1974, P.L. 93-380 (Martin, Martin & Terman, 1996; Ballard, Ramirez & Weintraub, 1982).

*By 1975, Congress had determined that millions of American children with disabilities were still not receiving an appropriate education. It found that more than half of the handicapped children in the United States were not receiving appropriate educational services that would enable them to have full equality of opportunity.* Therefore the Education For all Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), Sec. 3 (b) (3), known as Public Law 94-142 was enacted to remedy this situation by requiring that all students with disabilities receive free, appropriate public education and by providing a funding mechanism to help defray the costs of special education program (Ballard, Ramirez & Zantal-Wiener, 1987; USDOE; 1992; Rothstein, 1995; Martin, Martin & Terman, 1996).
The EAHCA, also called P.L. 94-142, provided federal funding to states to assist them in educating students with disabilities. States receiving federal funding were required to submit a state plan to the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (Elkind, 1998; Gerber, 2000; Martin, Martin & Terman, 1996). The plan was to describe the State’s policies and procedures to educate students with disabilities in accordance with the procedures contained in the EAHCA (Elkind, 1998; Gerber, 2000; Martin, Martin & Terman, 1996). If the Bureau approved the plan, the state was obligated to guarantee a free, appropriate public education to students with disabilities in return for federal funding. Federal regulations implementing the law took effect on August 23, 1977. All but one state, New Mexico, submitted state plans for federal funding under P.L. 94-142. New Mexico decided not to accept the funds or implement the Act (Peterson, 1988; Martin, Martin & Terman, 1996).

Public Law 94-142 proved to be landmark legislation, requiring public schools to provide students with a broad range of disabilities including physical handicaps, mental retardation, vision, speech and language problems, emotional and behavioral problems, and other learning disorders with a “Free Appropriate Public Education”. Moreover, it called for school districts to provide such schooling in the Least Restrictive Environment” possible (EAHCA, 1975, 20 U.S.C. Section 1400).

In 1990, President George Bush supported landmark legislation for protecting the rights of people with disabilities. The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) set forth standards of equal opportunity in areas of employments, transportation, telecommunications, public accommodations, and services (USDOE, 1998).

The 1990 amendments to P.L. 94-142 renamed the EAHCA the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (USDOE, 1998). Major changes in IDEA were that
the language of the law was changed to emphasize the person first, including the renaming of the law to the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, as well as changing the term handicapped students to students with disabilities; students with autism and traumatic brain injury were identified as a separate and distinct class entitled to the laws' benefits, and a plan for transition was required to be included on every student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) by age sixteen (USDOE, 1998).

On June 4th, President William Jefferson Clinton signed the Individual with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997, P. L. 105-17, into law. Over the twenty-year period between the implementation of P.L. 94-142 and its reauthorization as IDEA 1997, the focus of Congress and much of the special community changed.

In IDEA, the emphasis is not on access to schooling or access to special education, but rather on access to general education. The emphasis in IDEA is not having students with disabilities receive something special, the emphasis is on having them receive what everyone else gets. In IDEA general is good while special is viewed as not only less desirable but also as a last resort that must be justified (Zigmond, 2001; Moster & Crockett, 2000).

Today, IDEA includes broad mandates for the provision of services to all children with disabilities, from the first grader with a speech impairment to the junior high students with a history of emotional and behavior difficulties to the college-bound high school students who use a wheelchair (Zigmond, 2001; Moster & Crockett, 2000; Martin, Martin & Terman, 1996; USDOE, 1998). Despite the challenges involved in serving such a heterogeneous group, the key tenets of IDEA have remained unmodified since it was enacted in 1997 (USDOE, 1998).
Although provisions have been added or amended in order to expand the requirement of services to younger groups of children with disabilities or to improve the quality of services provided under the law, the purposes of IDEA have remained essentially the same: to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free, appropriate, public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their particular needs; to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents or guardians are protected; to assist states and localities to provide for the education of all children with disabilities; and to assess and ensure the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities (From the OSEP 22nd Annual Report to Congress, US Department of Education, 2000).

Thanks to IDEA, millions of students with disabilities who were previously denied access to an appropriate education are not only in schools, but also, at least in the best case scenarios, assigned to small classes where specially trained teachers have tailored their lessons to each student's individual needs (USDOE, 2000). Schools also are required to provide any additional services such as interpreters for the deaf or computer-assisted technology for the physically impaired that students need in order to reach their full potential. And, in more and more cases, special education students began spending time daily in regular classroom settings with their non-special education peers (Zuckerman, 2002; Rothstein, 2000; Gerbasi, 1994; Goodlad & Lovitt, 1993; Lipskey & Gartners 1989).

According to the Department of Education, in the year 2000 approximately six million children received special education services. Educating those children was estimated to cost nearly fifty-one billion dollars with forty-four billion dollars expended by states and local school districts. Despite the promise made by the federal
government in 1975 to cover forty percent of the additional costs incurred by districts to educate students with disabilities, even though federal spending for special education has continued to rise, the federal government has never paid more than fifteen percent of the total cost (US Department of Education’s Center for Special Education Finance, 2001).

Where Should Children With Severe Disabilities Be Educated?

A current popular view is that the needs of students with severe disabilities are so unique that they require specialized services that cannot be provided in the regular education program. It is generally assumed that neither students with severe disabilities nor students without such disabilities can benefit from shared public school education (Brimer, 1990; Sailor, et al. 1989; Smith, 1984; Coloninger, Giangreco & Iversin, 1992).

Few have considered the possibility that these diverse students might coexist and interact positively with each other (Brown, et al. 1979; Brimer, 1990; Goodlad & Lovitt, 1993). A philosophy that stresses the essential similarity of all human beings and their need to acquire skills that are functional in the communities in which they live, comes into unavoidable conflict with the current practices of some school districts of placing these children in segregated special schools (Goodlad & Lovitt, 1993; Giangreco, Coloninger & Iversin, 1992). A philosophy of equality and reality mandates educational environments for children that provide the necessary preparation. In other words, educational settings must provide daily and longitudinal interactions between students with severe disabilities and their counterparts without disabilities.

*Special schools* for students with severe disabilities impede their acquisition and generalization of functional, age appropriate interaction skills that facilitate community interaction. Students can hardly learn to interact appropriately with non-disabled peers without being exposed to them. Of course, exposure alone does not ensure interactions, but lack of exposure can guarantee lack of interaction (Brown et al. 1979; Murray-Seegert, 1989; Lipskey & Garners, 1989).

A small but growing number of parents and educators now advocate active integration of students with severe disabilities into mainstream education (Stainback & Stainback, 1987). This means placement of students with severe disabilities into chronologically age-appropriate, regular classes in neighborhood schools. In these settings, interactions between them and peers without disabilities are possible. Interactions may be structured and facilitated initially by the program, but eventually they should occur spontaneously (Stainback & Stainback, 1987; NASBE Study Group on Special Education, 1992; Goodland & Lovitt, 1993).

Traditional education is not at present structured or equipped to meet the needs of all students with severe disabilities. This does not mean, however, the integration is inappropriate or impractical. It only indicates that integration must proceed carefully as the regular educational system is modified and expanded to meet the needs of all students. It seems fair to conclude that, in the future, students with severe disabilities will be educated in regular classrooms alongside schoolmates without disabilities for some activities and in special education classrooms and the general community for others. This opportunity is important to them, since being educated in the mainstream
is the only realistic way to prepare them for living in mainstream society in their post-school years (Stainback & Stainback, 1987; Voeltz, 1984). After all, there are no “special” worlds, any “special” section of theaters, grocery stores, banks, cashiers, or churches. In short, the two separate worlds in the public schools do not exist in the community. In the future, the “special” world at school will end. In the meantime many, perhaps most, schools including Clark Count School District, continue the practice where severely disabled students are taught in special schools. It was assumed the factors affecting teacher attrition in these special schools could be identified.

Nature of the Work

Special education teachers work with children and youth who have a variety of disabilities. Most special education teachers instruct students at the elementary, middle or secondary school level, although some teachers work with infants and toddlers. Special education teachers design and modify instruction to meet the students’ specific special needs. These specialists also work with students who have other special instructional needs, including those who are gifted and talented. (CEC, 2001; USDOE, 1998; Cook & Boe, 1995)

The various types of disabilities delineated in government categories for types of disabilities served by special education programs include specific learning disabilities, mental retardation, speech or language impairment, serious emotional disturbance, visual and hearing impairment, orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury and multiple disabilities. Students are classified under one of these categories, and special education teachers are trained to work with specific groups (P.L. 94-142; USDOE, 1998; EAHCA, 1975, 20 U.S.C. Sections 1400).
Special education teachers use various techniques to facilitate learning and, as advocated by P.L.94-142 depending on the disability, teaching methods can include individualized instruction, problem-solving assignments, and group or individual work. Special education teachers are legally required to help develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for each special education student (P.L.94-142). This law requires that the IEP enunciate personalized goals for each student; these goals must be tailored to a student’s individual learning style and ability (P.L. 94-142; USDOE, 1998; EAHCA, 1975, 20 U.S.C. Section 1400). This program must further include a transition plan outlining specific steps to prepare special education students for middle school or high school, or in the case of older students, a job or post-secondary study. Teachers review the IEP with the student’s parents, school administrators, and the student’s general education teacher if mainstreaming is involved. They also work closely with parents to inform them of their child’s progress and suggest techniques to promote learning at home (From the OSEP 22nd Annual Report to Congress, USDOE, 2000; USDOE, 1998; P.L. 94-142).

The role of the special education teacher has been well described by the professional association of special educators (CEC, 2000). Teachers design curricula, assign work geared toward each student’s ability, grade papers and homework assignments. Special education teachers are involved in a student’s behavioral as well as academic development. They help special education students develop emotionally, become comfortable in social situations, and become aware of socially acceptable behavior. Preparing special education students for daily life after graduation is also an important aspect of the job. Teachers may help students with routine skills, such as balancing a checkbook or provide them with career counseling (CEC, 2000).
Several reports (USDOE, 2000; Zuckerman 2002; Rothstein, 2000; Gerbasi, 1994; Goodlad & Lovitt, 1993; Lipskey & Gartner, (Eds.) 1989), conducted reveal that schools have become more inclusive and special education teachers and general education teachers now increasingly work together in general education classrooms. Special education teachers help general educators adapt curriculum materials and teaching techniques to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Special education teachers work in a variety of settings. The breadth of their assignments has been widely discussed (Media Advisory, 2000; CEC, 1996). Some have their own classrooms and teach classes comprised entirely of special education students; others work as special education resource teachers and offer individualized help to students in general education classrooms; others teach along with general education teachers in classes composed of both general and special education students (Zuckerman, 2002; Rothstein, 2000; Gerbasi, 1994; Goodlad & Lovitt, 1993; Lipskey & Gartner, (Eds.) 1989). Some teacher’s work in a resource room, where special education students work several hours a day, separated from their general education classroom. A significantly smaller proportion of special education teacher’s work in special schools, in residential facilities or tutor students in homebound or hospital environments. Special education teachers who work with infants usually travel to the child’s home to work with the child and his or her parents (CEC, 1998).

There are public reports (USDOE, 2000; CEC, 2000) indicating that a large part of a special education teacher’s job involves interacting with others. They communicate frequently with parents, social workers, school psychologists, occupational and physical therapists, speech and language therapists, rehabilitation counselors, adapted physical
education teachers, special education technology specialists, creative arts, and recreational therapists, nursing staff, school administrators and other teachers.

According to the USDOE (2000) early identification of a child with special needs is another important part of a special education teacher’s job. Early intervention is essential in educating these children.

Technology is playing an increasingly important role in special education (USDOE, 2000). Special education teachers use specialized equipment such as computers with synthesized speech, interactive educational software programs, and audiotapes in what is called technology-assisted instruction.

The Training and Qualifications

According to the U.S. Department of Education (1998) all 50 states and the District of Columbia require special education teachers to be licensed. However the requirement for special education licensure varies by state. In many states, special education teachers receive a general education credential to teach kindergarten through grade twelve (AACTE, 1994; CEC, 1996; NBPTS, 1995). These teachers must also usually train in a specialty, such as learning disabilities or behavioral disorders. Some states offer general special education licensure, others license several different specialties within special education, while others require teachers to first obtain general education licensure and then add additional endorsement special education. Usually the State Board of Education or a Professional Standards Board grants such licensure (USDOE, 1998; Cambone, Zambone & Suarez, 1996; Browning & Dunn, 1994).

All states require a bachelor’s degree and a completion of an approved teacher preparation program with a prescribed number of courses or subjects, education credits
and supervised practice teaching. Many states require special education teachers to obtain a master’s degree in special education, involving at least one year of additional course work, including a specialization, beyond the bachelor’s degree (USDOE, 1998).

Some states have reciprocity agreements allowing special education teachers to transfer their licensure from one state to another, but many still require special education teachers to pass licensure requirements for that state (USDOE, 1998). The national Board for Professional Teaching standards is currently developing national certification standards for special education teachers (NBPTS, 1995).

As reported by the USDOE, about seven hundred colleges and universities across the United States offer programs in special education, including undergraduate, masters and doctoral programs. Special education teachers usually undergo longer periods of training than general education teachers. Most bachelor’s degree programs are four-year programs including general and specialized courses in special education. However, an increasing number of institutions require a fifth year or other post baccalaureate preparation. Courses typically include educational psychology, legal issues of special education, child growth and development and a course or courses of knowledge and skills needed for teaching students with disabilities as core requirements. Some programs require a specialization beyond that core. Others offer generalized special education degrees, or study in several specialized areas. The last year of the program is usually spent student teaching in a classroom supervised by a certified teacher (USDOE, 2000).

Alternative and/or emergency licensures are options now available in many states, due to shortages of teachers fully prepared to fill special education teaching positions. Alternative licensure is designed to bring college graduates and those changing careers
into special education teaching more quickly. Requirements for alternative licensure are usually less stringent than that for regular licensure and these also vary by State. In some programs, individuals begin teaching quickly under provisional licensure. They can obtain regular licensure by teaching under the supervision of licensed teachers for a period of one to two years while taking education courses. Emergency licensure is often enacted when states are having extreme difficulty finding licensed special education teachers to fill positions (Abraham, 1996/1997).

Special education teachers must be patient, able to motivate students, understanding of their student’s special needs, and accepting of differences in others (Cook, 1995, Green, 1993/1994; Osgood, 1999; Siegel, Taylor & Greene, 1996). Teachers must be creative and apply different types of teaching methods to reach students who are having difficulty. Communication and cooperation are essential skills because special education teachers spend a great deal of time interacting with others, including students, parents, school faculty and administrators (Cook, 1995; Green, 1993/1994; Osgood, 1999; Siegel, Taylor & Greene, 1996).

Special education teachers can advance to become facilitators, supervisors or administrators. They may also earn advanced degrees and become instructors in colleges that prepare others for special education teaching. In some school systems, highly experienced teachers can become mentor teachers to less experienced ones; they provide guidance to these teachers while maintain a light teaching load (USDOE, 1996; CEC, 1998).
Special Education Teacher Demographics

The most recent data available indicate that during the 1999-2000 school years, 38,671 individuals presently filling special education positions were not fully certified. This represents approximately 9% of all the teachers in special education (USDOE, 1998). Trends suggest that the need for new teachers will continue to grow at a rapid pace over the next ten years, requiring an additional 135,000 to 200,000 special education teachers over the next decade (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1999) and likely exacerbating the teacher shortage.

The shortage of special education teachers is greater than teacher shortages in any other area, including mathematics and science (AAEE, 1999). All seven categorical areas of teacher certification or licensure in special education rank in the top ten shortage areas nationally (AAEE, 1999). The category with the greatest shortage of teachers nationally is emotional or behavioral disorder, followed by learning disabilities, multiple disabilities, and mental retardation.

The Current Challenge

One of the most critical contributors to the shortage problem among special education teachers is attrition. To respond to the growing number of children needing special education services, schools are being forced to recruit more educators, but schools have not been successful in either locating or retaining these professionals (Akin, 1988; George et al. 1995; Billingsley, 1993; Boe, Bobbitt, Cook & Weber, 1995).

The lack of published research on the attrition of special educators is especially acute and is relatively limited (Billingsley, 1993; Brownell & Smith, 1992). Even among the sparse offerings, most of the published studies have reported primarily on
overall attrition rates among special educators. Even fewer researchers have studied attrition among specific groups or categories of special educators (Dangel et al. 1987; George et al. 1995; Singer, 1993). Studying attrition among particular groups of teachers is important because attrition rates vary for teachers in different disabilities areas (Brownell, Smith & Miller, 1994; Singer, 1993).

Previous studies (Brownell, Smith, McNellis & Weber, 1995), suggest that special education teachers leave teaching for a variety of reasons; some are personal and others are related to teaching conditions specific to their special education assignment. However, none of these studies have been designed to yield a comprehensive picture of why special educators working with severely disabled children leave their positions (Chaplain, 1995).

Some teachers leave the profession because they cannot cope with the stress inherent in the job. Others burnout but stay on the job, counting the days until weekends and ultimately, their retirement. Another group of teachers, who stay in the profession, learn coping skills that enable them to handle the stress involved in their work and grow with them (Singh & Billingsley, 1996; Banks & Necco, 1990).

Teachers’ attrition rates appear to vary over time due to age, experience, demographic composition of the teaching force, other employment opportunities, and the teaching environment (Grissmer & Kirby, 1987; Borg et al. 1991; Kyriacou, 1987; Manthei & Solman, 1988; Gulielmi & Tatrow, 1998).

Attrition, specifically in special education, often is assumed to be related to stressful teaching conditions. Stress among special educators has been attributed to a variety of problems, such as increased requirements resulting from P.L. 94-142 (Bensky et al. 1980), excessive paper work, inadequate materials and resources (Cook & Leffingwell,
1982), the isolation of the special education teacher, slow student progress, and problems with administrators (Fimian & Blanton, 1986; Lombardi & Donaldson, 1987).

These studies provide important and relevant information for understanding the general directions of special education teacher’s career paths. However, there has been a paucity of studies on the teachers of the more severely handicapped children in American’s schools. Much less, therefore, is known about attrition and career paths among educators of severely disabled children working in special schools (Chaplain, 1995; Manthei & Gilmore, 1996). Thus there is great justification for a study in this area.

Reasons for Attrition and Shortages

Children with special needs have been recognized as creating high levels of pressure for teachers (Galloway, 1985; Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998). Teachers of severe physically and mentally disabled students have even more sources of stress because of the individual learning challenges, often unstable emotional adjustment, sometimes hovering parents and other needs of these children that may result from mental, physical or sensory impairments (Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996).

In addition to these immediate factors, those who remain in the teaching profession experience cumulative stress. Most research indicates that burnout is not a one-dimensional construct (Byren, 1994) but rather is the end product of many elements that build over time. One nationwide poll by Gallup and Elam ranked such stressors, from lack of parent interest to low salary (Farher, 1991, p51). Other studies have investigated an array of factors including extreme workload, negative school environment, unclear expectations, shortage of teaching time, poor university
preparation, as well as teachers’ gender and martial status. These are major factors and can be cited as the primary causes and/or correlates of depression and burnout (Lewis, 1993; Hill, 1995; Gold, 1992; Freedman & Farber, 1992). Directly relevant to the present study was one carried out in 1996 that found that eighty percent of the sample of teachers in special schools believed that the teaching profession was a very stressful occupation and more than fifty percent of the respondents did not plan to continue in this occupation in the future (Male & May, 1997).

Study after study (Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996) has contended that the critical staff shortage in special education is due to declining enrollments in special education teacher preparation programs. These shortages in effect reduce the available supply of new teachers (Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996). On the other hand the growing demand for special educators owing to the increasing population of children who require special education needs services, also contributes to the problem of short supply (Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996).

The Implications of Attrition

Teacher attrition and retention is a growing problem in education. Attrition may include abandoning or otherwise exiting the profession, retirement, or transferring to another field (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Barkanic & Maislin, 1999). It has been substantiated that the number of special education teachers transferring out of special education is substantially larger than the number of teachers transferring into special education (Boe, et. al. 1999). It is likely that the supply of new qualified teachers will be insufficient to replace those who leave because of retirement and promotion. This will undoubtedly exacerbate the situation. Such demographic variables as age, certification
status, and teaching experience (Billingsley, 2002; Gersten et. al. 2001) are among those that attend attrition. Thus it appears that multiple demographic factors contribute to attrition. Special education teachers’ working conditions have also been shown to be related to attrition. These working conditions include poor school climate, lack of administrative support, low salary, job design, role overload, and negative behavioral characteristics of students with disabilities (Billingsley, 2002; Gersten et al. 2001). Each of these factors also has been shown to be related to attrition.

Reducing attrition and maintaining a committed workforce are particularly critical in special education. To prevent attrition, it is important to identify the factors that influence teacher commitment and job satisfaction, because both have been linked to individual propensity to leave various occupational groups (Olson, 2000). This study was designed to do that within one category of special education teachers.

Teacher retention is related to a wide variety of complex variables. Some retention variables are hard to influence because they are part of life-cycle changes. Decision to retire, stay at home with children, or change careers often revolve around changing needs, priorities, and interests, rather than problems in the work place (Billingsley, 1993).

However, other retention variables are work related and these are amenable to change. For example, providing administrative support, creating reasonable role expectations, and decreasing stress and burnout in the work place should reduce attrition and increase teacher commitment. (Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996). The design of the present study was intended to identify work related factors of attrition in one narrow specialty of special education.
This chapter presented a review of the related literature. It described the historical context of special education, the licensure realities, the nature of the daily work of special education teachers, explored the dimensions of attritions in the specialty and the related demographics of the field. A special focus on implications of these factors for special education teachers of severely disabled students was maintained throughout. This review was intended to help the reader in placing the study contextually and conceptually in the contemporary milieu of special education.
certification program and are working towards their certification while teaching in self-contained classrooms. The district has a total of 124 self-contained programs between Mentally Challenged Specialized (MCS), Specialized Diversely Challenged (SDC) and Mentally Challenged Specialized-Diversely Disabled (MCS-DD) located in regular schools and 70 of these programs located in special schools. The rest, 35 teachers, work as teachers on special assignment dealing with special education.

Previous studies suggest that, in general, special education teachers leave teaching for variety of reasons; some are personal and others are related to teaching conditions specific to their special education assignment. However, none of these studies were designed to yield a comprehensive picture of the current status of special education teachers working with severe multiple disabilities students in regard to these variables (Chaplain, 1995).

Attrition related specifically to special education is often assumed to be related to stressful teaching conditions. Stress among special educators has been attributed to a variety of problems, such as increased requirements resulting from P.L. 94-142 (Pensky, et al. 1980), excessive paper work, inadequate materials and resources (Cook & Leffingwell, 1982), the isolation of special education teachers, slow student progress, and problems with administrators (Fimian & Blanton, 1986; Lombardi & Donaldson, 1987). These studies provide important and relevant information for understanding the general directions of special education teachers’ career paths. However, there has been a paucity of studies on the teachers of the more severely handicapped children in American’s schools. Much less, therefore, is known about attrition and career paths among educators of severe multiple disabilities working in special schools (Chaplain,
1995; Manthei & Gilmore, 1996). Thus there is a great justification for study in this area.

The present exploratory study was intended to investigate several selected factors and variables that can be assumed to influence career decisions of teachers working with students of multiple severe disabilities. It specifically focused on factors such as perceptions of administration support or lack of it, commitment to special education, work related stress, emotional stress, burnout, desire to change career and the commitment to the Clark County School District.

Further than that, comparisons were made and contrasts noted on each of these variables when viewed by frequencies of teaching experience, age of the teachers, educational achievement levels, salary, race categories and gender.

This chapter contains a description of the methodologies and procedures used in the study. It includes information on the identification of the subjects of the study and the instruments used, including the questionnaire that was developed specifically for this study. It also describes the procedures and timelines employed in the collection of data and the quantitative and qualitative techniques that were used in analyzing the data.

Human Subjects

A proposal describing the study was submitted to the members of the College of Education Center for Educational Research and Planning (CERP), at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, for their approval. The researcher followed University of Nevada, Las Vegas guidelines and protocol for research involving human subjects. The proper forms were completed, submitted and approved for the study from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Also the researcher completed the Human Participant Protection
Education for Research Teams; it is an online course, sponsored by the National Institutions of Health (NIH) (Appendix I).

The proposal was submitted to the Clark County School District’s, Cooperative Research committee for their approval (Appendix II). Finally the proposal was submitted to the Director-District-Wide Services, Students Support Services Division and to the principals of the special schools to obtain their permission to survey the teachers (Appendix III).

Participants

The population of subjects for this study was identified from the Clark County School District. Two participant groups were identified. The first group was special education teachers who worked with students of severe multiple disabilities in self-contained programs in regular schools. A random sample of participants was selected from this group (N=85). Also, because the number was reasonably small, all special education teachers working in special schools (N=80) were included in the study and constituted the second participant groups.

In this study a teacher was defined as any full time, fully certified, special education teacher whose main assignment was teaching students with severe multiple disabilities in any of grades K through 12 in any self-contained classroom throughout the Clark County School District.

Instruments

A seventy-four-item questionnaire was designed specifically for this study (Appendix IV). The questionnaire measured seven levels of job satisfaction,
administration support, job commitment, stress, burnout, career decision and demographics. The items were rated on a four-point scale with (4) strongly agree to (1) strongly disagree.

The questionnaire was developed with the help of the Canon Research Center at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Nevada, using questionnaires from a number of published surveys and developing specific questions that specifically pertain to the Clark County School District. The focus of the study was on teachers of students with severe multiple disabilities and sought answers to the following variables:

1. Job Stress/burnout: This variable was assessed with a multiple questions that ask the respondents to indicate their feelings and the extent to which they feel tension, frustration, anxiety, and nervousness in relation to their work. The response scale ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

2. Job Satisfaction: The respondent were asked to indicate their satisfaction with multiple questions related to their work, including salary, importance and challenge, recognition, working conditions, relationship with colleagues and the job as a whole. The scales ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

3. Administration Support: The questions represent respondents’ perceptions of administration support, consideration assistance, decision-making, freedom of teaching and problem solving. Response choices ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

4. Demographic Information: Included gender, level of education, total number of years taught, salary range and ethnic background.
5. Attrition: This variable was assessed with questions to determine the extent to which lack of support from administration, stress, job dissatisfaction, and lack of participation in decision making, inadequate resources affect their decision whether to change jobs or stay in the field of special education. Also the questions assessed if the risk of teachers leaving differs by the years of experience, personal characteristics, program location from the perspective of teachers who worked in regular schools and special school. The response scale ranges from (4) strongly agree to (1) strongly disagree.

6. Career Choices: Items consisted of questions to determine if having a disabled person in the family influenced the teacher's career choice, to the extent of which commitment and job satisfaction influenced teachers' intent to stay in their teaching assignment. Response choices ranged from (4) strongly agree to (1) strongly disagree.

7. Commitment: Two measures of commitment were used. One measuring professional commitment to special education profession in general and to special education program in particular. The second was by measuring teachers' commitment to the employing school district. Response choices ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Data Collection

The research reported in this study was based on data collected from 85 teachers working with students of severe multiple disabilities in self contained classrooms in regular schools and 80 teachers working in special schools in the Clark County School District headquartered in Las Vegas, Nevada.
A packet was mailed on September 20, 2002, to the first participant group, special education teachers working in *regular schools*. The packet included information about the study, an appeal for participation, commitment to confidentiality and directions on how to complete the questionnaire. A self-addressed stamped envelope was included to return the completed forms (Appendix V).

Because the number of special education teachers working in *special schools* was relatively small, the populations of 80 teachers were included in the study. The researcher secured the site administrator’s permission to personally survey the teachers in order to assure a high return on the completed forms. Teachers were asked to complete the forms and the researcher personally collected the completed forms.

**Analysis of Data**

There were 74 questions from 10 scales in the selected texts that were incorporated into this survey. Some questions were excluded because the results were not reliable. Other questions had low response rates and could not be used as well, but there were a total of 60 usable questions. The method used was principal components extraction with varimax rotation. Thirty-three questions in six major factors were extracted, and these were broken down into 8 scales consisting of three to five questions each.

Scales scores summarize the answers to each question in the scale. The mean score for each scale was used to provide flexibility not available in a sum, but the resulting score was still treated as ordinal in the analysis. Recording them into dichotomous variables for generating tables further summarized these scores.

Several analysis methods were used to examine relationships between the scales and other factors. The main techniques used was correlation, using Spearman’s rho for
ordinal, none parametric data. Frequency Distribution was used to generate the bar charts, and for comparisons by school type and experience. Chi Square, Fisher’s Exact Test (1-sided), Pearson Chi-Square (2-sided), Linear-by Linear Association (2-sided), and Likelihood Ratio (2-sided) were used to assess the validity of relationships not examined by correlation. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was also used for comparison, but the results were not significant and therefore are not included in the report of results.

The importance of this study lies in its contribution to the investigation of important demographic and work environment factors among teachers working with students with multiple disabilities in both special and regular schools. By studying these it was expected that insights relative to ways for retention of these teachers, the improvement of their level of satisfaction with their careers and/or their work environment would emerge.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

As stated, previous studies suggest that special education teachers leave teaching for a variety of reasons; some are related to teaching conditions specific to special education. However, none of these studies have focused specifically on why special educators working with severe physically and mentally challenged students leave these teaching assignments (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Boe, Lovett, Cook, Barkanic, Masislin, 1999; Billingsley, 1993).

Four research question were identified to address this inquiry:

1. What are the characteristics of teachers of the severely and/or multiply disabled students in Clark County School District?
2. Do the teacher characteristics vary by years of experience, age, gender, education and salary level?
3. What is the demographic profile of the typical teacher of the severely and/or multiply disabled students in the Clark County School District?
4. Is there a discernable difference between groups of these teachers when compared by type of school, race or gender?
This chapter contains analysis and interpretation of the data. It also describes the several analysis methods that were used to examine relationships between factors and variables, the main technique and other statistical procedures that were used. The technique of cross tabulation was used to generate bar charts for comparisons.

Data Analysis

Administrative Support – Positive

Measures indicators of a good relationship between respondents and administrators.

The questions used to develop this scale are:

Q12. My relationship with my principal is very satisfying.
Q43. My immediate supervisor gives me assistance when I need help.
Q45. The administration in my school communicates its policies well.
Q50. My immediate supervisor explains what is expected of me.

Administrative Support – Negative

Measures indicators of a poor relationship between respondents and administrators.

The questions used to develop this scale are:

Q32. I feel that the principal will not help me with classroom difficulties.
Q47. My immediate supervisor is unwilling to listen to my suggestions.
Q52. I receive too many meaningless instructions from my supervisor.
Q54. I receive an assignment without adequate resources to complete it.

Commitment to Special Education

Measures indicators of commitment to the field of special education. The questions used to develop this scale are:
Q3. I am extremely glad that I chose a career in special education over another career I was considering at the time.

Q5. For me, special education is the best of all possible careers that I could have chosen.

Q22. I have an ideal career for life.

Q26. If I could plan my career again I would choose special education.

Career Change

Measures indicators of a desire to change careers. The questions used to develop this scale are:

Q19. I am disappointed I ever took this job.

Q20. If I could I would go into a different occupation.

Q35. I am anxious because I do not know if I still want to be a special education teacher.

Job Burnout

Measures indicators of burnout. The questions used to develop this scale are:

Q14. Quite often I feel like staying home from work instead of coming in.

Q15. I used to be more ambitious about teaching than I am now.

Q16. Most of the time I have to force myself to work.

Q17. Each day of work seems like it will never end.

Work Related Stress Scale

Measures indicators of work related stress. The questions used to develop this scale are:

Q9. I am given too much responsibility.

Q23. I feel frustrated trying to complete reports and paperwork on time.
Q24. I have too heavy of a workload, one that I cannot possibly finish during the normal workday.

Q31. I feel I could do a much better job if the problems confronting me were not so great.

Emotional Stress Scale

Measures indicators of emotional stress. The questions used to develop this scale are:

Q37. Sometimes I feel all alone in the world.

Q38. It's frightening to be responsible for the development of a physically or mentally challenged child.

Q39. There are so many decisions to make that sometimes I get frustrated.

Q40. My future teaching career looks very dismal.

Commitment to CCSD Scale

Measures indicators of commitment to CCSD. The questions used to develop this scale are:

Q2. I feel loyal to the CCSD.

Q4. I am extremely glad I chose CCSD over a different school district.

Q6. For me, CCSD is the best of all school districts that I could have chosen.

Q27. Salaries paid in this school district compare favorably with salaries in other systems with which I am familiar.

A critical analysis was carried out to determine the demographic breakdown of the pool of respondents. The relevant findings follow.
Frequency distribution by school type

*Special School* Teachers – Includes the data from 80 respondents from John F. Miller, Helen J. Stewart, or Variety School. This represents 54% of all respondents.

*Regular School* Teachers – Includes the data from 61 respondents from all other schools and represents 42% of all respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Frequency distribution by years of experience</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years of Experience</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 – 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – 6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – 9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 – 15 years</td>
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<td>16 + years</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Frequency distribution by respondent's age</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Respondent's age</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
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<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
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<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
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Table 3: Frequency distribution by respondent's level of education

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA/BS</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA/BS + 16 credits</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA/BS + 32 credits</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA + 16 credits</td>
<td>8%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA + 32 credits</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed.D/Ph.D</td>
<td>.06%</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Frequency distribution by respondent's salary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
<th>Salary</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Under $30,000</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>$30,001 - $39,999</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>58</strong></td>
<td><strong>$40,000 - $59,999</strong></td>
<td><strong>92</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>$60,000 - $79,999</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Frequency distribution by race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonwhite/Hispanic</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Frequency distribution by gender

- Fourteen percent of respondents (N = 21) are male.
- Eighty-six percent of respondents (N = 125) are female.

Thus the profile of the typical teacher of severe multiple disabled pupils in Clark County School District is one of a white non-Hispanic female with 16+ years of experience, between 50 and 59 years of age with an MA+ 32 credits who is salaried between 40,000 and 60,000 dollars a year.

Based on the analysis of data from the responses to the questions on the survey instrument, the following findings were revealed by the study.

Administrative Support—Positive

This section presents the proportion of respondents that answered positively (agree or strongly agree). These respondents indicated that they have satisfying relationship with their administration. In addition, these respondents favorably rated job expectations and school policies. They also agreed that they receive assistance from supervisors when needed.

*Administrative support—positive by school type*

Ninety-five percent of respondents from *regular schools*, and 88% of respondents from *special schools* rated administrative support and their school positive. Using the Fisher Exact Test—one sided to analyze the responses; the results indicated a statistically significant difference (.104) in the responses between the opinions of teachers at the two types of schools.
Teachers with the most experience (16 years +) indicated overwhelming agreement to the questions in the administrative support-positive scale. Ninety-three percent in this group rated the support from their administration as positive. Teachers at other levels of experience also rated administrative support high. The rates of agreement ranged from 86% for those with 13-15 years of experience to 90% for those with 4-6 years of experience.
Respondents who were aged 50 and above indicated a high degree of positive relationship with their school administration. The level of positive relationship was highest among respondents between the ages of 60 to 69 (100%) followed by respondents age 50-59 (94%). Those whose ages ranged from 20-49 rated their administrative support at a lower, though still quite positive, level. Eighty-seven percent of respondents in the 40 to 49 age group indicated a positive relationship with their administration, making it the group with the lowest incidence of agreement; and 88% of the youngest group age 20-29 rated the administration at their school positive.

![Administrative Support-Positive by Education](image)

*Figure 3: Administrative support – positive by education*

Respondents at all educational levels indicated a fairly high level of satisfaction with their administrators. Respondents with the lowest level of education (BA/BS) had the highest level of positive support for their administration (96%), while those respondents with a master’s degree plus 16 credits had the lowest level of positive support for their administration (77%). Responses from the rest of groups were very similar, ranging from 87% for respondent with a BA/BS plus 32 credits, to 95% of
respondents with an MA degree. Somewhat surprisingly when applying the Pearson Chi-Square-2 sided analysis, statistically significant difference (.045) among the levels of education and administration support-positive was found. By inspection, it seems likely that this occurred because of the relatively lower incidence of rating by those with an MA+16 credits.

![Figure 4: Administrative support – positive by salary](image)

Respondents making the lowest amount of money (under $30,000) indicated the highest level of positive support from their administration (95%); conversely, those making the highest amount of money ($60,000-79,000) indicated the lowest level of positive support for their administration (80%). This may indicate that the level of independence differs markedly at these two levels. The most vulnerable teachers, being those who make the lowest salary, perhaps need the security of reflecting they are satisfied with the administrative support they receive. Perhaps they actually receive the most help, which would be understandable.
Ninety-four percent of nonwhite/Hispanic respondents and 90% percent of white non-Hispanic respondents reported a positive relationship with their school administration. These are quite high in both cases.

Ninety-five percent of male respondents and 88% of female respondents indicated a positive relationship with their school administration. Again these are high in both cases.

Administrative Support - Negative

Respondents that indicated agreement or strong agreement with the statements that make up the administrative support-negative scale (Q’s 32, 47, 52, and 54) are included in this section. These respondents feel that their school administration is unwilling to listen to suggestions and give too many meaningless instructions. In addition, these respondents feel that their administration will not help out with difficulties in the classroom and that they receive assignments without the adequate resources needed to complete them.
Administrative support – negative by school type

Twenty-five percent of respondents from special schools (N=20) and 20% of respondents from regular schools (N=12) rated administrative support at their school negatively.

![Diagram showing Administrative Support - Negative by Experience]

Figure 6: Administrative supports – negative by experience

For this factor there were marked differences in negative views of administrators. The level of negative views is stable at about 26% or 27% for those in their first seven years, then spikes to over 40% in the seventh to ninth year and then recedes sharply. Respondents that have been teaching 13-15 years were the least likely to rate their school administration negatively (7%) and this is followed by the 14% of respondents that have taught for 16 plus years.

Linear-by-Linear association (two sided) indicated a statistically significant difference (.044) between the experience level and a negative view of their administration. Those who are the most seasoned teachers have the least negative view of their administrators.
Age does not appear to be linked to respondents' negative feelings toward their administration. About a quarter of respondents in all age groups reported that they have a negative relationship with their administration, with a slightly lower incidence from respondents' age 50 years and over.

The profile of results shows the lowest negative ratings (18%) at the beginning and end of the spectrum of education, with a slow, steady increase until respondents reach a
bachelor’s degree plus 32 credits (30%). Then there is a slow, steady decrease in this perception of negative support from their administration.

![Administrative Support - Negative by Salary](image)

*Figure 9: Administrative support – negative by salary*

Respondents that make less than $39,999 reported the highest incidence of negative support from their administration (36%) and this appears to increase as salary levels increase. In contrast, respondents making $40,000 and up reported a much lower incidence of negative support from their administration.

*Administrative support – negative by race / gender*

Sixteen percent of nonwhite/Hispanic respondents and 21% of white non-Hispanic respondents reported negative support from their administration. Female respondents (23%) are much more likely than male respondents (10%) to report negative support from their administration. The latter is especially interesting and has implications for further research.
Commitment to Special Education

Respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that make up the commitment to the field of special education scale (Q: 3, 5, 22, 26) are included in this section. These respondents feel that special education is the best career they could have chosen; in addition, they consider it a lifelong career and one that they not only would choose again, but also are happy to have chosen it over other career possibilities.

Commitment to special education by school type

Eighty-one percent or 65 respondents from special schools and 85% or 52 respondents from regular schools indicated a commitment to the field of special education. These levels are comparable to each other.

![Commitment to Special Education by Experience](image)

*Figure 10: Commitment to special education by teaching experience*

Respondents who have taught the longest (16+years) reported the most commitment to the field of special education. Eighty-six percent of these respondents indicated their commitment to special education, followed closely, with 83%, by new teachers and
those who have taught up to 3 years. In contrast, respondents who have taught between 10 and 12 years, with 67%, reported the least commitment to special education. The other three experience groups (4-6, 7-9, 13-15) reported a fairly consistent commitment to special education ranging from 77 to 79 percent. The trend line shows a high commitment as a career begins tapering off somewhat to about the tenth or twelfth year of teaching and then increasing steadily to its highest level among the most seasoned teachers.

![Commitment to Special Education by Age](image)

*Figure 11: Commitment to special education by age*

All the respondents (N=8) who are between the ages of 60 and 69 reported that they are committed to the field of special education. In contrast, respondents in the second oldest age group of teachers, those who are between the ages of 50 and 59, reported the least commitment to the field of special education. In the other three age groups, commitment to special education ranges from 86% to 88% with only one percentage point separating these groups. An analysis of this variable using the Likelihood Ratio (two sided) indicated that there is a statistically significant difference (.086) among the
different age groups of respondents and their commitment to the field of special education.

![Commitment to Special Ed. by Education](image)

*Figure 12: Commitment to special education by level of education*

Respondents holding a bachelor’s degree plus 16 credits reported a 100% commitment to the field of special education. In contrast, respondents holding a bachelors degree plus 32 credits, reported the lowest commitment to the field of special education (74%) followed closely, with 76%, by respondents who hold a masters degree plus 32 credits. Ninety-one percent of respondents holding a bachelors degree and 92% of respondents holding a master’s degree plus 16 credits indicated their commitment to the field of special education. Respondents holding a masters degree reported an 80% commitment level to the field of special education.

A two-sided test of this variable using three different tests, Pearson Chi-Square (.84), Likelihood Ratio (.047), and the Linear-by-Linear Association (.067) indicated a statistically significant difference among respondents’ level of education and their...
commitment to the field of special education. The fluctuation in the level of commitment bears further study.

Respondents making the least amount of salary reported the highest commitment to the field of special education (89%). In contrast, respondents making the second highest amount reported the lowest commitment to the field of special education (79%). In the other income groups, responses were similar ranging from 80% for the highest income group to 83% for the second lowest income group.

Commitment to special education by race/gender

Seventy-five percent of nonwhite/Hispanic respondents and 85% of white non-Hispanic respondents indicated their commitment to the field of special education. Female respondents indicated an 82% commitment to their careers in the field of special education while male respondents reported a 76% commitment to their careers in the field of special education.
Desire to Change Career

Respondents that indicated their desire to change career by agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statements that make up the career change scale (Q's 19, 20, and 35) are included in this section. These respondents are disappointed with special education as a career choice and would, if possible, go into a different occupation. They are anxious, because they are uncertain whether or not they even want to remain in the field of special education.

Desire to change career by school type

Respondents from both types of schools reported a low desire to change careers. Only 15% of teachers at special schools and only 10% of teachers at regular schools indicated any desire to change career.

![Desire to Change Career by Experience](image)

Figure 14: Desire to change career by experience

The highest desire to change career (36%) was reported by respondents who have taught for 10-12 years. Next with 23% are teachers who have taught for 13-15 years.
In contrast, the lowest incidence of desire to change career (7%) was reported by respondents who have taught for 7-9 years, followed closely by those who have taught for 16+ years (9%). Ten percent of the newest teachers (0-3 years) and 16% of teachers who have taught for 4-6 years reported their desire to change career. It is apparent that teachers who have 10-12 years of experience reach a critical stage in their career development. If they are to be retained in special education of severe multiple disabled pupils incentives are needed at that time and probably for at least the two years following.

![Desire to Change Career by Age](image)

*Figure 15: Desire to change career by age*

Age does not appear to be a factor differentially associated with teachers’ desire to change careers. The highest incidence of desire to change career (17%) was reported by teachers in the age group of 50-59 years and the lowest desire to change careers (8%) was reported by teachers in the age group 40-49 years. The remaining age groups reported between 12 and 15 percent a desire to change careers. All are relatively low incidences.
None of the respondents who hold a bachelor's degree plus 16 credits, or a master's degree indicated any desire to change careers. The highest incidence of desire to change careers (22%) was reported by teachers holding a bachelor's degree plus 32 credits, followed by teachers holding a master's degree plus 32 credits (18%). In the other education groups, 14% of those with a bachelor's degree and 8% of those holding a master's degree plus 16 credits indicated a desire to change careers.

This variable was analyzed using the Likelihood Ratio (2-sided). The result indicated a significant relationship (.079) between the respondents' level of education and the desire to change careers.

It should be noted that across the entire spectrum of educational achievement, these teachers have relatively low levels of desire to change careers. Any focuses of incentives to retain teachers appear to be needed at the bachelor's plus 32 credits level.
Salary level does not appear to be a factor in respondents' desires to change careers, except possibly among teachers in the highest salary scale ($60,000-79,999) who indicated the highest desire to change careers (20%). Teachers in the second highest salary scale ($40,000-59,999) 15% and those in the lowest salary scale showed relatively low proposition in their desire to change careers.

**Desire to change careers by race/gender**

Thirteen percent of nonwhite/Hispanic respondents and 12% of white non-Hispanic respondents indicated a desire to change careers. Gender differences were noted as female respondents appear more likely to change careers (16%) than males (5%). However, both are quite low.

**Job Burnout**

Respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that make up the job burnout scale (Qs’ 14, 15, 16, and 17) are included in this section. These
respondents have indicated that they are not as ambitious about teaching as they were in the past. In addition, they sometimes feel like staying home rather than going to work. They are forcing themselves to go to work, and feel like work-day will never end.

**Job burnout by school type**

Twenty percent of respondents who teach at *special schools* and only 7% of teachers who teach at *regular schools* indicated that they are burned out by their jobs. A two-sided test of this variable using two different tests: Pearson Chi-Square (.023) and Likelihood Ratio (.019) as well as a test using Fisher’s Exact Test-one sided (.19), indicate a statistically significant relationship between the type of school where respondents teach and job burnout.

![Job Burnout by Experience](image)

*Figure 18: Job burnout by experience*

The highest incidence of burnout (39%) was reported by respondents who have been teaching 10-12 years. Three groups (0-3 year’s experience, 7-9 years experience,
13-15 years experience) reported seven percent burnout incidences. The remaining group, teachers who taught over 16 years, reported a 17% burnout by their jobs.

This variable was analyzed using the Pearson Chi-Square (2-sided) test. Test results (.042) indicated a significant relationship between the years a respondent has been teaching and job burnout. This was, however, not a linear relationship.

![Figure 19: Job burnout by age](image)

The highest incidence of job burnout (19%) was reported by respondents who are between 50 and 59 years of age, followed by respondents who are between 40 and 49 years of age reporting 16% incidence of job burnout. In contrast, the oldest age group, those who are between 60 and 69 years of age reported only 11% incidence of job burnout. None of the youngest respondents (20-29 years of age) indicated that they are burned out by their jobs. In the remaining group (30-39 years of age) 10% of respondents indicated job burnout.

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A two-sided Linear-by-Linear test was conducted on this variable. Test results (.085) indicated a statistically significant relationship between a respondent’s age and incidence of job burnout. This was a linear relationship only through age 59.

Respondents with the highest level of education (MA+16, MA+32 credits) also had the highest incidence of job burnout. Twenty-six percent of respondents holding a master’s degree plus 32 credits and 23% of respondents holding a master’s degree plus 16 credits reported they were burned out.

At lower levels of educational achievement burnout did not appear to be a problem. A two-sided Pearson Chi-Square test was conducted on this variable. Test results (.045) indicated a significant relationship between respondents’ level of education and job burnout. However, this was not a linear relationship.
Salary range appears to be significantly by related to job burnout. Respondents making the most money appear to have the highest incidence of job burnout and those making the least amount of money appear to have no incidence of job burnout. Twenty percent of respondent making more than $40,000 have indicated that they are burned out by their jobs. Of those, respondents making between $30,001 and $39,999, 10% indicated that they are burned out by their jobs.

A two-sided Likelihood test was conducted on this variable. Test results (.033) indicated a significant linear relationship between salary range and incidence of job burnout.

Job Burnout by race/gender

Sixteen percent of nonwhites/Hispanic respondents and 13% of white non-Hispanic reported job burnout. Males (20%) appear to be slightly more likely than females (15%) to report job burnout.
Work Related Stress

Respondents that agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that make up the work related stress scale (Q: 9, 23, 24, 31) are included in this section. They are frustrated trying to complete reports and paperwork on time and feel they are given too much responsibility and not enough help. They have also indicated that they could do a much better job if the problems they were confronting were not so great. The percentage of respondents experiencing work related stress is very high across all groups.

Work related stress by school type

The majority of respondents from both regular and special schools indicated that they are experiencing work related stress. Sixty-nine percent of respondents from regular schools and 59% of respondents from special schools indicated that they are stressed by their work.

Figure 22: Work related stress by experience
Some disparity was evident among the groups between number of years teaching and those experiencing job related stress. However, in most of the groups between 62 and 71 percent of respondents are experiencing job related stress.

The lone exception appears to be that less than half (43%) of teachers who have been teaching from between 13-15 years reported feeling work related stress.

Figure 23: Work related stress by age

Work related stress was reported by a strong majority of respondents at all age levels. The propositions ranged from 57% (ages 50-59) to 61% (ages 60-69). The exception was that a high 76% of those in the 30-39 years age range were bothered by work related stress.
Respondents with lowest level of education reported the lowest incidence of work related stress (50%). The highest level of work related stress was reported by respondents who hold a masters degree (80%), followed by those respondents holding a masters degree plus 16 credits (77%), and those holding a bachelor’s degree plus 16 credits (75%). Respondents holding a master’s degree plus 32 credits reported a 59% work related stress followed closely by respondents holding a bachelor’s degree plus 32 credits (57%). No clear-cut linkage was apparent between educational achievement level and work related stress.
Respondents in the lowest salary range, earning less than $30,000, reported the lowest incidence of work related stress (53%), followed by respondents in the $40,000 to 59,999 salary range reporting a 58% incidence of work related stress. The highest incidence of work related stress (76%) was reported by respondents making $30,000 to 39,999, followed closely by those who are making at least $60,000 (75%). Salary level did not appear to be associated with work related stress levels.

_work related stress by race/gender_

It appears that female teachers are more prone to work related stress than male teachers. Sixty-four percent of female teachers reported work related stress compared to only 48% of male respondents. Work related stress does not appear to be linked to race. Sixty-eight percent of nonwhite/Hispanic respondents and 60% of white non-Hispanic respondents reported work related stress.
Emotional Stress

Respondents who indicated agreement or strong agreement with statements that make up the emotional stress scale (Q’s: 37, 38, 39, 40) are included in this section. These respondents indicated that they are frightened by the responsibility for the development of a mentally challenged child and frustrated by the number of decisions they have to make to the point that they sometimes feel all alone in this world. Some respondents felt that their future teaching careers in special education looked very dismal.

Emotional stress by school type

School type does not appear to be associated with level of emotional stress. A quarter of respondents from both regular and special schools reported that they are experiencing emotional stress.

Figure 26: Emotional stress by experience
The highest incidence of emotional stress (43%) was reported by respondents who have between 7 and 9 years of teaching experience, followed by respondents who have between 10 and 12 years of teaching experience (33%). Respondents with 13 to 15 years of teaching experience reported the least amount of incidence of emotional stress (14%). Twenty-four percent of respondents with 16 plus years, 21% of respondents with 4 to 6 years of teaching experience, and 20% of respondents with less than three years of teaching experience reported that they are experiencing emotional stress. Thus it appears that emotional stress and the weight of teaching responsibility and frustration is felt most heavily in the mid-career years of teaching (between 7 and 12 years of teaching experience). It is less prevalent in the early years and among well-seasoned teachers.

![Figure 21: Emotional stress by age](image)

Age does not appear to be systematically lined to emotional stress, as all age groups reported similar results. The highest incidence 29% was reported by respondents in the 30 to 39 years of age group and the lowest incidence of emotional stress (22%) were

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reported by the oldest age group 60 to 69 years of age. In the other age groups between 22 and 24 percent of respondents reported that they are experiencing emotional stress.

![Figure 28: Emotional stress by level of education](image)

Respondents with a bachelor degree reported the lowest incidence of emotional stress (14%); followed closely by respondents holding a master’s degree. Respondents with bachelor’s degree plus 16 credits reported the highest incidence of emotional stress (42%) followed by respondents with a bachelor’s degree plus 32 credits (39%). The other two groups (MA+16, MA+32 credits) reported that they experienced emotional stress at about one-quarter incidence level. It would appear that the level of work related emotional stress is lowest immediately following the completion of an educational degree.
Respondents in the highest pay category, those earning in excess of $60,000, unanimously reported that they did not experience any emotional stress on the job. One-third of respondents earning between $30,000 and $39,000 reported experiencing emotional stress on the job. Twenty-three percent of respondents earning between $40,000 and $59,999, and 16 percent of respondents earning under $30,000 reported that they are experiencing emotional stress on the job. By inspection, no logical connection was detected between these two variables.

**Emotional stress by race/gender**

Race does not appear to be a factor affecting emotional stress on the job as both groups, nonwhite/Hispanic and white non-Hispanic, reported almost the same percentage of respondents (23%) who have experienced emotional stress on the job. Female, with 26% of respondents appear to be experiencing more emotional stress on the job than male respondents (19%).
Commitment to Clark County School District

Respondents that agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that make up the commitment to Clark County School District (CCSD) scale (Q: 2, 4, 6, 27) are included in this section. These respondents reported that they feel loyal to the CCSD and are glad that they chose the CCSD over another school district. For these respondents, CCSD is the best school district they could have chosen. In addition, they feel that salaries paid by the CCSD compare favorably with salaries paid by other school districts with which they are familiar.

Commitment to CCSD by school type

School type does not appear to be a factor in respondent’s commitment to Clark County School District. Forty-six percent of respondents teaching in special schools and 41% of respondents teaching in regular schools indicated their commitment to CCSD.

Figure 30: Commitment to CCSD by experience
Respondents in the two groups with the longest teaching history appear to be the most committed to Clark County School District. The highest commitment (64%) was reported from teachers that have been with CCSD between 13 and 15 years, followed by 53% of teachers who have been with CCSD 16 plus years. Teachers who have been with CCSD 10 to 12 years reported the lowest incidence of commitment 28%. The newest teachers, those who have been with CCSD three years or less, reported a 47% commitment to CCSD. In the other groups (4 to 6 and 7 to 9 years) about third of the respondents indicted their commitment to CCSD. There is a discernible trend line shown by these data. About half of new teachers express a commitment to CCSD. This recedes fairly steadily through the twelfth year of employment. In later career stages (13+ years of experiences) the incidence of commitment is substantially higher than at any other time. For purposes of retention, efforts would appear to be needed and/or incentives applied on an increasing basis throughout the first 12 years.

Figure 31: Commitment to CCSD by age
The oldest group of respondents reported the highest percentage (79%) of respondents committed to CCSD, followed by the youngest group of respondents (63%). In the other age groups, commitment to CCSD is consistently below half and ranges between 41 and 47 percent of respondents. No linear trend line is detected.

The highest level of commitment (74%) was reported by respondents who have a master’s degree, followed by respondents that have a bachelor’s degree (64%). The lowest level of commitment (17%) was reported by respondents who have a bachelor’s degree plus 32 credits. Both groups, those who have bachelor’s degree plus 16 credits and those who have a master’s degree plus 32 credits reported a 46% commitment to CCSD, followed by respondents who have a master’s degree plus 16 credits reporting a 39% commitment to CCSD. Two-sided Likelihood Ratio and Pearson Chi-Square tests were used to determine the relationship between the level of education and commitment to CCSD. Test results indicated a significant relationship between the level of a
respondent’s education and their commitment to CCSD (Likelihood ratio .005, Pearson Chi-Square .008). However, this is not a linear relationship.

The highest levels of commitment to CCSD appear to be immediately after completing either the bachelors or masters degree.

![Commitment to CCSD by Salary](image)

*Figure 33: Commitment to CCSD by Salary*

Commitment to CCSD appears to be the highest at both the highest and lowest ends of the salary scale. Sixty percent of those at highest end and 53% of those at the lowest end of the salary scale reported their commitment to CCSD. Forty-eight percent of those making between $40,000 and $59,000 and 38% of those making between $30,000 and 39,999 indicated that they are committed to the CCSD.

*Commitment to CCSD by race/gender*

Forty percent of nonwhite/Hispanic and fifty percent of white non-Hispanic respondents indicated that they are committed to the CCSD. Male respondents (48%) appear to be more committed to the CCSD than female respondents (44%).
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS
AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

It is difficult to draw sound conclusions about stress, burnout, attrition, career choices, work environment and commitment, that apply to special education teachers working with students of multiple disabilities in special and regular schools, given the very few previous research studies, that have been reported, the lack of conceptual models, and the methodological limitations of the research.

Very few of these previous studies have addressed either the demographics or perceptions of work variables of these teachers. The majority of these studies have weaknesses that make generalizations very difficult. The present study provides a starting point for understanding what needs to be known about stress, burnout, career characteristics, commitment and work environment for teacher’s working with severe handicapped children in special and regular schools.

This chapter contains a summary of key findings, conclusions, implications of the study and recommendations for future research. These will be addressed in order.

Summary of Key Findings

This study was designed mainly to determine the characteristics of and the contrasts between different levels of experience, age, education, salary, gender and race of
teachers working with students with severe multiple disabilities in both regular and special schools.

Based on cross tabulations of data, the profile of the typical CCSD teacher of classes of severe multiple disabled pupils is one of a white non-Hispanic female with 16+ years of experience, between 50 and 59 years of age with an MA+ 32 credits who is salaried between $40,000 and $60,000 a year.

This typical teacher has a very positive perception of the support she receives from administrators (between 91% and 93% favorable based on her categories of response), and gives a low rating to administrators on negative aspects of support (between 14% and 21% incidence of responses based on her classification by characteristics).

She is committed to her profession and specialization (between 71% and 86% incidence of responses), but less so to CCSD (between 41% and 53% based on her demographic characteristics). She has little desire to change careers (between 9% and 18%), reports a relatively low level of job burnout (between 13% and 26% ratings) and emotional stress (between 23% and 26% ratings). However, her level of work related stress is considerably higher (between 57% and 64% incidence ratings based on her array of characteristics.

It is difficult to draw precise conclusions about persistors/non-persistors in this field given the relatively limited number of specialists. However, this study can be considered a first step or a starting point for understanding and contrasting the characteristics of persistors and non-persistors and how some of these variables might affect their decision regarding their careers. However, respondents in this study did advance and reveal a variety of factors that highlight the most likely characteristics of persistors.
A majority of the respondents who were persistors indicated that the high level of administrative support is a major factor in their decision to continue in this field just as the majority of non-persistors indicated that a lack of administration support was a major reason for their decision to change career.

Other conclusions that can be drawn from this study about Persistors indicate that respondents holding a bachelor’s degree plus 16 credits and those holding master’s degree are more likely to continue working with students with severe multiple disabilities than those at other educational levels. There appears to be a sharp drop off in persistence as they continue their education beyond the BA plus 16 credits. This gradually increases until the MA+ 16 credits attained. Persistence then recedes again as more education is attained.

Respondents who are at least 60 years of age can definitely be expected to persist in their job. There is a fairly stable persistent rate from ages 20 to 50 years with the lowest level of persistence coming between ages 50 and 60 years. The latter is also the age range where job burnout is most prevalent.

Almost a quarter of all respondents indicated that they have a family member with physical or mental disability that might explain why they chose this field and might be a strong indication of their desire to continue in this field.

Job satisfaction was also indicated as a factor affecting respondent’s decision to continue in their assignment. Respondents also indicated that positive administration support and the availability of extra help when needed result in low work related stress and emotional stress, two factors that are negatively related to professional commitment.
A comparison between respondents working in regular schools and those working in special schools reveal that respondents from regular schools rate administrative support higher than respondents from special schools and those they are more committed to the field of special education. A smaller percentage of respondents from regular schools indicated their desire to change careers than those working in special schools.

Job burnout was much higher among respondents working at special schools than those respondents working at regular schools. On the other hand, work stress was higher among respondents from regular schools than respondents from special schools. Respondents from both types of schools reported almost the same level of emotional stress and commitment to the Clark County School District.

Implication of the Study

The field of special education in general and working with severely disabled students in particular requires teachers to perform an array of skills on a regular basis.

Given the current shortages of special education teachers (USDE, 1999) and the attrition rates among special educators (Billingsley, 1993; singer, 1993), these findings should be of interest to school principals, teacher training personnel and Clark County School District administrators. To offset high attrition rates, institutions that offer teacher training to personnel must prepare teachers who can meet the multifaceted demands of this profession (Wisniewski & Garginlo, 1997), thus increasing satisfaction and reducing stress levels. Many of the influences on work environment, burnout, stress, and commitment to special education were similar across all classifications of
age, experience, educational achievement levels, salary levels, gender, and race. However some were not. These findings have implications for various audiences.

1. Supervisors: An important finding of this study was that principals have a very significant influence on stress, burnout, turnover, and job satisfaction and, ultimately career decision. Lack of support and cooperation from administrative personnel was identified as a major concern across all categories studied. In addition, the deterrent factors “Lack of support” and administrative obstacles include a variety of other deterrents under administrative control, such as special education policies and paperwork. This is not surprising since paperwork has been identified as a stress factor in number of previous studies (Bensky et al., 1980; Bogenschild et al., 1988; Dangel et al., 1987; Lawrenson & McKinnon, 1982; Lombardi & Donaldson, 1987; Olson & Matuskey, 1982). However, the problem may not be the paperwork itself, but what the paperwork prevents teachers from doing. Administrators, who collaborate with teachers, solicit suggestions and feedback, and assist teachers on their problems and concerns are more likely to have teachers who are less stressed, more satisfied, and more committed. Principals should conduct periodic needs assessments to see if they are providing the type of support that teachers believe is important.

2. Clark County School District: Retaining special education teachers is vital to building a highly trained teacher workforce. New teacher support programs, such as mentoring induction programs, can provide support new teachers need and increase retention. Also ensuring an adequate supply of special education teachers working with severe disabled students depends on
attracting a large pool of candidates, offering financial incentives, improving job conditions, promoting professional rewards and recognition, and addressing certification issues. Clark County School District should encourage special education teacher preparation programs and school districts to partner for mentoring new special educators. Also the district should adopt a policy of hiring only qualified teachers to teach children with severe physical and mental disabilities. In short, recruiting more teachers to work in this field will not solve the teacher crisis if large numbers of such teachers then leave. Of course, some teacher turnover is unavoidable and even beneficial. Moreover, teacher turnover and attrition has the added benefit of keeping down salary costs by replacing highly paid senior teachers with less expensive beginners. But high levels of teacher attrition are not cost free. It has long been recognized that high rates of employee departure incur substantial training and recruitment costs and are both cause and effect of productivity problems. Supporting special education teachers working with students of multiple disabilities, early in their careers through special assistance programs and mentors may be particularly beneficial (Magliaro & Wildman, 1990). Clark County School District can assist pre-service teachers by helping them understand the pressures they are likely to face and providing suggestions for dealing with stress. Conversations with experienced teachers and articles about the early career period may help them make a better transition into teaching.

3. Teacher Preparation Programs: teacher educators need to ensure that undergraduate and graduate special education students acquire a wide array
of practical classroom skills, which includes federal and state laws regulations, specialized knowledge and skills related to specific types of disabilities, Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) development, strategies for providing services to these students, strategies to work with other special education professional, awareness of stress, burnout, and how to deal with parents, and general knowledge about the educational system, not only on theory and memorization. These skills should be practiced and monitored in a classroom during early and extended student teaching experience. By assisting new teachers in developing a broad repertoire of skills and behaviors, they will be more likely to feel comfortable performing the myriad of tasks required of them in order to have more satisfying and less stressful experiences as special educators especially in the first three years of their careers. There is a need for more accountability and standards in teacher preparation programs across the valley. Special education training with students of severe disabilities for all pre-service teachers and instituting internship requirements, especially in special schools, to ensure that teachers and other professionals have "actual" classroom experience prior to entry into the special education field.

Recommendation for Future Research

Given the limited number of studies dealing with teachers working with children of severe physical and mental disabilities in special and regular schools, and taking into consideration the small number of teachers working in this field at the Clark County
School District of Las Vegas, Nevada, a replication of this study involving a larger population would be useful to add to the empirical data base in this area.

Improving job satisfaction is important to teacher retention. However, future research should address other variables that may be related to job satisfaction, such as teachers' self-efficacy, student progress, and colleague and student relationships.

The study of special educators' career decisions has only begun and much remains to be learned. Not only do we need to know which teachers are most likely to leave and why, we need to have a better understanding of teachers' career paths over time. Perhaps the most important consideration is developing a better understanding of the characteristics of teachers who persist and none persistors.

It is important to retain the special education teachers that we have and make the work environment less stressful. It is to the benefit of the school district and the students we serve to keep experienced, committed teachers in order to provide quality and consistent education. However, many qualified and good special education teachers may opt for other teaching fields and careers because of work frustrations. The relationships between qualified teachers and career decisions are a critical question for future research.

Teachers from both special and regular schools indicated that job satisfaction is greatly affected by the level of support they receive from their principals. In order to implement steps that promotes job satisfaction. These steps include, but not limited to, providing planning time during the work week, providing job rotation options and sufficient supplies and assign trained clerical personnel to assist in completing paperwork.
Clark County School District also needs to implement steps that help alleviate or at least minimize job stress and job burnout and increase commitment. These steps include, but are not limited to, providing pay incentives based on knowledge and skills, assign special education teachers reasonable case loads that consider each teacher’s responsibilities as well as the students the teacher is responsible for, minimize paper work and provide stipends for pursuing additional training and or endorsements.

Although these incentives should be applied across the board to all teachers, a special attention should be paid to a certain segment of special education teachers in order to increase the probability of retaining them. This segment include teachers who have been working for 10-12 years, female, holds a bachelor’s degree plus 32 credits and are the upper levels of the salary scale.

Although this research was made for a particular school district, the Clark County School District of Las Vegas, Nevada, and for teachers working with severe disabled students in special and regular schools, a similar study and analysis could be made for other school districts and states, provided that adequate databases are made available.

Because the Clark County School District headquartered in Las Vegas, Nevada, did not provide information on teachers working with severe disabled students in special and regular school or attrition rate for previous years, the most feasible alternative method for studying teacher’s attrition and turnover is at the state level to develop teacher database from School Districts’ administrative records. In addition to making such analyses possible, state-level teacher databases usually have an advantage providing for longitudinal analyses of the state teaching force (Boe & Gilford, 1992).
Conclusion

Throughout the United States, schools’ officials are either anticipating or already experiencing a teacher shortage in general and in special education in particular. Recognizing this, policymakers are devising ways to make teaching more attractive. Recruiters in various districts, knowing that competition for qualified teachers is fierce, can now waive pre-service training, offer signing bonuses, forgive student loans, and even provide mortgage subsidies or health club memberships. While such strategies may well increase the supply of new teachers to schools, they provide no assurance of keeping them there, for they are but short-term responses to long-term challenges.

In summary, the main objectives of this research was to provide, from a local perspective, quantitative data on basic components of teachers who are working with students with multiple disabilities, their career choices, work environment, characteristics, administration support, stress, burnout, commitment, attrition and retention at the school level, and to identify similarities and differences between special education teachers in special schools and regular schools in these respects.

Clark County School District must realize that any real solution to the teacher shortage problem requires a comprehensive plan, a blueprint for preparing, recruiting, supporting, retaining, and structuring the job. All are important. School reform cannot occur by addressing one area and ignoring the others. Clark County School District needs to create conditions in which teachers can teach, and teach well. Perhaps, in addition to other initiatives, to attract and retain the best and the brightest teachers, we need to provide them an environment in which they can thrive. Teachers like to succeed, and when schools make that possible, they are more likely to remain in the profession.
It is envisaged that the second stage of this research will concentrate on investigating the coping mechanisms that teachers employ in order to deal with stress and burnout. Identifying these factors that lead to stress and burnout will help to form suggestions for the most effective stress management and intervention. It is believed that the results of this pilot study will be the first stage of a more systematic investigation of this significant problem.
REFERENCES


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Sailor, W., & Halvorsen, A. (1986). California Research Institute Annual Report, Year 4. San Francisco: San Francisco State University Department of Special Education. CRI.


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University of Nevada, Las Vegas
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Check one: □ Faculty; □ Doctoral Student; □ Masters Student; □ Undergrad

Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Name Dr. Dale Andersen; Department: Educational Leadership

Title of Project: Persistent Problems

Duration of Study: Start Spring 2002; End Summer III, 2002

Funding — Study is (check if applicable):

□ Being submitted as a proposal for funding (attach proposal draft if checked);

□ Funded by an existing grant or contract (indicate source of funds) ________________________________

Subject Data: Total Number of Subjects: 200-400
(check each applicable category)

X □ Adults (non-student); □ UNLV Students; □ CCSD Students; □ Minors (under 18);

□ Patients; □ Pregnant women or fetuses; □ Mentally disabled; □ Physically disabled;

□ Prisoners (incarcerated persons); □ Others subject to physical, emotional, social, or legal risk

Procedures (indicate all that apply):

X □ Survey/questionnaire

□ Interviews

□ Observation

□ Medical Records

□ Other personal records/data

□ Personal Interaction with subjects

□ No personal interaction with subjects

□ Non-invasive biomedical procedure(s)

□ Invasive biomedical procedure(s)

□ Psychological intervention/treatment

□ Use of potentially hazardous materials

□ Use of radiation or lasers

□ Other ________________________________

Signatures:

Principal Investigator: Samira Risheg; Date: 12/20/2001

Faculty Advisor (if applicable): ________________________________ Date ________________________________
This is to certify that

samira risheg

has completed the Human Participants Protection Education for Research Teams online course, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), on 01/10/2002.

This course included the following:

- key historical events and current issues that impact guidelines and legislation on human participant protection in research.
- ethical principles and guidelines that should assist in resolving the ethical issues inherent in the conduct of research with human participants.
- the use of key ethical principles and federal regulations to protect human participants at various stages in the research process.
- a description of guidelines for the protection of special populations in research.
- a definition of informed consent and components necessary for a valid consent.
- a description of the role of the IRB in the research process.
- the roles, responsibilities, and interactions of federal agencies, institutions, and researchers in conducting research with human participants.

National Institutes of Health

http://cme.nci.nih.gov/cgi-bin/hsp/cts-cert4.pl  
1/10/02
This is to certify that

Dale Andersen

has completed the Human Participants Protection Education for Research Teams online course, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), on 12/31/2002.

This course included the following:

- key historical events and current issues that impact guidelines and legislation on human participant protection in research.
- ethical principles and guidelines that should assist in resolving the ethical issues inherent in the conduct of research with human participants.
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- the roles, responsibilities, and interactions of federal agencies, institutions, and researchers in conducting research with human participants.

National Institutes of Health
http://www.nih.gov
May 9, 2002

Samira Risheg
J. F. Miller Special School
1905 Atlantic St.
Las Vegas, NV 89104

Dear Ms. Risheg:

At its meeting on Wednesday, May 1, 2002, the Clark County School District's Committee to Review Cooperative Research Requests reviewed your proposal entitled "An Examination of the Learning Processes of Delayed Entrants to Teaching." We are pleased to inform you that the committee approved your proposal, with the following provisos:

- that you make the changes indicated on the attached pages, and
- that you obtain the permission of each principal at whose school you wish to conduct your study.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Judith S. Costa, Ed.D.
Chairman
Committee to Review Cooperative Research Requests

Attachments
cc: Dale Andersen, Kevin Crehan, Bill Hoffman, Craig Kadlub
    Lauren Kohut-Rost, Connie Kratky, Thomas Lamatsch, Charles Rasmussen
    Michael Robison, Betty Sabo
August 29, 2002

To Whom It May Concern:

I, Patricia Schepers, principal at Variety School give Samira Risheg permission to conduct a study on teacher retention using data collected on teachers who are currently teaching at Variety School. Please feel free to contact me regarding any questions I may answer.

Trish Schepers
Principal
August 23, 2002

Dear Samira,

Thank you for your interest in using Helen J. Stewart teachers in your study of teacher retention. We would be pleased to assist you with your project.

Please contact me so we can schedule a time on September 16 to conduct the survey.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Alison Kasner
Principal
Special Education Assessment Survey

Please use BLUE or BLACK ink to complete form

Shade Circles Like This—

Not Like This—

1. I feel loyal to my special education program. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
2. I feel loyal to the Clark County School District. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
3. I am extremely glad that I chose a career in special education over a different career that I was considering at the time. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
4. I am extremely glad that I chose the Clark County School District over a different school district. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
5. For me, special education is the best of all careers that I could have chosen. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
6. For me, Clark County School District is the best of all school districts that I could have chosen. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
7. I feel that I am accomplishing something worthwhile while teaching special education. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
8. My classroom is a pleasant place to be. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
9. I am given entirely too much responsibility. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
10. My principal always seems to be looking over my shoulder. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
11. I often feel frustrated while teaching. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
12. My relationship with my principal is very satisfying. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
13. The major satisfaction in my life comes from my job. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
14. Quite often I feel like staying home from work instead of coming in. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
15. I used to be more ambitious about teaching than I am now. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
16. Most of the time I have to force myself to work. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
17. Each day of work seems like it will never end. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
18. I find real enjoyment in my work. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
19. I am disappointed that I ever took this job. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
20. If I could, I would go into a different occupation. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
21. I can see myself teaching special education for many years. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
22. I have an ideal career for life. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
23. I feel frustrated trying to complete reports and other paperwork on time. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
24. I have too heavy a work load, one that I cannot possibly finish during the normal work day. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
25. Teaching special education enables me to make my greatest contribution to society. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
26. If I could plan my career again, I would choose special education teaching. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
27. Salaries paid in this school system compare favorably with salaries in other systems with which I am familiar. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
28. My immediate supervisor gives me assistance when al need help. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
29. I feel that I am an important part of this school system. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
30. I really enjoy working with my students. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
31. I feel that I could do a much better job of teaching if only the problems confronting me were not so great. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
32. I feel that the principal will not help me with classroom difficulties. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
33. I look forward to each teaching day. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
34. I feel secure with regard to my ability to keep my class under control. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
35. I feel anxious because I do not know if I still want to be a special education teacher. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
36. I’m worried that differences in background among my students prevent me from teaching them effectively. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
37. Sometimes I feel all alone in the world. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
38. It’s frightening to be responsible for the development of a physically or mentally disabled child. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
39. There are so many decisions that have to be made that sometimes I get frustrated. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
40. My future teaching career looks very dismal. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
41. I receive active support from my student’s parents while teaching class. ⃝ 4 ⃝ 3 ⃝ 2 ⃝ 1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>42.</td>
<td>I have the freedom to decide what my curriculum should be.</td>
<td>○ 4</td>
<td>○ 3</td>
<td>○ 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43.</td>
<td>My immediate supervisor gives me assistance when I need help.</td>
<td>○ 4</td>
<td>○ 3</td>
<td>○ 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44.</td>
<td>I do not get cooperation from the people I work with.</td>
<td>○ 4</td>
<td>○ 3</td>
<td>○ 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45.</td>
<td>The administration in my school communicates its policies well.</td>
<td>○ 4</td>
<td>○ 3</td>
<td>○ 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46.</td>
<td>My colleagues stimulate me to do better work.</td>
<td>○ 4</td>
<td>○ 3</td>
<td>○ 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.</td>
<td>My immediate supervisor is not willing to listen to my suggestions.</td>
<td>○ 4</td>
<td>○ 3</td>
<td>○ 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.</td>
<td>Physical surroundings in my school are unpleasant.</td>
<td>○ 4</td>
<td>○ 3</td>
<td>○ 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.</td>
<td>I receive too little recognition.</td>
<td>○ 4</td>
<td>○ 3</td>
<td>○ 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.</td>
<td>My immediate supervisor explains what is expected of me.</td>
<td>○ 4</td>
<td>○ 3</td>
<td>○ 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.</td>
<td>I do not have the freedom to make my own decisions.</td>
<td>○ 4</td>
<td>○ 3</td>
<td>○ 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52.</td>
<td>I receive too many meaningless instructions from my immediate supervisor.</td>
<td>○ 4</td>
<td>○ 3</td>
<td>○ 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53.</td>
<td>I have to sometimes ignore a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment.</td>
<td>○ 4</td>
<td>○ 3</td>
<td>○ 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54.</td>
<td>I receive an assignment without adequate resources and materials to complete it.</td>
<td>○ 4</td>
<td>○ 3</td>
<td>○ 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55.</td>
<td>I work on unnecessary things.</td>
<td>○ 4</td>
<td>○ 3</td>
<td>○ 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.</td>
<td>What school do you teach at?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ MCS (Mentally Challenged Specialized)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57.</td>
<td>Which program(s) do you teach in?</td>
<td>○ SDC (Specialized Diversely Challenged)</td>
<td>○ MCS-DD (Mentally Challenged Specialized-Diversely Disabled)</td>
<td>○ Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58.</td>
<td>How long have you been employed in special education?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59.</td>
<td>How long have you been employed in special education in the Clark County School District?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60.</td>
<td>Have you worked in a special education field or as a special education teacher in another school district?</td>
<td>○ Yes</td>
<td>○ No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61.</td>
<td>What is your current position?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61a.</td>
<td>How long have you been in your current position?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62.</td>
<td>How many students are in your classroom?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63.</td>
<td>How many hours do you work inside the classroom?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64.</td>
<td>How many hours do you work outside the classroom preparing for the classroom?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65.</td>
<td>Do you use your prep. hour preparing for class?</td>
<td>○ All of the time</td>
<td>○ Most of the time</td>
<td>○ Some of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66.</td>
<td>Have you taken sick or vacation days because you have felt overwhelmed?</td>
<td>○ Yes</td>
<td>○ No</td>
<td>○ Not Sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66a.</td>
<td>IF YES, how many days have you taken off because you have felt overwhelmed?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67.</td>
<td>Have you spent your own money for classroom supplies?</td>
<td>○ Yes</td>
<td>○ No</td>
<td>○ Not Sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68.</td>
<td>IF YES, about how much of your own money have you spent on classroom supplies in the last year?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69.</td>
<td>Does anyone in your family have any mental or physical disabilities?</td>
<td>○ Yes</td>
<td>○ No</td>
<td>○ Not Sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69a.</td>
<td>IF YES, did this influence your decision to go into special education?</td>
<td>○ Yes</td>
<td>○ No</td>
<td>○ Not Sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70.</td>
<td>Age:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71.</td>
<td>Education level:</td>
<td>○ BA/BS</td>
<td>○ MA plus 16 credits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ BA/BS plus 16 credits</td>
<td>○ MA plus 32 credits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ BA/BS plus 32 credits</td>
<td>○ Ed.D/Ph.D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ MA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72.</td>
<td>Ethnic background:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(You may choose more than one)</td>
<td>○ American Indian / Alaska Native</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Asian / Pacific Islander</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Black / African American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ White / Caucasian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Hispanic / Latino</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73.</td>
<td>Salary range:</td>
<td>○ Under $30,000</td>
<td>○ $60,000 - $79,999</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ $30,001 - $39,999</td>
<td>○ $80,000 - $99,999</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ $40,000 - $59,999</td>
<td>○ $100,000 or more</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74.</td>
<td>Gender:</td>
<td>○ Male</td>
<td>○ Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
August 28, 2002

Dear Samira,

Thank you for including the teaching staff at John F. Miller School in your research study. Your dissertation topic will benefit the leadership team in the Student Support Services Division in examining the retention of Special Education teachers.

On behalf of the teaching staff at Miller School, we are pleased to assist you with your research.

Sincerely,

C. Jean Reynolds
Principal
September 12, 2002

Dear Special Education Professional:

Each day in the United States, millions of children go off to school, each with different abilities and disabilities. Those of us who choose to teach special education do so for a variety of reasons, and we leave for a variety of reasons too! My name is Samira Risheg, and I am a doctoral student at UNLV. I am conducting a study of special education teachers who work with physically and mentally challenged students and would appreciate your assistance. The study will focus on factors linked with job stress, dissatisfaction, burnout, work environment, and attrition.

Your participation in the survey is voluntary, and please be assured that all of your answers will be kept strictly confidential and entered into the database without recording your name or the numerical code found on the survey. The code is for mailing purposes only. Once your survey is returned, your responses are not linked to you, and the results will only be reported in the aggregate.

Please take approximately 10 minutes out of your busy schedule to complete the survey and return it in the enclosed envelope Thank you for you help with this project.

Sincerely,

Samira Risheg
General Information:
I am Samira Risheg from the UNLV Department of Educational Leadership. I am the researcher on this project. You are invited to participate in a research study.

The study: The study will investigate variables that influence career decisions for teachers working with students who have severe or profound mental retardation. The study will also investigate the effect of the teachers' work environments on job satisfaction, stress, and burn-out.

Procedure:
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:
Complete and return a survey questionnaire.

Benefits of Participation:
By participating, you will increase your awareness of the factors that influence career decision making off special education teachers working with severely handicapped students. You will also increase your awareness and understanding of the work environment at special education schools vs. regular education schools for teachers working with multiply handicapped students. Factors related to stress, burnout, administration support will be studied.

Risks of Participation in:
There may be some discomfort with the time required to complete the survey questionnaire. Also, teachers may be uncomfortable answering some of the questions. Teachers are encouraged to discuss any concerns with the researcher regarding the study.
INFORMED CONSENT (continued)

Contact Information:

If you have any questions about the study or if you experience harmful effects as a result of participation in this study, you may contact me at:

J. F. Miller Special School
1905 Atlantic St.,
Las Vegas, NV 89104
Tel: 799-7411

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, you may contact the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 895-2794.

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 regarding this study at the beginning or during the research study.

Confidentiality:

All information gathered in this study will be kept confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link respondents to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for at least 3 years after completion of the study.

Participant Consent:

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

__________________________
Signature of Participant

__________________________
Participant Name (Please Print)

Date

2 of 2