

Missouri Special Education Directors' Perceptions of Their Knowledge, Graduate Preparation, and Necessity of Knowledge

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of Missouri special education directors regarding whether directors learned about compliance with special education law and regulations, special education finance, completion of state reports, best instructional practices, and relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders during coursework in graduate school and/or on the job. Additionally, the purpose of this study was to determine whether special education directors perceived that learning about the above-mentioned topics was necessary. The final purpose of this study was to determine whether educational degree, years of experience, or number of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in a district affected special education directors' perceptions that learning about compliance with special education law and regulations, special education finance, completion of state reports, best instructional practices, and relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders was necessary.

This study involved a quantitative research design using an original survey created for this study. The population of interest for the study was special education directors from Missouri during the 2015-2016 school year. Multiple one-sample *t* tests and one-factor analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to address the research questions.

The findings indicated the participants disagreed that they learned about completing state reports during coursework in graduate school. On average, special education directors with fewer district IEPs agreed less strongly than special education directors with more district IEPs that learning about special education finance is necessary. On average, Missouri special education directors agreed that learning about

best instructional practices is necessary. Special education directors with Ed.D./Ph.D. degrees agreed more strongly than special education directors with Specialist degrees that learning about best instructional practices is necessary. Additionally, on average, special education directors with fewer district IEPs agreed less strongly than special education directors with more district IEPs that learning about best instructional practices is necessary. On average, Missouri special education directors agreed that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary. Special education directors with Ed.D./Ph.D. degrees agreed more strongly than did special education directors with Specialist degrees that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary. Special education directors with fewer district IEPs agreed less strongly than did special education directors with more district IEPs that learning about relationship building and collaboration is necessary.

Dedication

This study is dedicated to children with disabilities in the state of Missouri and the directors of special education who serve them. Directors of special education in Missouri are friends, mentors, and colleagues of mine, and I hold them in high esteem. It has been through their advocacy of upholding the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that children with disabilities in Missouri continue to have their civil and educational rights protected. The academic achievement and successful transition to adulthood of children with disabilities can in part be attributed to the dedication of individual special education directors, and also the collective efforts of special education directors and their professional organizations.

Children with disabilities are an inspiration to me in many ways. I am impressed with their confidence to overcome obstacles. As exceptional learners, they influenced my teaching methods, and I was more creative as a teacher. I also developed a curiosity about multiple intelligences, differentiated instruction, and learning styles. I was inspired when my application of that knowledge impacted the students' achievement and self-esteem in a positive way. It is an honor to have conducted research that may impact the learning outcomes of directors of special education in graduate programs so that children with disabilities in the state of Missouri will continue to have bright futures. I will remain loyal and steadfast in my dedication to children with disabilities, and the directors of special education that are charged with protecting the children's education.

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doctorate from Baker, and it does appear as if we will all complete our doctorates. The comradery has been motivating to finish.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The position as the special education administrator in a school district or special education cooperative has always been a “most challenging and fulfilling role” (Harris, 1975, p. 82), yet the roles and responsibilities of the position have changed since the beginning years of special education in the early 1970s. Harris (1975) noted that some of the most important topics for special education administrators to focus on have included, but were not limited to, finances, relationships with general education, transportation, forms and records, in-service education, and curriculum. Although those topics remain relevant to current special education administrators, a review of the current literature indicated there has been a shift toward accountability for the academic achievement of students with disabilities. Crockett, Billingsley, & Boscardin (2012) wrote, “School leaders are being and will be held accountable for the performance of all their students, including students with disabilities” (p. 1).

An example of a public school district being held accountable for the academic performance of students with intellectual disabilities is the June 2013 agreement between the United States Department of Justice and the Providence, Rhode Island school district. This agreement followed a probe by the U.S. Department of Justice and “was referred to by the Department as a landmark case” (Samuels, 2013a, p. 14). The students with primarily intellectual disabilities at the Mount Pleasant High School in Providence, RI were isolated from their nondisabled peers, unable to access integrated competitive employment, and lacked transition plans (Samuels, 2013a). “Nationally, the U.S. Department of Justice since 2009 has been intensifying its efforts to fight improper

segregation of individuals with disabilities” (Samuels, 2013a, p. 14), because it had become common for states to “allow low expectations to shape their disability programs” (Samuels, 2013a, p. 14). Cases such as the one in Rhode Island may be of interest to public school districts because McNeil and Gewertz (2013) stated that teachers in classrooms across the United States are “working to design lesson plans for students that will, in most cases represent a step up in academic expectations” (p. 35). As stated in the opening paragraph, a special education administrator must focus on a variety of responsibilities in addition to the above-discussed concern of increasing academic expectations for students with disabilities. Boscardin (2010) stated that special education administration is a “dynamic and continually evolving profession” (p. 60). Special education administrators work to find a balance “between standards-based education and the individualized focus of special education policies” (Crockett et al., 2012, p. x). Boscardin (2012) went further when she stated, “federal and state mandates continue to contribute to making the work of leaders of special education more complex” (p. 58).

This complex challenge has influenced the field of special education administration. In addition to needing basic leadership skills expected of all educational administrators, administrators of special education do benefit from having specific knowledge, and graduate preparation regarding the administration of special education programs. Specific examples of knowledge necessary for an administrator to be effective in that role include legal requirements, areas of disabilities, personnel recruitment, evolving best practices, and itinerancy of staff (Swan, 1998). The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) (2012a) developed Advanced Role Content Standards for special educators in leadership roles by outlining specific skills and knowledge necessary

to be successful. The standards focus on six areas that include leadership and policy, program development and organization, research and inquiry, student and program evaluation, professional development and ethical practice, and collaboration (CEC, 2012a).

Background

In the state of Missouri, 886,423 children attended 518 school districts during the 2014-2015 school year. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MDESE) has reported from those districts, 298 Special Education Administrators were identified in the Missouri School Directory: 2014-2015 Statistics of Missouri Public School (2015a). The 518 Missouri school districts were accountable for the appropriate academic progress of 112,678 children receiving special education services in kindergarten through grade 12, or up to age 21 years (MDESE, 2015b). The school districts were also responsible for the implementation of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for children eligible for early childhood special education (MDESE, 2015b). During the 2014-2015 school year, the number of children requiring special education services represented 12.71% of the total student population attending public schools in Missouri (MDESE, 2015b).

The federal law, the IDEA Amendments Public Law 105-17 of June 1997, and the Missouri Compliance Standards and Indicators (MDESE, 2015c) are the established guides for public schools in Missouri. Lashley and Boscardin (2003) suggested special education administrators are responsible for implementing the provisions of the IDEA. Additionally, Lashley and Boscardin (2003) indicated that special education administrators are also responsible for “state and local statutes as well as policies and

procedures that stipulate a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment for all students with disabilities” (p. 63).

Legalities and complex compliance regulations are associated with special education in Missouri. MDESE has established criteria that must be met for a person to be a certificated administrator of special education in Missouri (MDESE, 2016) An Initial Administrator Certificate for Special Education Director can be issued to an educator who is certified to teach special education or has a baccalaureate degree in special education (MDESE, 2016). Additional requirements for the certification include: two years of special education teaching experience, a passing score for the building-level administrator’s assessment, a course in Psychology and/or Education of the Exceptional Child, a master’s degree in educational leadership, a recommendation for certification from an official of a college or university, and a MDESE review of the candidate’s graduate program (MDESE, 2016).

The criteria to become a certificated special education administrator in Missouri may not encompass all of the unique district level work of a special education administrator as described by the CEC. The CEC (2012a) established advanced preparation standards for special education administrators. The CEC (2012a) has prepared seven standards “organized around learners and learning environments, curricular knowledge, assessment, specialized pedagogical skills, and professional and collaborative skills” (p. 1). Thus, there could be insufficient preparation of those seeking to become district administrators of special education considering only two years of teaching experience in special education is required, and that would not be enough for a teacher to become tenured in the state of Missouri.

Statement of the Problem

Several factors, which are not mutually exclusive, have created a need in public education for special education administrators to be effective leaders with knowledge and graduate preparation specific to their work. One important factor is special education directors are accountable for student achievement. Nicastro (2010) wrote that “a district’s director of special education is responsible for the directing, coordinating, and supervising of the district’s special education services” (p. 106). Special education directors are also “responsible for ensuring students with disabilities receive a free, appropriate education designed to meet their individual needs” (Hughes, Combes, & Metha, 2012, p. 91).

However, Lashley and Boscardin (2003) found a significant historical shortage of directors of special education with appropriate training. As confirmed almost 25 years ago in the 1992-93 U. S. Department of Education’s 17th Annual Report, “there were indications of special education administration shortages nationally” (as cited in Lashley & Boscardin, 2003, p. 5). “The number of vacancies reported and projections of retirements and transfers to other positions indicate that a significant number of special education administration positions will be open and that individuals will not be available to fill those positions” (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003, p. 6). More recently, Boscardin, Weir, and Kusek (2010) reported

While some states have been quite rigorous, clearly defining competencies and expectations for special education administrators, many states remain vague, with no such definitions or guidelines. Instead, these states elected to allow the

administrator of special education role to be filled by administrators who are not trained in special education or special education administration. (p. 61)

School districts' willingness to fill special education administrator vacancies with untrained personnel could have been a consequence of the shortage of qualified directors of special education administration. Boscardin et al.'s (2010) study further revealed the limited amount of research about the qualifications and credentialing requirements of "administrators of special education" (p. 61). Therefore, additional research regarding whether special education directors' perceptions of their graduate programs were adequate to prepare them to be successful administrators, and if the necessary knowledge and skills to be successful were learned on the job, would add to the body of literature on the topic of special education administration.

Purpose of the Study

The first purpose of this study was to determine whether special education directors learned about compliance with special education law and regulations, special education finance, completion of state reports, best instructional practices, and relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders during coursework in graduate school. The second purpose of this study was to determine whether special education directors learned about compliance with special education law and regulations, special education finance, completion of state reports, best instructional practices, and relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders on the job. The third purpose of this study was to determine whether special education directors perceived that compliance with special education law and regulations, special education finance, completion of state reports, best instructional practices, and relationship building and

collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary. The final purpose of this study was to determine whether educational degree, years of experience, or number of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in a district affected special education directors' perceptions that compliance with special education law and regulations, special education finance, completion of state reports, best instructional practices, and relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is the contribution to the field of special education administration in possible improvements to graduate preparation programs based on the perceptions of special education administrators. Through an analysis of the results of the survey of directors of special education, this information could allow for an understanding of the type of graduate preparation needed for special education directors. It may inform curriculum developers of graduate programs for special education administration, and it may provide public school districts with valuable information about necessary credentials and competencies of directors of special education. Through a better understanding of the perceptions of special education directors regarding whether the knowledge and skills necessary to be effective are learned during coursework in graduate school or are learned on the job, perhaps graduate course offerings could be influenced to improve relevancy, which may lead to an improvement of the overall leadership in the field.

Boscardin et al. (2010) added to the research regarding the credentialing process of special education directors, which included state requirements of competency, experience, highest degree required, examinations, and continuing education. "This

information will offer insight into how states ensure the development of highly qualified administrators of special education who are expected to support students with disabilities, their families, and the instructional staff who are responsible for their educational outcomes” (Boscardin et al., 2010, p. 64). According to Marrett (2008), “while the acquisition of knowledge and skills is vital, it must be recognized that without the specific application of competencies, leadership will be ineffective and, at best, student learning and achievement will be minimal” (pp. 4-5). The results of this study could extend the body of knowledge regarding the field of special education administration. Little research on special education administration and the effectiveness of the educational programs has been conducted.

Delimitations

Delimitations have been defined as “self-imposed boundaries set by the researcher on the purpose and scope of the study” (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p. 134). For this study, the researcher established the following delimitations:

1. The survey was administered to special education directors of Missouri public school districts. The survey was not sent to special education directors of private or parochial schools, charter schools, the Department of Corrections, Missouri School for the Deaf, Special School District of St. Louis, Missouri School for the Blind, Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled, Division of Youth Services, or the Missouri Virtual Instruction Program in Missouri.
2. The surveys were completed during the fall semester of 2015.
3. The leadership skills and areas of needed knowledge selected for this study are not an exhaustive set.

Assumptions

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) defined assumptions as the “postulates, premises, and propositions that are accepted as operational for purposes of the research. Assumptions include the nature, analysis, and interpretation of the data” (p. 135). The following assumptions were made in this study:

1. Special education administrators understood the terms, definitions, and purpose of the survey.
2. Special education administrators answered survey questions honestly, accurately, and were not unduly influenced to respond to a survey question in a certain way.
3. The results of the data collection and analysis were accurate, appropriate, provided accurate measurement, and well-chosen analyses of the perceptions of the Missouri special education directors.

Research Questions

Creswell (2009) noted research questions (RQs) should “shape and specifically focus the purpose of the study” (p. 132). The following research questions were used for this study:

RQ1. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about compliance with special education law and regulations during coursework in graduate school?

RQ2. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about special education finance during coursework in graduate school?

RQ3. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about completing state reports during coursework in graduate school?

RQ4. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about best instructional practices during coursework in graduate school?

RQ5. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders during coursework in graduate school?

RQ6. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about compliance with special education law and regulations on the job?

RQ7. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about special education finance on the job?

RQ8. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about completing state reports on the job?

RQ9. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about best instructional practices on the job?

RQ10. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders on the job?

RQ11. To what extent do Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about compliance with special education law and regulations is necessary?

RQ12. To what extent do educational degree, years of experience, or number of IEPs in the district affect Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about compliance with special education laws and regulations is necessary?

RQ13. To what extent do Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about special education finance is necessary?

RQ14. To what extent do educational degree, years of experience, or number of IEPs in the district affect Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education finance is necessary?

RQ15. To what extent do Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about completing state reports is necessary?

RQ16. To what extent do educational degree, years of experience, or number of IEPs in the district affect Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about completing state reports is necessary?

RQ17. To what extent do Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about best instructional practices is necessary?

RQ18. To what extent do educational degree, years of experience, or number of IEPs in the district affect Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about best instructional practices is necessary?

RQ19. To what extent do Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary?

RQ20. To what extent do educational degree, years of experience, or number of IEPs in the district affect Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary?

Definition of Terms

A definition is provided so that the reader will have an understanding of the word or phrase in the context of the study. Creswell (2009) stated that terms should be defined

“if there is any likelihood that readers will not know its meaning” (p. 39). The following terms are defined for this study:

Special education director/administrator. A special education director/administrator “directs, coordinates, and supervises the district’s special education services” (Nicastro, 2013, p. 101).

State core data screen 20 report for course and assignment data. This report contains special education teachers’ planning time, travel time between buildings, grade levels taught, code for funding source of salary, class enrollment, and the instructional delivery system such as small group or self-contained (MDESE, 2013a).

State December 1 child count of students with disabilities. This report is formally reported as the Core Data Screen 11 – Special Education Student Counts by Age; it is an unduplicated count. This report is “used to report the number of students with disabilities that are served by Missouri public schools” (MDESE, 2013a, p. 107).

Core data screen 26 – career education follow-up. This screen “is used to report follow-up data by selected categories of students graduating from approved career education programs” (MDESE, 2013a, p. 133). School districts are responsible for contacting the previous year’s graduates and reporting information regarding the student’s employment and continuing education (MDESE, 2013a).

State exiting data for students with disabilities report. This report is formally reported as the Core Data Screen 12 – Special Education Exiter Counts by Age. This report is “used to report the number of students with disabilities . . . that exited special education during the current school year” (MDESE, 2013a, p. 205). Examples would

include students that no longer have an IEP, graduated, died, or parent withdrew them from services (MDESE, 2013a).

Part B budget application. Part B funds are dollars provided by the federal government under the provisions of the IDEA Section 611 to be disbursed by the states of the Union (MDESE, 2013b). These funds “must be used for expenditures related to students with disabilities” (MDESE, 2013b, p. 9). The budget application is “due by July 1 of each fiscal year” (MDESE, 2013b, p. 15).

Early childhood special education expenditure report. In Missouri, the provision of special education to children with disabilities ages 3-5 is a fully funded mandated state program. Districts must submit an expenditure report of allowable expenses to be reimbursed by the state (MDESE, 2013b).

Proportionate share for non-public schools. Proportionate share is the part of the district’s Part B funds that are required to be reserved and used to provide special education services to children with disabilities attending nonprofit private or parochial schools. These students have been evaluated and determined eligible for special education and related services by the district (MDESE, 2013b).

Overview of the Methodology

This study involved a quantitative research design using survey methods. The population of the interest for the study was special education directors from Missouri during the 2015-2016 school year. Purposive sampling included special education directors identified by public school districts in Missouri per the MDESE. The instrumentation was an original survey created for this study. The perceptions of Missouri special education directors were analyzed regarding whether knowledge was

learned during graduate school, or on the job, and whether it was necessary. Data was examined regarding the special education directors' educational degree, years of experience, or number of IEPs in the district to evaluate if those factors significantly influenced their perceptions that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary. The data was collected through a web-based survey sent to the target sample. Multiple one-sample *t* tests and one-factor analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to address the research questions.

Organization of the Study

Five chapters are contained in this study: introduction, review of the literature, methods, results, and interpretations and recommendations. Chapter one included the background information, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and significance of the study. Also, identified in chapter one were the delimitations, assumptions, research questions, the definition of terms, and an overview of the study's methodology. Chapter two includes a synthesis of literature including: (a) history of special education (b) the impact of litigation on special education, (c) the impact of civil rights laws on special education, (d) specialized knowledge and skills necessary of directors of special education, and (e) graduate programs for directors of special education. Presented in chapter three are the specifics of the methodology utilized in the study. The results of the analyses are reported in chapter four. Chapter five is the concluding chapter that provides interpretations and recommendations, findings related to the literature, implications for action, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

Effective supervision by directors of special education of the instruction provided to students with disabilities is vital to the success of those students and school districts. “Supervising special education instruction is challenging because it occurs in a unique multidimensional arena” (Swan, 1998, p. 530). Chapter two includes an examination of literature relevant to the study organized into five sections. This chapter contains a rationale for studying special education directors’ perceptions of their knowledge, and graduate school preparation through a review of the following topics: (a) history of special education (b) the impact of litigation on special education, (c) the impact of civil rights laws on special education, (d) specialized knowledge necessary for directors of special education, and (e) graduate programs for directors of special education.

History of Special Education

“Societies have acknowledged the existence of disability for thousands of years. Depending on the era and the culture, persons with significant and obvious disabling conditions have been demonized, deified, ignored, persecuted, protected, or isolated and exterminated” (Osgood, 2008, p. 6). A notable early historical recording of educating a person with disabilities occurred in 1798 when Itard attempted to teach the “wild boy” of Aveyon, France how to communicate and be socially appropriate (Milton, 2012). Itard spent years attempting to teach the boy basic communication; however, the boy’s only progress was verbally using two words and recognizing action signs for concepts (Milton, 2012). The boy died after 30 years in the care and custody of Itard, who had concluded

the boy “was the mental and psychological equivalent of a born deaf-mute” (Milton, 2012, p. 4).

“In the colonial and early national eras of the United States, persons with disabilities either were kept at home, tolerated and even supported by communities, or expelled, prosecuted, and even condemned” (Osgood, 2008, p. 7). An early American attempt of supporting persons with disabilities was the opening of The Asylum for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut in 1817 by Tomas Gallaudet (Osgood, 2008, p. 7). An example of a positive, and what some may consider legendary American story of special education, is the work of teacher Anne Sullivan with Helen Keller, a deaf, blind, and mute student born on June 27, 1880, in Tuscumbia, Alabama (Keller, 1996). Through the advocacy of Helen’s mother, Helen was provided an opportunity to be seen by Alexander Graham Bell, who was working with deaf children in the late 1800s (Keller, 1996). Parental advocacy led to Helen being referred to the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston, Massachusetts and then to be a graduate of the institution; she later graduated cum laude from Radcliffe College in 1904 (Keller, 1996). Anne Sullivan was Helen’s lifelong teacher and companion and supported Helen’s efforts to advocate for women’s suffrage and the improvement of the lives of the blind (Keller, 1996). Helen Keller in her autobiography expressed deep gratitude toward her special teacher, “the most important day in all my life is the one on which my teacher, Anne Mansfield Sullivan, came to me” (Keller, 1996, p. 10). Both Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan assisted in paving the way for future national efforts to improve the education of children with disabilities.

“By 1900, disability had become a key construct and target for progressive reformers” (Osgood, 2008, p. 7). People interested in social reform helped advocate for

people with disabilities. “Throughout our nation’s history, children identified as disabled in the United States have lived lives reflecting a remarkable ambivalence toward their place in American Society” (Osgood, 2008, p. xiii). A transition in instructional practices occurred over the time of the education provided to children with disabilities. One of the first cities in the United States to establish schools for children with disabilities was Boston (Osgood, 2008).

From 1899 to 1914, Boston opened special classes and programs for children with disabilities (Osgood, 2008). “By the 1920s, special education stood as an established aspect of public schools in the city, with over 5 percent of children enrolled in a designated specialized setting” (Osgood, 2008, p. 11). With Boston as an example, other cities in the United States such as Chicago, New York, Cleveland, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles, also took similar steps to provide an education for children with disabilities (Osgood, 2008). The country continued to progress through the 1930s in providing various opportunities for students. These opportunities included “public schools, public and private institutions, and public policy. Children were central to these endeavors” (Osgood, 2008, p. 18).

The 1930s were impacted by the Great Depression and progressivism in education (Osgood, 2008). The result was a “stronger emphasis on school involvement in vocational preparation” (Osgood, 2008, p. 65). The White House Conference committee on the handicapped advocated for “the introduction of sheltered workshops, prevocational training, and specific job training as a key aspect of what the committee referred to as “social adjustment” (Osgood, 2008, p. 65). Sheltered workshops and vocational training for people with disabilities continue today.

Public school administrators, until after World War II, followed a practice of assigning children to special classes (Howe, 1981). This practice “was considered a failure because any misfit in the school could be assigned to the opportunity rooms” (Howe, 1981, p. 31). Persons of influence and passion for the less fortunate moved the nation towards inclusion. After this period, categories of eligibility were developed and had to be met for a program to qualify for state funds (Howe, 1981). State funds are Part B federal monies provided to school districts in the state of Missouri to be used for the implementation of IDEA.

Trailblazers for advocacy of special education were needed as Howe (1981) expressed, “Decency cannot be legislated. Attitudes die hard. *Handicapped* has been associated with *inferior* in the mind of the American public for more than a century, and change will be slow” (p. 15). According to Osgood (2008), “within schools, special education changed only slightly between 1940 and 1960” (p. 84). Osgood (2008) expanded that thought to conclude, “the near-universal practice was to establish and maintain separate classes, schools, and programs that permitted little if any contact between special education students and their nondisabled peers” (p. 84).

According to Howe (1981), Congress has passed more than a dozen acts since 1954 related to handicapped persons. “Categorical federal funds for the handicapped were first appropriated in 1957, when monies were earmarked to be spent on research related to the education of the mentally retarded” (Howe, 1981, pp. 16-17). Between 1960 and 1980, “persons with disabilities and their advocates engaged in political, social and educational initiatives that would challenge and change longstanding policies and practices” (Osgood, 2008, p. 99). When Public Law 94-142, the Education for All

Handicapped Children Act was first written in 1975, special educators were among the major interpreters of its meaning to general administrators. The interpretation may have been a result of an educational model of separating handicapped children in special classes or facilities, and creating a dual system of administration (Howe, 1981). An additional outcome of the 1975 Act was the need for special education directors “to understand, interpret, and implement legal requirements to assure the rights of handicapped children” (Howe, 1981, p. 9). For example, in 1975, the portion of the Act most likely to affect the day-to-day work of educators was the requirement of an Individualized Education Plan for each child eligible for special education, because before that time most special educators provided instruction in a small group model (Howe, 1981).

The IDEA was amended in 1997 and included “substantial changes in the education of students in special education, as well as the roles of administrators, general educators, special educators, and teacher trainers” (Yell & Shriner, 2005, p. 29). The primary goal of these changes by Congress was to emphasize improvement of student performance through “ensuring access to the general education curriculum” (Yell & Shriner, 2005, p. 29). Additional improvements included a reduction in paperwork, strengthened parental involvement, attention to overidentification of minority children, and resolution of differences between parents and school districts through mediation (Yell & Shriner, 2005). The completion of this goal and improvements led to changes in the processes of school districts’ special education departments.

The first step in the process is an educational evaluation in determining if a student is eligible for special education services. Changes to IDEA in 1997 affected the

rights of parents to have informed consent before an evaluation, and “that consent for evaluation is not consent for placement of the child” (Yell & Shriner, 2005, p. 31). The reevaluation process was also changed to require parental consent “unless the school can determine that the parents failed to respond to reasonable attempts to obtain their consent” (Yell & Shriner, 2005, p. 31). One of the other intended improvements of IDEA in 1997 was to reduce paperwork. The reduction of paperwork was achieved by streamlining the 3-year-reevaluation process that “may rely on existing information and assessments. If the LEA believes that no additional data are needed and notifies the parent of this option, the reevaluation can be conducted without any new assessments” (Yell & Shriner, 2005, pp. 32-33). The paperwork reduction thus requires less costly personnel time for responsibilities such as administering formal assessments. “In this regard, the reevaluation process is more purposeful – seeking to assess only when there are valid reasons to do so” (Yell & Shriner, 2005, p. 33). Thus once the student is found to continue to be a child with a disability, and requires specialized instruction, the school district must continue their responsibilities to the student.

“With federal legislation mandating once and for all the need for public schools to do much more to accommodate children with disabilities, the status of persons with disabilities in school and society garnered increasing attention” (Osgood, 2008, p. 117). The responsibility of school and district level administrators is to support the national expectation of providing quality special education in schools, which are diverse and inclusive of children with varying degrees of need and handicapping conditions. “Although special education evolved in the 20th century to assume a prominent place in American schooling, concerns with legal and fiscal matters often dominated the

professional literature, leaving other critical dimensions of leaders' work unaddressed or misunderstood" (Crockett et al., 2012, p. ix).

Two contemporary issues affecting special education administration are the implementation of the Common Core Academic Standards and state legislative actions. Reedy (2014) stated that one of the current topics that special education directors manage is "transitional planning for students with disabilities who have completed high school and are ready to move to a postsecondary educational setting or a career" (p. 17). Post-secondary transition is a key component of any student's IEP. "Several reports highlighting transition policy and practices for students with disabilities also have targeted a need for different or specialized transition services for students ages 18-21" (Neubert, Moon, & Grigal, 2005, p. 388). Transition planning is just one area that directors of special education must be proficient.

"School-district special education directors routinely juggle complex, difficult, time-consuming, and emotion-laden job demands, but when things get tough, they usually find themselves solving problems on their own" (Reedy, 2014, p. 15). Trends in the education of children with disabilities have needed the attention of special education directors. Examples of trends include, "inclusion, assistive technology, universal design, co-teaching, accommodations and high-stakes testing" (Marrett, 2008, p. 10). Special education directors commit to implementing compliance processes and procedures to be defensible in case of litigation. Marrett (2008) addressed new special education administrators in her study and wrote, "Keeping abreast of complex and often contradictory legal requirements is yet another challenge" (p. 11).

The Impact of Litigation on Special Education

The 1975 federal law, IDEA, included many provisions that a special education director must implement (Reedy, 2014). “A key provision of IDEA is that an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for each special education student must be developed and monitored” (Reedy, 2014, p. 15). An additional impact of IDEA is the large amount of documentation required to be submitted to state and federal agencies (Reedy, 2014). “Ensuring this compliance is very time-consuming for special education directors and it takes time away from program-related activities” (Reedy, 2014, p. 16). Failure to maintain compliance may lead to litigation.

In 2014, when Congress returned for that year’s session, nearly every major education law remained overdue for reauthorization (Klein, 2014), including IDEA. That is the law that “governs special education programs” (Klein, 2014, p. 19), which was last renewed in 2004. The IDEA “obligates school districts to identify students with disabilities and provide them with a free and appropriate public education (FAPE), which includes specially designed instruction” (Karaxha & Zirkel, 2014, p. 55). It is the role of the special education director to guide districts regarding this obligation; however, “issues under the IDEA sometimes become a source of contention between parents and school districts. The IDEA provides both the parent and school district with the right to file a due process complaint” (Karaxha & Zirkel, 2014, p. 55). A district may file a due process complaint to protect the district’s or student’s rights under federal law.

As IDEA is a federal law, school districts are obligated to uphold the law. “As a result of the legal mandate, special education directors are much more likely to be involved in administrative hearings and litigation than their general education peers”

(Reedy, 2014, p. 16). In September 2014, the Government Accountability Office reported that “the U.S. Department of Education needs to do a better job of tracking how quickly due process hearings for special education students are resolved” (Samuels, 2014, b, p. 19).

The procedural safeguards of the IDEA describe for parents and school districts “the provision of a due process hearing to settle differences between and among school personnel, parents, and other professionals” (Schrag & Schrag, 2004, p. 1). A due process hearing may be initiated by parents or school district officials “if they are unable to agree on any matter relating to the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of a child with a disability, or the provision of FAPE” (Schrag & Schrag, 2004, p. 1). In 1997, Congress included formal mediation as a means to resolve disagreements between parents and school districts, because there was a need for less adversarial resolutions to differences between the parties (Schrag & Schrag, 2004). Based on the data from the National Dispute Resolution Use and Effectiveness Study, “state and local informal problem solving/conflict resolution procedures appear to help resolve issues more immediately and closer to the classrooms and school where conflicts originate” (Schrag & Schrag, 2004, p. 5). Unfortunately, not all disputes can be solved through mediation.

Zirkel (2011) conducted a study to explore if there were a disproportional number of legal cases involving students with autism. Zirkel (2011) selected autism to study because “autism is on the rise at what seems to be epidemic proportions. As a result of the relatively recent recognition in and dramatic growth under the IDEA, autism has become a major issue in the education context” (p. 92). Zirkel (2011) sought to determine if “litigation concerning students with autism is disproportional to their

enrollment in special education programs under the IDEA” (p. 93). The results of Zirkel’s (2011) study indicated the litigation of cases involving students in schools with autism had disproportionately higher trends than the enrollment of students without autism. “Thus, overall the proportionality ratio of autism litigation to autism enrollments was more than 10:1” (Zirkel, 2011, p. 96). Another major finding by Zirkel (2011) was that “students with autism account for approximately a third of the central stream of court decisions after the transitional period in the wake of the 1990 IDEA amendments” (p. 96). The practical significance of the study was that special education administrators “need to pay particular attention to providing effective research-based programs for children with autism and to establishing effective communication and trust building with parents” (Zirkel, 2011, p. 101).

A group of researchers from the University of South Carolina completed an analysis of court decisions that influenced the provision of education for individuals with disabilities in the specific area of transition services (Petcu, Yell, Cholewicki, & Plotner, 2014). Judicial decisions from 2005 to 2013 were analyzed “to identify issues that school districts have in implementing the transition requirements of the IDEA” (Petcu et al., 2014, p. 67). The major findings of the study were that:

The primary violations arose in the following areas of transition services:

- (a) the development of the transition plan, (b) participants in the individualized education program (IEP) meetings, (c) the student’s strengths, interests, and preferences when developing the transition plan, (d) parent involvement in transition planning, (e) postsecondary goals, (f)

agencies and persons responsible for the provisions of transition services, and (g) age-appropriate transition assessments. (Petcu et al., 2014, p. 66)

From this analysis, the researchers concluded that school districts continue to find challenging the development of appropriate IEPs that meet the spirit and letter of the IDEA (Petcu et al., 2014). They suggested that common mistakes made when developing an IEP can be avoided when special education administrators ensure that personnel understand the transition requirements of the IDEA and implement those requirements with fidelity. The IDEA defines transition services as a

Coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that is designed to be within a result-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of a child with disabilities to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities.

(IDEA, 20 U.S.C. 1401 (34))

Special education directors should consider planning and implementing professional development for IEP case managers and building level administrators so that their district can develop an appropriate transition plan for the student that is also legally compliant. Doing so may reduce the number of child complaints and due process hearings.

Karaxha and Zirkel (2014) determined the frequency and outcomes of court decisions filed under the IDEA. The data for the study was gathered from the website of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education and included 809 published court decisions (Karaxha & Zirkel, 2014). A significant finding of the study included "the frequency of these decisions trended upward during the 15-year period,

particularly during the most recent 5-year interval” (Karaxha & Zirkel, 2014, p. 55). An additional major finding was “conclusive outcomes favored districts 3:1 both overall and on a relatively consistent longitudinal basis” (Karaxha & Zirkel, 2014, p. 55). The Eighth Circuit Court, which includes Missouri, led the Circuit Courts in pro-district outcomes (Karaxha & Zirkel, 2014). “If parents seek a level playing field in litigation, the proper place to achieve this balance is in the policy-making forum, that is, federal and state special education legislation and regulations, which provide the framework for litigation” (Zirkel, 2013, p. 73).

The Impact of Civil Rights Laws on Special Education

The federal law that has had a major impact on directors of special education is Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 because the responsibility of implementation of Section 504 often falls to directors of special education. “The unique aspects of Section 504 is that one of its statements extends to the handicapped those protections given to other minority groups by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964” (Howe, 1981, p. 17). Directors of special education have to be literate enough regarding civil rights to make legally defensible decisions. Section 504 “makes it clear that the intent of Congress was to prohibit discrimination against the handicapped as well as to include a requirement of affirmative action” (Howe, 1981, p. 19).

Directors of special education understand the differences between IDEA and Section 504. Zirkel (2012) provided a simple definition for both.

The IDEA definition requires meeting the criteria of one or more of a specified set of impairments, such as autism or other health impairment, and having a resulting need for special education. In contrast, the Section

504 definition consists of three essential elements: (a) any physical or mental impairment (without a restricted list) that (b) substantially limits (c) one or more major life activities (with specified examples that extend beyond learning, such as walking or breathing). (p. 99)

Zirkel (2012) offered this advice since he found that “because of a lack of continuing compliance, parents or other individuals have had a high rate of success in Office of Civil Rights (OCR) complaints concerning this requirement” (p. 100). Directors of special education have had to accept that the responsibility for compliance with Section 504 cannot lie solely with the general education administrators.

The U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights issued a “Dear Colleague” letter in October of 2014 requiring school districts to take immediate action if bullying of a student with a disability occurs (Samuels, 2014c, p. 15). The message was there will be no clear directive “for schools to follow in determining whether bullying has had enough of an impact on a student’s academic success to be a violation of his or her ability to receive a free, appropriate public education” (Samuels, 2014c, p. 15). This directive could be perceived to be ambiguous considering the department also stated that “While there is broad consensus that bullying is wrong and cannot be tolerated in our school, the sad reality is that bullying persists in our schools today, and especially so for students with disabilities” (Samuels, 2014c, p. 15).

An example of alleged bullying of a student with a disability was reviewed in a Texas case, *Nevills v. Mart Independent School District*. A federal court held that the Texas student “could not show intentional discrimination by a school district in its

handling of bullying and harassment claims” (Roth, 2015, p. 7). When the male student was in the seventh grade, he was removed from Mart Independent School District when his parents alleged he was verbally bullied and harassed by his peers by mostly name calling (Roth, 2015). “A federal court held the parents did not show the harassment was based on a disability and also failed to show the district was deliberately indifferent to any harassment” (Roth, 2015, p. 7). Therefore, the U. S. Court of Appeals, Fifth Circuit “held the evidence was not sufficient to support a claim for peer disability harassment or intentional discrimination by the school district” (Roth, 2015, p. 7). The court found for the district in *Nevills v. Mart Independent School District* (Roth, 2015).

Parents of children of minority status have often filed suit against schools alleging racial bias under civil rights laws. For example, several African-American families alleged that the Lower Merion School District in Pennsylvania “acted with racial bias when it disproportionately assigned African-American students to special education classes” (Walsh, 2014, p. 4). The families sued using Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act as the standard. “A majority of a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 3rd Circuit held that there was no evidence the district purposely discriminated against students based on race” (Walsh, 2014, p. 4).

In a different case, *Blunt v. Lower*, parents claimed, “The 7,300-student school district was improperly placing their children in special education. About 8 percent of the district’s enrollment is black, but in special education courses, the percentage of black students is about 16 percent” (Samuel, 2014a, p. 23). The allegation by the parents was that the district found African-American students eligible for special education at a rate higher than their percentage of the enrollment (Walsh, 2014). “That result illustrates the

difficulty that parents and advocates have in proving that a school district intentionally engages in discriminatory practices, despite what the statistics may show” (Samuel, 2014, October 1, p. 23). Therefore, “federal officials face sharply polarized opinions among advocates and educators as they consider creating a bright line for states to use in deciding whether minorities are being over-identified for special education services” (Samuels, 2014a, p. 17).

A long-standing concern of the U. S. Department of Education has been that students with disabilities who identify themselves as part of a minority ethnic or racial group are over-identified (Samuels, 2014b). For example, black students often are found eligible for special education services in areas of disability that may be perceived to have a negative connotation such as emotionally disturbed and intellectually disabled (Samuels, 2014b). In contrast, “over-identification is not seen in disability categories with clearer definitions, such as hearing impairment and visual impairment” (Samuels, 2014b, p. 17). Unfortunately, in other areas of disability eligibility for special education, “minority students end up being under-identified, such as in the early-intervention programs designed to address developmental difficulties before they become entrenched” (Samuels, 2014b, p. 17).

The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) is another civil rights law that can protect students receiving special education services. A specific example is the use of service animals by children with disabilities in public schools. Weatherly (2014) found in her school law practice that “schools have recently been facing increasing requests to allow students with disabilities to bring their service animals to school” (p. 6). Weatherly’s (2014) recommendation to special education administrators was to be

“prepared to respond appropriately to service animal requests and that school districts have good procedures in place with respect to this issue” (p. 6). Advice provided to special education administrators by Weatherly (2014) included to remember that a student could meet the criteria to be protected by the ADA but not be eligible for special education services under the IDEA, and district procedures should include a concise definition of a service animal. A service animal is a dog or miniature horse that is trained to perform a task meant to benefit the person, and that task must be directly related to the person’s disability (Weatherly, 2014).

As an animal in the public school environment may raise questions and concerns, there are justifications for not allowing a service dog in school (Weatherly, 2014). ADA allows a school to prohibit a service animal for reasons such as the animal is out of control, the student cannot control the animal, the animal is not housebroken, the animal is a threat to the safety and well-being of others, or the animal would significantly change the nature of the student’s educational services (Weatherly, 2014). For students with an IEP or Section 504, Weatherly advised the animal itself is not written into the IEP or 504 Plan. Rather, the accommodation that is being made by the district is the act of allowing the student to bring his/her service animal to school” (Weatherly, 2014, p. 7).

Specialized Knowledge Necessary for Directors of Special Education

Harris (1975) wrote based on personal experiences as a director of special education in *Preparation for Special Education Administration*. The author’s purpose was to offer guidance to assist others in similar situations. The author noted that “life in this role is never dull, as the variety of daily experiences is tremendous” (p. 82). Of the 25 guidelines Harris proposed to fellow special education administrators in 1975, many

continue to be relevant including follow policies, communicate honestly with stakeholders, understand available resources, and provide quality programs and services. “Special education leaders, whether they are solely in charge of students with exceptionalities or oversee a variety of programs, must empower school and district teams to meet the needs of all students” (Leckie, 2016, p. 59). Skilled and knowledgeable directors of special education continue to make a positive contribution to local and state systems of education.

Super (2005) investigated the perceptions of special education directors in West Virginia regarding what those directors believed they needed to know as part of their knowledge base to be adequately prepared. Super (2005) concluded from the 45 participants in his study that there were 18 topics that would provide a sufficient knowledge base in the field of special education. Super (2005) also concluded that graduate courses provided content in specific areas, but that the participants of his study perceived that their job experiences allowed for expanded learning and additional knowledge through practical day-to-day application.

Marrett (2008) wrote, “To effectively serve students with disabilities and their families; it is important to reevaluate the specific skills and knowledge base needed for special education administrators” (p. 8). Special education directors require knowledge of compliance with special education law, state regulations, and completing state reports. Citations supporting this statement can be found in the *Standards from the Council for Exceptional Children* and through a review of information from the *Leadership Performance Planning Worksheet for New Special Education Administrators from the New York City Leadership Academy, created in cooperation with the Center for*

Performance. “Possessing an understanding of job functions alone without the competencies needed will not be sufficient to successfully meet the challenges of special education” (Marrett, 2008, p. 9). Carter (2011) described that special education administrators deal “daily in highly charged situations involving children with disabling conditions and their parents and finding suitable supports and education programs for them” (p. 109). These supports can fall along a spectrum of programs and services.

As more than 60% of students with disabilities receive their education in regular classes more than 80% of the day (Holdheide, 2015), directors of special education should also be aware of the general education curriculum and best instructional practices for all students. Leckie (2016) also supports the importance of ensuring the provision of “providing robust academic and behavioral student supports” (p. 59). Knowledge of best instructional practices by directors of special education starts with an appreciation and understanding of student data. Tinberg (2012) noted there is an emphasis on the annual yearly progress of all students and the disaggregation of subgroups. “Data must serve as the bedrock for identification of strategies; strategies must be chosen with the specific target population in mind” (Tinberg, 2012, p. 106).

Knowledge of special education financial regulations at the state and federal level is a necessity for special education directors because they must “ensure that students with exceptionalities are provided with appropriate education services and supports in a fiscally challenging environment (Carter, 2011, p. 110). Local IEP teams are responsible for writing plans and implementing the services in the plan “without regard to the cost of these services, thus creating a fiscal burden shared by federal, state, and local educational authorities” (Baker, Green, & Ramsey, 2012, p. 97). Boscardin (2010) identified

dwindling revenues as one of the challenges directors of special education faced when determining how to provide appropriate services to students. “The career of an administrator of special education is one of tirelessly advocating for students with disabilities and their families while withstanding the pressures to do more with less” (Boscardin, 2010, p. 60). Special education administrators should work in a balanced manner between the financial side of providing educational services and the side of providing FAPE.

The business side of being a special education administrator was also referred to in a study completed by Carter (2011) when he revealed that special education administrators must “operate with a finite budget and respond to time-consuming litigation and federal and state mandates, as well as personnel issues” (p. 109). This balance is not simple, as school administrators cannot assume it would be appropriate to “provide the same level of financial resources for children having severe disabilities as for the “average” child in a school district, because the appropriate programs and services required for children with disabilities may have substantially different costs” (Baker et al., 2012, p. 98). Knowledge of a local district’s financial obligations to children with disabilities and the means in which local districts are funded could be of benefit to directors of special education.

The congressional sequestration of 2013 had an impact on public education nationwide. A 600-million-dollar reduction in federal spending occurred (Samuels, 2013b) that affected local districts as they attempted to make up for the shortfall in federal funds. IDEA has established provisions that prohibit local public school districts from making cuts to special education funding in an effort to maintain the requirement

“to provide a free, appropriate education to students with disabilities, and are constrained from cutting classes or staff if doing so would violate that requirement” (Samuels, 2013b, p. 20). Thus, decreased federal funds spent on public education may place a burden on special education directors to maintain appropriate levels of services for students with disabilities during a time of a “challenging funding forecast” (Samuels, 2013b, p. 20).

Special education directors risk litigation with families if their districts fail to provide FAPE. Local school districts are financially obligated to provide the funding for services for children with disabilities. When district’s fail to do so, it is possible for parents to pursue “reimbursement of private-education tuition where the school district had failed to provide that child with FAPE and the private education was appropriate” (Baker et al., 2012, p. 102). Special education directors could advocate for comparable services for children with disabilities across the varying types and severity of disabilities. To provide appropriate programs and services, “one would need reasonably precise estimates of the costs of achieving adequate educational outcomes and/or providing appropriate programs and services (Baker et al., 2012, p. 103)”. Knowledge of local financial resources available to the director of special services is an important component to the success of a district as “local districts ultimately bear the burden of complying with IDEA, regardless of state support” (Baker et al., 2012, p. 107).

A skill necessary to be successful as a director of special education administration is the ability to build relationships and work in collaboration with stakeholders. Marrett (2008) wrote, “an effective administrator today must focus on intense and informed collaboration between special and general education teachers, administrators, related service personnel, families, and community service agencies to support and sustain the

learning and development of students with special needs” (p. 9). A valued member of the stakeholder group is the parent of the child with a disability.

Resolution of parents’ complaints is essential to the longevity of a career in special education administration. “Special education directors have a lot of contact with parents regarding education services for their children and participate, in some cases, in difficult and emotional IEP meetings” (Reedy, 2014, p. 16). The need to resolve parent complaints may be a result of the complexity of special education and the challenge of understanding the legal aspects of individualized education program development and implementation (Sayeski, 2016). Challenging circumstances “require big-picture thinking –what is the larger goal and how can initial barriers be reduced, eliminated or addressed in order to meet the long-term, overarching goal” (Sayeski, 2016, p. 126). Learning how to manage situations professionally is a skill needed by special education directors. “Conflict resolution is a big issue in special education” (Reedy, 2014, p. 16).

Effective communication and collaboration are key skills for directors of special education to assist in, or avoid, conflict resolution with parents. “Effective communication enhances school-family partnerships. Written communication is a common, efficient way of communicating with families, but potential barriers to effective communication include readability level, clarity of presentation, complexity of format, and structural components” (Nagro, 2015, p. 262). He further explains that “Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2006), parents of students with disabilities have the right to ongoing information regarding progress” (Nagro, 2015, p. 256). Directors of special education can remain in compliance with IDEA by “recognizing potential accessibility barriers for families” (Nagro, 2015, p. 256), and

taking appropriate action steps to meet the needs of families. Through building connections with families and parents, special education directors can assist in improving parent involvement in their child's education, and in the IEP team process.

Reluctance by parents to participate in the education of their child with a disability may be related to “cultural differences, negative personal experiences with schools or teachers, and fear of failure” (Sawyer, 2015, p. 173). Special education administrators understand that “involving parents in their children's education requires proactive relationship building techniques” (Sawyer, 2015, p. 173). Payne (2006) suggested, “It is unrealistic to treat parents as one group. The needs and issues are very different” (p. 3). Parents should be thought of as sub-groups, each sub-group with different communication needs from the school district (Payne, 2006). Some parents with overwhelming personal issues such as addiction may need to have a home visit, and parents living in poverty may be more likely to visit the school if they can bring their young children (Payne, 2006). The key is to finding what works for each parent, just as the district works to individualize a plan for each child with a disability.

Special education directors' understandings of state legislation and national law are needed when maneuvering through complicated IDEA provisions about parental participation in IEP meetings. A second stakeholder group with whom special education administrators must collaborate and build a trusting relationship with is advocacy organizations. A third stakeholder group with whom special education administrators must collaborate and build a trusting relationship with is in-district personnel. A special education director “supervises a district-wide group of teachers, paraprofessionals, and other support personnel, and oversees programs, services, and practices” (Reedy, p. 15,

2014). Special education administrators can effectively oversee programs if they “document how progress is being measured and monitored for student and teachers” (Marrett, 2008, p. 10).

Graduate Programs for Directors of Special Education

The Council for Exceptional Children Subcommittee on Knowledge and Skills has written the Advanced Role Content Standards to assist in the understanding of “the professional qualifications and responsibilities of the position of special education administrator” (Carter, 2011, p. 104). These standards include leadership and policy, program development and organization, research and inquiry, student and program evaluation, professional development and ethical practice, and collaboration (Carter, 2011). Carter (2011) indicated, “higher education institutions must align their administrative programs with these standards” (p. 104). The preparation of future special education administrators is important because the “demands and expectations of the position have increased, secondary to fiscal, legal, educational and community challenges” (Carter, 2011, p. 104). Responsibilities of “current special education directors are countless, great in number, and ever changing” (Leckie, 2016, p. 59). These current responsibilities make it important for future special education administrators to have an opportunity for meaningful graduate level preparation.

In 2016, the U.S. Department of Education indicated it would “distribute \$13.4 million in grants to colleges and universities across the country to beef up special education training” (Heasley, 2016). This funding came as the federal government saw a need to increase the “number of school professionals prepared to serve kids with disabilities” (Heasley, 2016). This enhancement of training opportunities for special

education administrators could assist in giving those administrators a meaningful graduate level program.

Boscardin et al. (2010) found in a national study that “while some states have been quite rigorous, clearly defining competencies and expectations for special education administrators, many states remain vague, with no such definitions or guidelines” (p. 61). The discovery of a lack of quality training for future special education administrators has been confirmed by more than one researcher. “In many states, there is no difference in the preparation and training of special and general education administrators” (Marrett, 2008, p. 13). Moreover, “some states have recently loosened requirements for specialized licensure to increase the supply of special education administrators, and in some school districts, principals or their assistants have been hired as directors of special education (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003, p. 5). Limited preparation for serving as a director of special education makes it difficult to meet the basic functions of the position. Included in Marrett’s (2008) study was the statement regarding the difference “between preparation programs’ expectations, goals and the competencies needed in the field is huge” (p. 13). It is also obvious from a review of the literature “that there are major gaps and deficits in the acquisition of special education knowledge and skills in leadership preparation and training” (Marrett, 2008, p. 13). The issue is made worse by an increasing trend in which institutions of higher education essentially disband their special education administration programs by not filling positions vacated by faculty that retire who have the expertise (Boscardin et al., 2010).

Boscardin et al. (2010) completed a research study to investigate the state credentialing requirements for administrators of special education with the purpose “to

provide an update to the number of states offering licenses/certificates/endorsements as administrators of special education” (p. 64). A second purpose of the study was to “gather information related to the credentialing process, including titles associated with that position, competency requirements, experience requirements, practica/internships, degree and coursework requirements, credentialing examinations, and continuing education requirements” (Boscardin et al., 2010, p. 64).

Of the State Directors of Special Education and Washington D.C. that participated in the study, 98% responded to the request for input from Boscardin et al. (2010). Twenty-seven of the states that responded have separate special education administrative credentialing, and twenty-two states required a master’s degree (Boscardin et al., 2010).

In terms of course work, 20 states require specific course work in special education administration, with 15 of these states also requiring courses in educational administration. Fourteen of these states require course work in special education, special education administration, and educational administration. One state requires course work in only special education administration. Although some states did not require course work in special education administration, five did require course work in both special education and educational administration. (p. 67)

A thoroughly rigorous graduate program with classes in leadership and school administration would be beneficial to future special education directors.

“Frequently, special education leaders begin their careers as special education teachers, psychologists, social workers, or related service providers” (Carter,

2011, p. 104). These career paths are beneficial to future special education administrators.

Summary

Chapter two included an examination of literature relevant to this study. The chapter contained a review of the following topics: a history of special education, the impact of litigation on special education, the impact of civil rights laws on special education, specialized knowledge and skills necessary for directors of special education, and graduate programs for directors of special education. Included in chapter three are the methodology used to conduct this study.

Chapter Three

Methods

The purpose of this study was to determine whether special education directors learned about compliance with special education law and regulations, special education finance, completion of state reports, best instructional practices, relationship building, and collaboration with all stakeholders during coursework in graduate school or on the job. An additional purpose of this study was to determine whether special education directors perceived that compliance with special education law and regulations, knowledge of special education finance, completion of state reports, knowledge of best instructional practices, and relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary. The final purpose of this study was to determine whether educational degree, years of experience, or number of IEPs in a district affected special education directors' perceptions that compliance with special education law and regulations, special education finance, completion of state reports, best instructional practices, and relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary.

This chapter includes the research design of the study and the plan to address the research questions stated in chapter one. The chapter begins with the research design and then provides a description of the population, sample, and sampling procedures. This description is followed by information about the instrumentation, measurement, validity and reliability, and data collection procedures. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the data analysis and hypothesis testing, limitations of this study, and a summary of the chapter.

Research Design

A quantitative descriptive research design using a survey was chosen for use in this study. Lunenburg and Irby (2008) stated descriptive research is about the perceptions of the participants in the study regarding basic phenomena. For the purpose of this study, the dependent variables were defined as the perceptions of Missouri special education directors. The independent variables included the special education directors' educational degrees, special education directors' years of experience, and numbers of IEPs in the school districts.

Population and Sample

The population for the study was special education directors. The sample included directors of special education from the state of Missouri during the 2015-2016 school year. This sample was diverse because it included Missouri special education directors from districts of differing sizes, geographic locations, and socio-economic statuses. Also affecting the diversity of the sample was the directors' years of experience, highest degree attained, and graduate school experience.

Sampling Procedures

Purposive sampling was used due to the shared characteristics of special education directors in Missouri. Lunenburg and Irby in 2008 wrote, "Purposive sampling involves selecting a sample based on the researcher's experience or knowledge of the group to be sampled" (p. 175). The MDESE School Directory was used to identify the names of special education directors. The directory only includes directors of public schools in Missouri, not private or parochial schools. Directors identified in the directory meet the state of Missouri's criteria for being appropriately certificated for that position

(MDESE, 2013). This directory is available to the public on the MDESE website. This directory also includes the email addresses of the participants (MDESE, 2013).

Instrumentation

The instrument administered in this study was an original survey created for this study. The survey was designed to collect data regarding perceptions held by Missouri special education directors of the extent that specific skills and knowledge were learned during coursework in graduate school or on the job, and if the directors perceived those skills and knowledge to be necessary. Additional variables included the special education directors' educational degree, years of experience, and the number of IEPs in the directors' school district. The survey was created based on the knowledge of the researcher of the roles and responsibilities of special education directors.

The initial section of the survey includes three demographic questions, the participant's number of years as a director of special education, highest degree earned, and an approximate number of students in the director's school district who have an IEP. The three additional sections contained five Likert-scaled items. The response choices are provided to select based upon agreement with each survey item. The choices were *SD (Strongly Disagree)*, *D (Disagree)*, *N (Neutral)*, *A (Agree)*, and *SA (Strongly Agree)* (see Appendix A).

Measurement. Table 1 contains the variable, research question, and survey items related to the section of the survey responsive to questions regarding perceptions of learning various skills and knowledge during coursework in graduate school.

Table 1

Alignment of the Variables, RQ1-RQ5, and Survey Items

Variable	RQ	Survey Item(s)
learned about compliance with special education law and regulations	1	I learned about compliance with special education law and regulations during course work in graduate school.
learned about special education finance	2	I learned about special education finance during coursework in graduate school.
learned about completing state reports	3	I learned about completing state reports during course work in graduate school.
learned about best instructional practices	4	I learned about best instructional practices during coursework in graduate school.
learned about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders	5	I learned about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders during coursework in graduate school.

Table 2 contains the variable, research question, and survey items related to the section of the survey that asked participants to respond to questions regarding perceptions of learning various aspects of their work on the job.

Table 2

Alignment of the Variables, RQ6-RQ10, and Survey Items

Variable	RQ	Survey Item(s)
learned about compliance with special education law and regulations	6	I learned about compliance with special education law and regulations on the job.
learned about special education finance	7	I learned about special education finance (budgeting and final expenditure reports) on the job.
learned about completing state reports	8	I learned about completing state reports (e.g., Child Count, Core Data, Exit Report) on the job.
learned about best instructional practices	9	I learned about best instructional practices on the job.
learned about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders on the job	10	I learned about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders on the job.

Table 3 contains the variable, research question, and survey items related to the section of the survey that asked participants to respond to questions regarding perceptions of the necessity of certain aspects of their work.

Table 3

Alignment of the Variables, RQ11-RQ20, and Survey Items

Variable	RQ	Survey Item
learning about compliance with special education law and regulations is necessary	11 & 12	I perceive that learning about compliance with special education law and regulations is necessary.
learning about special education finance is necessary	13 & 14	I perceive that learning about special education finance (budgeting and final expenditure reports) is necessary
learning about completing state reports is necessary	15 & 16	I perceive that learning about state reports (e.g., Child Count, Core Data, Exit Report) is necessary.
learning about best instructional practices is necessary	17 & 18	I perceive that learning about best instructional practices is necessary.
learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary	19 & 20	I perceive that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary.

Research questions 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20 involve the extent to which participants' years of experience, participants' educational degrees, or number of IEPs in the district affected their perceptions of the necessity of compliance with special education law and regulations. Participants were asked to provide the number of years of experience as a special education administrator in survey question one. Participants were asked to mark their highest educational degree by choosing from Masters, Specialist, or Ph.D. on survey question 2. Finally, participants were asked to record the approximate number of IEPs in the district during the 2015-2016 school year on survey question three.

The questions were open-ended. Once the data collection was complete, the numbers from the responses of the open-ended demographic questions were recoded into categories. These categories were used to group data when the hypothesis testing was conducted.

Validity and reliability. Lunenburg and Irby (2008) defined validity as “the degree to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure” (p. 181), and reliability as “the degree to which an instrument consistently measures whatever it is measuring” (p. 82). To establish content validity, the survey was peer reviewed by three professionals in the field of special education administration. The peer reviewers were asked to critique the survey for relevancy, to provide feedback regarding the understandability of the questions, and to offer suggestions for topics or questions not included that should be considered (see Appendix B). A reliability analysis was not needed because a scale was not constructed from the survey items. The researcher used single-item measurement.

Most commonly used single-item measures can be divided into two categories: (a) those measuring self-reported facts ... and (b) those measuring psychological constructs, e.g., aspects of personality ... measuring the former with single items is common practice. However, using a single-item measure for the latter is considered to be a “fatal error” in research. If the construct being measured is sufficiently narrow or is unambiguous to the respondent, a single item may suffice. (Sackett & Larson, 1990, p. 631)

The individual items used in this research were self-reported facts that were sufficiently narrow and unambiguous. Therefore, reliability was not an issue for the measurement using this survey instrument.

Data Collection Procedures

Before data collection, the process to obtain permission from Baker University to conduct the research study was initiated. An Institutional Review Board (IRB) request was submitted to Baker University on July 31, 2015 (see Appendix C). The Baker University IRB committee approved the research study on August 13, 2015 (see Appendix D). After the approval had been granted, the survey was entered into the web-based survey instrument SurveyMonkey.

The target population for the study was identified as special education directors from the MDESE School Directory. The special education directors received a direct email on October 31, 2015, explaining the purpose of the study and were encouraged to complete the survey (see Appendix E). The email included a statement that notified the participants that completing the survey indicated voluntary consent to participate in the study. Each participant received another email that included an introduction to the study, and an explanation about the purpose of the study, and the researcher's contact information. There were two additional prompts to remind those invited to complete the survey on November 22 and November 29, 2015. The survey was closed on December 31, 2015. The data was downloaded for analysis.

Data Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

The responses to the survey were the data analyzed for this study. The data was downloaded from SurveyMonkey to IBM® SPSS® Statistics Faculty Pack 23 for Windows to complete the statistical analyses. Each research question is listed below with a hypothesis statement or statements and the appropriate analysis method.

RQ1. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about compliance with special education law and regulations during coursework in graduate school?

H1. Missouri special education directors report that they learned about compliance with special education law and regulations during coursework in graduate school.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H1. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ2. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about special education finance during coursework in graduate school?

H2. Missouri special education directors report that they learned about special education finance during coursework in graduate school.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H2. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ3. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about completing state reports during coursework in graduate school?

H3. Missouri special education directors report that they learned about completing state reports during coursework in graduate school.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H3. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ4. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about best instructional practices during coursework in graduate school?

H4. Missouri special education directors report that they learned about best instructional practices during coursework in graduate school.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H4. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ5. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders during coursework in graduate school?

H5. Missouri special education directors report that they learned about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders during coursework in graduate school.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H5. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ6. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about compliance with special education law and regulations on the job?

H6. Missouri special education directors report that they learned about compliance with special education law and regulations on the job.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H6. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ7. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about special education finance on the job?

H7. Missouri special education directors report that they learned about special education finance on the job.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H7. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ8. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about completing state reports on the job?

H8. Missouri special education directors report that they learned about completing state reports on the job.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H8. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ9. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about best instructional practices on the job?

H9. Missouri special education directors report that they learned about best instructional practices on the job.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H9. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ10. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders on the job?

H10. Missouri special education directors report that they learned about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders on the job.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H10. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ11. To what extent do Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about compliance with special education law and regulations is necessary?

H11. Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about compliance with special education law and regulations is necessary.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H11. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ12. To what extent do educational degree, years of experience, or number of IEPs in the district affect Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about compliance with special education laws and regulations is necessary?

H12. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about compliance with special education laws and regulations is necessary are affected by their educational degree.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H12. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education laws and regulations is necessary was their educational degree. The level of significance was set at .05.

H13. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about compliance with special education laws and regulations is necessary are affected by their years of experience.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H13. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education

laws and regulations is necessary was their years of experience. The level of significance was set at .05.

H14. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about compliance with special education laws and regulations is necessary are affected by the number of IEPs in the district.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H14. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education laws and regulations is necessary was the number of IEPs in their district. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ13. To what extent do Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about special education finance is necessary?

H15. Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about special education finance is necessary.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H15. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ14. To what extent do educational degree, years of experience, or number of IEPs in the district affect Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education finance is necessary?

H16. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education finance is necessary are affected by their educational degree.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H16. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education

finance is necessary was their educational degree. The level of significance was set at .05.

H17. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education finance is necessary are affected by their years of experience.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H17. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education finance is necessary was their years of experience. The level of significance was set at .05.

H18. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education finance is necessary are affected by the number of IEPs in the district.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H18. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education finance is necessary was the number of IEPs in the district. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ15. To what extent do Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about completing state reports is necessary?

H19. Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about completing state reports is necessary.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H19. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ16. To what extent do educational degree, years of experience, or number of IEPs in the district affect Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about completing state reports is necessary?

H20. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about completing state reports is necessary are affected by their educational degree.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H20. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about completing state reports is necessary was their educational degree. The level of significance was set at .05.

H21. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about completing state reports is necessary are affected by their years of experience.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H21. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about completing state reports is necessary was their years of experience. The level of significance was set at .05.

H22. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about completing state reports is necessary are affected by the number of IEPs in the district.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H22. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about completing state reports is necessary was the number of IEPs in the district. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ17. To what extent do Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about best instructional practices is necessary?

H23. Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about best instructional practices is necessary.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H23. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ18. To what extent do educational degree, years of experience, or number of IEPs in the district affect Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about best instructional practices is necessary?

H24. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about best instructional practices is necessary are affected by their educational degree.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H22. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about best practices is necessary was their educational degree. The level of significance was set at .05.

H25. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about best instructional practices is necessary are affected by their years of experience.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H25. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about best instructional practices is necessary was their years of experience. The level of significance was set at .05.

H26. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about best instructional practices is necessary are affected by the number of IEPs in the district.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H26. The categorical variable used to group the special directors' perceptions that learning about best instructional practices is necessary was the number of IEPs in the district. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ19. To what extent do Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary?

H27. Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H27. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ20. To what extent do educational degree, years of experience, or number of IEPs in the district affect Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary?

H28. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary are affected by their educational degree.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H28. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary was their educational degree. The level of significance was set at .05.

H29. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders are necessary is affected by their years of experience.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H29. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary was their years of experience. The level of significance was set at .05.

H30. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary are affected by the number of IEPs in the district.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H30. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary was the number of IEPs in the district. The level of significance was set at .05.

Limitations

Limitations cannot be controlled by the researcher, but are factors that "may have an effect on the interpretation of the findings or on the generalizability of the results" (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). The following limitations may affect the generalization of the study findings and should be considered.

1. The MDESE directory information is as accurate as the information provided by local school district personnel.
2. The research was dependent upon participants responding to each survey item, and the reasons for a participant not to respond to every survey item were not collected as part of the research.
3. The accuracy of the participants' memories may have affected the participants' answers to the survey items.

Summary

Chapter three included a restatement of the purposes of the study. Additionally, the chapter provided a discussion of the methodology utilized including the research design, population, sample, sampling procedures, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis and hypothesis testing, and study limitations. Chapter four includes the results of the statistical analyses and hypothesis testing.

Chapter Four

Results

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of Missouri special education directors regarding whether they learned about compliance with special education law and regulations, special education finance, completion of state reports, best instructional practices, and relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders during coursework in graduate school. The second purpose of this study was to determine whether special education directors learned about compliance with special education law and regulations, special education finance, completion of state reports, best instructional practices, and relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders on the job. The third purpose of this study was to determine whether special education directors perceived that compliance with special education law and regulations, special education finance, completion of state reports, best instructional practices, and relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary. The final purpose of this study was to determine whether educational degree, years of experience, or number of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in a district affected special education directors' perceptions that compliance with special education law and regulations, special education finance, completion of state reports, best instructional practices, and relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary.

Results for the special education directors surveyed ($N = 207$) are organized according to the research questions presented in this study. Of the 503 special education directors who were surveyed, 223 responded; however, 16 of the respondents did not

complete the survey past the demographic information, so those responses were not included in the analysis.

Descriptive Statistics

Two hundred six Missouri special education directors completed the survey. The three categories for highest degree earned included master's degree, education specialist degree, and Ed.D. or Ph.D. Categories of years of service were 0–5 years, 6–10 years of service, and 11 or more years of service. The categories for the number of IEPs in the district were divided into the categories of 0-99, 100-250, 25-500, and 501 or more.

In Table 4, the highest degree earned by each participant is shown. Two participants did not respond to this item, so the total count of participants for Table 4 is 204. Most of the participants had obtained either a master's degree or a specialist degree. The remaining 13.72 % of the participants had earned either an Ed.D. or Ph.D.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Category of Highest Degree Earned

Degree	Count	Percentage
Masters	89	43.63
Specialist	87	42.65
Ed.D./Ph.D.	28	13.72

Table 5 includes a summary of the years of experience for the study participants, the largest percentage of the participants, 48.1 %, had 0-5 years of experience as a director of special education. Participants with 6-10 years of experience made up 28.6 % of the total population surveyed. Finally, 23.3 % of the participants had 11 or more years of experience as a director of special education.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for Category of Years of Service

Years	Count	Percentage
0-5	99	48.1
6-10	59	28.6
11+	48	23.3

Table 6 includes the number of IEPs per district of the participants. Most of the participants were from school districts with 0-99 IEPs, 44.66%. Participants with 100-250 IEPs per school district made up the next largest group with 32.52% of the total. Participants with 251-500 IEPs and 501 or more IEPs made up the remainder with 11.65% and 11.17% respectively.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Category of Number of IEPs per District

IEPs	Count	Percentage
0-99	92	44.66
100-250	67	32.52
251-500	24	11.65
501+	23	11.17

Hypothesis Testing

Provided in the hypothesis testing section are the research questions, hypothesis statements, and a description of the analysis conducted to test each hypothesis. A

description of the type of test, the test statistics, and the statistical significance is provided. A sentence to summarize the outcome is provided for each hypothesis.

RQ1. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about compliance with special education law and regulations during coursework in graduate school?

H1. Missouri special education directors report that they learned about compliance with special education law and regulations during coursework in graduate school.

A one-sample t test was conducted to test H1. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the one-sample t test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two values, $t = 7.91$, $df = 205$, $p = .000$. The sample mean ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.00$) was higher than the null value (3). On average, Missouri special education directors agreed that they learned about compliance with special education law and regulations during coursework in graduate school.

RQ2. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about special education finance during coursework in graduate school?

H2. Missouri special education directors report that they learned about special education finance during coursework in graduate school.

A one-sample t test was conducted to test H2. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the one-sample t test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two values, $t = -7.87$, $df = 204$, $p = .000$. The sample mean ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.04$) was lower than the

null value (3). On average, Missouri special education directors disagreed that they learned about special education finance during coursework in graduate school.

RQ3. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about completing state reports during coursework in graduate school?

H3. Missouri special education directors report that they learned about completing state reports during coursework in graduate school.

A one-sample t test was conducted to test H3. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the one-sample t test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two values, $t = -15.53$, $df = 205$, $p = .000$. The sample mean ($M = 2.11$, $SD = .83$) was lower than the null value (3). On average, Missouri special education directors disagreed that they learned about completing state reports during coursework in graduate school.

RQ4. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about best instructional practices during coursework in graduate school?

H4. Missouri special education directors report that they learned about best instructional practices during coursework in graduate school.

A one-sample t test was conducted to test H4. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the one-sample t test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two values, $t = 12.18$, $df = 204$, $p = .000$. The sample mean ($M = 3.70$, $SD = .82$) was higher than the null value (3). On average, Missouri special education directors agreed that they learned about best instructional practices during coursework in graduate school.

RQ5. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders during coursework in graduate school?

H5. Missouri special education directors report that they learned about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders during coursework in graduate school.

A one-sample t test was conducted to test H5. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the one-sample t test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two values, $t = 17.03$, $df = 205$, $p = .000$. The sample mean ($M = 4.02$, $SD = .86$) was higher than the null value (3). On average, Missouri special education directors agreed that they learned about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders during coursework in graduate school.

RQ6. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about compliance with special education law and regulations on the job?

H6. Missouri special education directors report that they learned about compliance with special education law and regulations on the job.

A one-sample t test was conducted to test H6. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the one-sample t test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two values, $t = 36.42$, $df = 203$, $p = .000$. The sample mean ($M = 4.60$, $SD = .62$) was higher than the null value (3). On average, Missouri special education directors agreed that they learned about compliance with special education law and regulations on the job.

RQ7. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about special education finance on the job?

H7. Missouri special education directors report that they learned about special education finance on the job.

A one-sample t test was conducted to test H7. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the one-sample t test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two values, $t = 14.38$, $df = 203$, $p = .000$. The sample mean ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.12$) was higher than the null value (3). On average, Missouri special education directors agreed that they learned about special education finance on the job.

RQ8. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about completing state reports on the job?

H8. Missouri special education directors report that they learned about completing state reports on the job.

A one-sample t test was conducted to test H8. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the one-sample t test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two values, $t = 16.51$, $df = 205$, $p = .000$. The sample mean ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.08$) was higher than the null value (3). On average, Missouri special education directors agreed that they learned about completing state reports on the job.

RQ9. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about best instructional practices on the job?

H9. Missouri special education directors report that they learned about best instructional practices on the job.

A one-sample t test was conducted to test H9. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the one-sample t test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two values, $t = 24.50$, $df = 205$, $p = .000$. The sample mean ($M = 4.23$, $SD = .71$) was higher than the null value (3). On average, Missouri special education directors agreed that they learned about best instructional practices on the job.

RQ10. To what extent do Missouri special education directors report that they learned about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders on the job?

H10. Missouri special education directors report that they learned about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders on the job.

A one-sample t test was conducted to test H10. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the one-sample t test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two values, $t = 27.25$, $df = 205$, $p = .000$. The sample mean ($M = 4.34$, $SD = .70$) was higher than the null value (3). On average, Missouri special education directors agreed that they learned about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders on the job.

RQ11. To what extent do Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about compliance with special education law and regulations is necessary?

H11. Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about compliance with special education law and regulations is necessary.

A one-sample t test was conducted to test H11. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the one-sample t test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two values, $t = 59.29$, $df = 202$, $p = .000$. The sample mean ($M = 4.83$, $SD = .44$) was higher than the null value (3). On average, Missouri special education directors agreed that learning about compliance with special education law and regulations is necessary.

RQ12. To what extent do educational degree, years of experience, or number of IEPs in the district affect Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about compliance with special education laws and regulations is necessary?

H12. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about compliance with special education laws and regulations is necessary are affected by their educational degree.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H12. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education laws and regulations is necessary was their educational degree. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the analysis indicated there was not a statistically significant difference between at least two of the means, $F = 1.655$, $df = 2, 198$, $p = .194$. See Table 7 for the means and standard deviations for this analysis. A follow-up post hoc was not warranted. Special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education laws and regulations is necessary were not affected by their educational degree.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for the Results of the Test for H12

Degree	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Masters	89	4.89	0.32
Specialist	87	4.77	0.52
Ed.D./Ph.D.	28	4.85	0.46

H13. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about compliance with special education laws and regulations are affected by their years of experience.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H13. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about compliance with special education laws and regulations was their years of experience. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the analysis indicated there was not a statistically significant difference between at least two of the means, $F = 2.420$, $df = 2, 202$, $p = .092$. See Table 8 for the means and standard deviations for this analysis. A follow-up post hoc was not warranted. Special education directors' perceptions that learning about compliance with special education laws and regulations were not affected by their years of experience as a special education director.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics for the Results of the Test for H13

Years	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
0-5	99	4.86	0.41
6-10	59	4.72	0.56
11+	48	4.90	0.31

H14. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about compliance with special education laws and regulations is necessary are affected by the number of IEPs in the district.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H14. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education laws and regulations is necessary was affected by the number of IEPs in their district. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the analysis indicated there was not a statistically significant difference between at least two of the means, $F = 2.10$, $df = 3, 199$, $p = .102$. See Table 9 for the means and standard deviations for this analysis. A follow-up post hoc was not warranted. Special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education laws and regulations is necessary were not affected by the number of IEPs in their district.

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics for the Results of the Test for H14

District IEPs	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
0-99	92	4.75	0.51
100-250	67	4.91	0.29
251-500	24	4.92	0.41
501+	23	4.78	0.52

RQ13. To what extent do Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about special education finance is necessary?

H15. Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about special education finance is necessary.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H15. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the one-sample *t* test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two values, $t = 34.13$ $df = 202$, $p = .000$. The sample mean ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 1.00$) was higher than the null value (3). On average, Missouri special education directors agreed that learning about special education finance is necessary.

RQ14. To what extent do educational degree, years of experience, or number of IEPs in the district affect Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education finance is necessary?

H16. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education finance is necessary are affected by their educational degree.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H16. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education laws and regulations is necessary was their educational degree. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the analysis indicated there was not a statistically significant difference between at least two of the means, $F = .96, df = 2, 198, p = .384$. A follow-up post hoc was not warranted. Special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education finance is necessary were not affected by their educational degree.

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics for the Results of the Test for H16

Degree	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Masters	89	4.63	0.70
Specialist	87	4.62	0.71
Ed.D./Ph.D.	28	4.81	0.48

H17. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education finance is necessary are affected by their years of experience.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H17. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education finance was affected by their years of experience. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the analysis indicated there was not a statistically significant difference between at least two of the means, $F = .594, df = 2, 200, p = .553$. See Table 11 for the means and standard deviations for this analysis. A follow-up post hoc was not

warranted. Special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education finance is necessary were not affected by their years of experience.

Table 11

Descriptive Statistics for the Results of the Test for H17

Years	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
0-5	99	4.96	0.60
6-10	59	4.62	0.70
11+	48	4.56	0.82

H18. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education finance is necessary are affected by the number of IEPs in the district.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H18. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about special education finance is necessary was affected by the number of IEPs in the district. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the analysis indicated a statistically significant difference between at least two of the means, $F = 3.557$, $df = 3, 199$, $p = .015$. See Table 12 for the means and standard deviations for this analysis. A follow-up post hoc was conducted to determine which pairs of means were different. The Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) post hoc was conducted at $\alpha = .05$. One of the differences was statistically significant. The mean for directors with 0-99 district IEPs ($M = 4.50$) was lower than the mean for directors with 100-250 district IEPs ($M = 4.80$). On average, special education directors with fewer district IEPs agreed less strongly than did special education directors with more district IEPs that learning about special education finance is necessary.

Table 12

Descriptive Statistics for the Results of the Test for H18

District IEPs	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
0-99	92	4.50	0.81
100-250	67	4.80	0.60
251-500	24	4.90	0.50
501+	23	4.74	0.54

RQ15. To what extent do Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about completing state reports is necessary?

H19. Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about completing state reports is necessary.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H19. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the one-sample *t* test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two values, $t = 31.69$, $df = 202$, $p = .000$. The sample mean ($M = 4.60$, $SD = .05$) was higher than the null value (3). On average, Missouri special education directors agreed that learning about completing state reports is necessary.

RQ16. To what extent do educational degree, years of experience, or number of IEPs in the district affect Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about completing state reports is necessary?

H20. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about completing state reports is necessary are affected by their educational degree.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H20. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about completing state reports is necessary was their educational degree. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the analysis indicated there was not a statistically significant difference between at least two of the means, $F = .134$, $df = 2, 198$, $p = .875$. See Table 13 for the means and standard deviations for this analysis. A follow-up post hoc was not warranted. Special education directors' perceptions that learning about completing state reports is necessary were not affected by their educational degree.

Table 13

Descriptive Statistics for the Results of the Test for H20

Degree	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Masters	89	4.64	0.65
Specialist	87	4.58	0.71
Ed.D./Ph.D.	28	4.59	0.93

H21. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about completing state reports is necessary are affected by their years of experience.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H21. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about completing state reports is necessary was their years of experience. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the analysis indicated there was not a statistically significant difference between at least two of the means, $F = .894$, $df = 2, 200$, $p = .411$. See Table 14 for the means and standard deviations for this analysis. A follow-up post hoc was not warranted. Special education directors' perceptions that learning about completing state

reports is necessary are not affected by their years of experience as a special education director.

Table 14

Descriptive Statistics for the Results of the Test for H21

Years	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
0-5	99	4.66	0.63
6-10	59	4.50	0.84
11+	48	4.60	0.74

H22. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about completing state reports is necessary are affected by the number of IEPs in the district.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H22. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about completing state reports was affected by the number of IEPs in the district. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the analysis indicated there was not a statistically significant difference between at least two of the means, $F = 1.897$, $df = 3, 199$, $p = .131$. See Table 15 for the means and standard deviations for this analysis. A follow-up post hoc was not warranted. Special education directors' perceptions that learning about completing state reports is necessary were not affected by the number of IEPs in their district.

Table 15

Descriptive Statistics for the Results of the Test for H22

District IEPs	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
0-99	92	4.50	0.80
100-250	67	4.72	0.62
251-500	24	4.80	0.61
501+	23	4.61	0.80

RQ17. To what extent do Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about best instructional practices is necessary?

H23. Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about best instructional practices is necessary.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H23. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the one-sample *t* test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two values, $t = 46.24$, $df = 202$, $p = .000$. The sample mean ($M = 4.69$, $SD = .04$) was higher than the null value (3). On average, Missouri special education directors agreed that learning about best instructional practices is necessary.

RQ18. To what extent do educational degree, years of experience, or number of IEPs in the district affect Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about best instructional practices is necessary?

H24. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about best instructional practices is necessary are affected by their educational degree.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H24. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about best instructional practices is necessary was their educational degree. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the analysis indicated a statistically significant difference between at least two of the means, $F = 3.200$, $df = 2, 198$, $p = .043$. See Table 16 or the means and standard deviations for this analysis. A follow-up post hoc was conducted to determine which pairs of means were different. A Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) post hoc was conducted at $\alpha = .05$. One of the differences was statistically significant. The mean for directors with an Ed.D./Ph.D. ($M = 4.89$) was higher than the mean for directors with a Specialist degree ($M = 4.62$). On average, special education directors with Ed.D./Ph.D. degrees agreed more strongly than did special education directors with Specialist degrees that learning about best instructional practices is necessary.

Table 16

Descriptive Statistics for the Results of the Test for H24

Degree	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Masters	89	4.73	0.45
Specialist	87	4.62	0.60
Ed.D./Ph.D.	28	4.89	0.32

H25. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about best instructional practices is necessary are affected by their years of experience.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H25. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about best instructional practices is necessary was affected by their years of experience. The level of significance

was set at .05. The results of the analysis indicated there was not a statistically significant difference between at least two of the means, $F = .023$, $df = 202$, $p = .977$. See Table 17 for the means and standard deviations for this analysis. A follow-up post hoc was not warranted. Special education directors' perceptions that learning about best instructional practices is necessary was not affected by their years of experience.

Table 17

Descriptive Statistics for the Results of the Test for H25

Years	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
0-5	99	4.70	0.53
6-10	59	4.71	0.53
11+	48	4.70	0.51

H26. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about best instructional practices is necessary are affected by the number of IEPs in the district.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H26. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about instructional best practices is necessary was affected by the number of IEPs in the district. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the analysis indicated a statistically significant difference between at least two of the means, $F = 4.333$, $df = 3, 199$, $p = .006$. See Table 18 for the means and standard deviations for this analysis. A follow-up post hoc was conducted to determine which pairs of means were different. A Tukey's HSD post hoc was conducted at $\alpha = .05$. One of the differences was statistically significant. The mean for directors with 0-99 district IEPs ($M = 4.56$) was lower than the mean for directors with 100-250 district IEPs ($M = 4.79$). On average, special education directors with

fewer district IEPs agreed less strongly than did special education directors with more district IEPs that learning about best instructional practices is necessary.

Table 18

Descriptive Statistics for the Results of the Test for H26

District IEPs	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
0-99	92	4.56	0.58
100-250	67	4.79	0.45
251-500	24	4.92	0.41
501+	23	4.70	0.47

RQ19. To what extent do Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary?

H27. Missouri special education directors perceive that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H27. The sample mean was tested against a null value of 3. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the one-sample *t* test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two values, $t = 47.42$, $df = 202$, $p = .000$. The sample mean ($M = 4.70$, $SD = .51$) was higher than the null value (3). On average, Missouri special education directors agreed that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary.

RQ20. To what extent do educational degree, years of experience, or number of IEPs in the district affect Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary?

H28. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary are affected by their educational degree.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H28. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary was affected by their educational degree. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the analysis indicated a statistically significant difference between at least two of the means, $F = 4.74$, $df = 200$, $p = .010$. See Table 19 for the means and standard deviations for this analysis. A follow-up post hoc was conducted to determine which pairs of means were different. A Tukey's HSD post hoc was conducted at $\alpha = .05$. One of the differences was statistically significant. The mean for directors with an Ed.D./Ph.D. ($M = 4.89$) was higher than the mean for directors with a Specialist degree ($M = 4.59$). On average, special education directors with Ed.D./Ph.D. degrees agreed more strongly than did special education directors with specialist degrees that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary.

Table 19

Descriptive Statistics for the Results of the Test for H28

Degree	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Masters	89	4.76	0.45
Specialist	87	4.59	0.56
Ed.D./Ph.D.	28	4.89	0.32

H29. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary are affected by their years of experience.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H29. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary is affected by their years of experience. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the analysis indicated there was not a statistically significant difference between at least two of the means, $F = .018$, $df = 202, 198$, $p = .982$. See Table 20 for the means and standard deviations for this analysis. A follow-up post hoc was not warranted. Special education directors' perceptions that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary were not affected by their years of experience.

Table 20

Descriptive Statistics for the Results of the Test for H29

Years	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
0-5	99	4.70	0.50
6-10	59	4.69	0.54
11+	48	4.71	0.50

H30. Missouri special education directors' perceptions that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary are affected by the number of IEPs in the district.

A one-factor ANOVA was conducted to test H30. The categorical variable used to group the special education directors' perceptions that learning about relationship

building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary was affected by the number of IEPs in the district. The level of significance was set at .05. The results of the analysis indicated a statistically significant difference between at least two of the means, $F = 2.842$, $df = 3, 199$, $p = .039$. See Table 21 for the means and standard deviations for this analysis. A follow-up post hoc was conducted to determine which pairs of means were different. A Tukey's HSD post hoc was conducted at $\alpha = .05$. One of the differences was statistically significant. The mean for directors with 0-99 district IEPs ($M = 4.58$) was lower than the mean for directors with 100-250 district IEPs ($M = 4.78$). On average, special education directors with fewer district IEPs agreed less strongly than did special education directors with more district IEPs that learning about relationship building and collaboration is necessary.

Table 21

Descriptive Statistics for the Results of the Test for H30

District IEPs	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
0-99	92	4.58	0.54
100-250	67	4.78	0.49
251-500	24	4.83	0.48
501+	23	4.78	0.42

Summary

In this chapter, frequency data regarding participant demographics were provided. Demographics included the number of participants, the highest degree earned by the special education director, years of service as a special education director, and the

number of IEPs in the district. Also presented in this chapter were the results of the statistical analyses using *t*-test and ANOVA hypothesis testing.

Chapter five includes a summary of the study, provides an overview of the problem and research questions. The major findings and findings related to the literature review are presented. Implications for future action, recommendations for additional research, and concluding remarks are also included.

Chapter Five

Interpretation and Recommendations

Several factors, which are not mutually exclusive, have created a need in public education for special education administrators to be effective leaders with knowledge and graduate preparation specific to their work. The purpose of this study was to determine whether special education directors learned specific knowledge in graduate coursework or on the job and whether that knowledge was necessary.

Following an introduction in chapter one, and a review of literature in chapter two, chapter three included a description of research methods. Chapter four presented the results of the study through descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing. Provided in chapter five is a summary of the study through a restatement of the overview of the problem, purpose statement, and research questions, methodology, and major findings of the study. Findings related to the literature are shared. Also, included in chapter five are the implications for action, recommendations for future research, and closes with concluding remarks.

Study Summary

Special education directors face complex federal and state mandates. Special education directors need leadership skills, specific knowledge of the mandates, and effective graduate programs to prepare them to work in this career field. A review of literature included the topics of the history of special education, the impact of litigation on special education, the impact of civil rights laws on special education, the specialized knowledge necessary to the effectiveness of directors of special education, and graduate programs for directors of special education. The study included a quantitative descriptive

research design using a survey, an overview of the problem studied, the purpose statement, research questions, review of the methodology, major findings, findings related to the literature, conclusions, implications for action, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks.

Overview of the problem. A need exists in public education for special education administrators to be effective leaders with knowledge and graduate preparation specific to their work. Therefore, additional research regarding special education directors' perceptions of learning on the job the necessary knowledge to be effective, and if graduate programs were adequate to prepare them, would add to the body of literature on the topic of special education administration. Special education directors are accountable for student achievement. Nicastro (2010) wrote that a district's director of special education is responsible for the "directing, coordinating, and supervising of the district's special education services" (p. 106). Special education directors are expected to meet the individual needs of children with disabilities in a manner that is appropriate and free (Hughes et al., 2012).

However, Lashley and Boscardin (2003) found a significant historical shortage of directors of special education with appropriate training. School districts' willingness to fill special education administrator vacancies with untrained personnel could have been a consequence of the shortage of qualified directors of special education administration. Boscardin et al.'s (2010) study further revealed the limited amount of research about the qualifications and credentialing requirements of "administrators of special education" (Boscardin et al., 2010p. 61). Therefore, additional research regarding special education directors' perceptions about what knowledge is necessary to be effective, and whether

that knowledge was learned on the job, and if their graduate programs were adequate to prepare them, would add to the body of literature on the topic of special education administration.

Purpose statement and research questions. The primary purpose of this study was to determine whether special education directors learned about compliance with special education law and regulations, special education finance, completion of state reports, best instructional practices, and relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders during coursework in graduate school or on the job. The next purpose of this study was to determine whether special education directors perceived that learning about the aforementioned topics was necessary. The final purpose of this study was to determine whether educational degree, years of experience, or number of IEPs in a district affected special education directors' perceptions that learning about those same topics was necessary. Twenty research questions were posed to address the purposes of the study.

Review of the methodology. A quantitative descriptive design with survey research methods was used in this study. The instrumentation was an original survey created for this study. For the purpose of this study, the dependent variables were defined as the perceptions of Missouri special education directors during the 2015-2016 school year. The perceptions of Missouri special education directors were analyzed regarding whether knowledge was learned during graduate school, or on the job, and whether such knowledge was necessary. The independent variables included the special education directors' educational degrees, special education directors' years of experience, and the numbers of IEPs in the school districts. The data was collected through a web-

based survey sent to the target sample. Multiple one-sample *t* tests and one-factor analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to address the research questions.

Major findings. The findings are a result of addressing the 20 research questions in this study. The results of the study indicated participants agreed that they learned about the following topics both in graduate school and on the job: compliance with special education law and regulations, best instructional practices, relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders. The participants indicated that they did not learn about special education finance and completing state reports during coursework in graduate school. They agreed that they learned about special education finance and completing state reports on the job.

Participants agreed that it is necessary to learn about special education law, regulations, and completing state reports, and this is an additional finding of the study. Participant responses about these being necessary were not affected by their educational degree, years of experience as a special education director, or number of IEPs in their school district. Participants agreed that it is necessary to learn about special education finance. Although their perceptions of this were not affected by their educational degree or years of experience as a special education director, they were affected by the number of IEPs in the district. On average, special education directors with fewer district IEPs agreed less strongly than did special education directors with more district IEPs that learning about special education finance is necessary.

On average, Missouri special education directors agreed that learning about best instructional practices is necessary. Special education directors with Ed.D./Ph.D. degrees agreed more strongly than did special education directors with specialist degrees that

learning about best instructional practices is necessary. Additionally, on average, special education directors with fewer district IEPs agreed less strongly than did special education directors with more district IEPs that learning about best instructional practices is necessary. Their perceptions that learning about best instructional practices is necessary was not affected by their years of experience.

The last major finding was that on average, Missouri special education directors agreed that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary. On average, special education directors with Ed.D./Ph.D. degrees agreed more strongly than did special education directors with Specialist degrees that learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary, but their perceptions were not affected by their years of experience. On average, special education directors with fewer district IEPs agreed less strongly than did special education directors with more district IEPs that learning about relationship building and collaboration is necessary.

Findings Related to the Literature

In this section, a comparison of the results of this study with previous studies is included. This study illustrated that Missouri special education directors agreed that they learned about compliance with special education law and regulations in graduate school, and they believed it was necessary. The findings from the review of the literature for this study supported that knowledge of special education finance is important. The participants in this study indicated that they did not learn about special education finance in graduate school, but learned about it on the job, and felt it was necessary knowledge to have to be successful. Knowledge of special education financial regulations at the state

and federal level is a necessity for special education directors because they must “ensure that students with exceptionalities are provided with appropriate education services and supports in a fiscally challenging environment” (Carter, 2011, p. 110). Local IEP teams are responsible for writing plans and implementing the services in the plan “without regard to the cost of these services” (Baker et al., 2012, p. 97). The business side of being a special education administrator was also referred to in a study completed by Carter (2011) where he wrote that special education administrators must “operate with a finite budget and respond to time-consuming litigation and federal and state mandates, as well as personnel issues” (p. 109). Knowledge of a local district’s financial obligations to children with disabilities and the means in which local districts are funded could be of benefit to directors of special education. Special education directors risk litigation with families if their districts fail to provide FAPE. Local school districts are financially obligated to provide the funding for services for children with disabilities. To provide appropriate programs and services, “one would need reasonably precise estimates of the costs of achieving adequate educational outcomes and/or providing appropriate programs and services” (Baker et al., 2012, p. 103). Knowledge of local financial resources available to the director of special services is an important component to the success of a district as “local district ultimately bear the burden of complying with IDEA, regardless of state support” (Baker et al., 2012, p. 107).

One result of this study was that directors of special education in Missouri on average believed that they learned about completing state reports on the job, and not in graduate school. They believed it was necessary knowledge to have to be successful. This was supported by the work of Marrett (2008) as that study verified that many states

do not have different preparation and training expectations for special and general education administrators. The results of this study expand the current knowledge of the topic of perceptions of directors of special education.

An additional result of this study indicated that Missouri special education directors learned about best instructional practices both during coursework in graduate school and on the job. They believed it to be necessary knowledge to be successful. Recent research showed that more than 60% of students with disabilities receive their education in regular classes more than 80% of the day (Holdheide, 2015). The results of the study indicated that directors of special education should also be aware of the general education curriculum and best instructional practices for all students. Leckie (2016) also supports the importance of ensuring the provision of “providing robust academic and behavioral student supports” (p. 59).

The results of this study indicated that the participants did learn about relationship building and collaboration with stakeholders in graduate school and on the job. The participants in this study also believed that building relationships was necessary to be successful. Previous research supports this conclusion of the study. Marrett (2008) wrote, “an effective administrator today must focus on intense and informed collaboration between special and general education teachers, administrators, related service personnel, families, and community service agencies to support and sustain the learning and development of students with special needs” (p. 9). Learning how to manage situations professionally is a skill needed by special education directors. “Conflict resolution is a big issue in special education” (Reedy, 2014, p. 16). The results of this study supported previous research and expanded the content as others have stated

“effective communication enhances school-family partnership” (Nagro, 2015, p. 262).

Through building connections with families and parents, special education directors can assist in improving parent involvement in their child’s education, and in the IEP team process.

Conclusions

This section is a summary of the study of Missouri special education directors’ perceptions of their knowledge and graduate preparation. Results from the study could influence higher education institutions regarding topics that could be included in graduate programs. This section includes implications for action, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks.

Implications for action. The findings of this study can support the growth of directors in the field of special education administration. A need exists for graduate schools and professional organizations to examine the gaps in the training and preparation of directors of special education and to follow through with creating appropriate professional development opportunities. Tailored professional development opportunities to meet the perceived needs of directors of special education could have the potential to increase the capacity of effectiveness earlier in their careers rather than learning on the job.

The participants in this current study generally believed they learned about completing Missouri state reports on the job rather than in graduate school. A stakeholder of the completion of state reports by all school districts is the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MDESE). An action could be for MDESE to collaborate with institutions of higher education in forming a graduate level

curriculum that would provide meaningful instruction to aspiring directors of special education so that they could begin their careers with knowledge of state reports.

The findings of the study indicated that special education directors with fewer district IEPs agreed less strongly than did special education directors with more district IEPs that learning about special education finance is necessary. The MDESE could provide specific professional learning opportunities to directors of smaller districts so that those directors have an awareness of how to access funds available to their special education programs. An example of accessing a funding source is the source for early childhood special education. Early childhood special education is funded at 100% reimbursement for all allowable expenditures.

Based on the results of the study, on average, Missouri special education directors agreed that learning about best instructional practices is necessary. However, directors with Ed.D./Ph.D. degrees agreed more strongly than did special education directors with Specialist degrees. Moreover, special education directors with fewer district IEPs agreed less strongly than did special education directors with more district IEPs that learning about best instructional practices is necessary. Institutions of higher learning could provide a more comprehensive program about the best instructional practices and the way those practices can be implemented in districts of any size. MDESE's regional professional development centers could also provide more comprehensive opportunities about best instructional practices to meet the needs of any size district.

Districts of any size should be mindful of positive relationships with all their stakeholders, including students and families. Graduate programs and DESE could offer learning opportunities that provide directors with information about the importance of

relationship building with stakeholders, and how to develop those relationships so that those are positive for all parties.

Recommendations for future research. A main purpose of the study was to analyze the perceptions of Missouri directors of special education regarding their graduate school preparation. Researchers could replicate the present study in other states. Replication of the study in other states would further the research by providing additional data about perceptions of special education directors regarding what is necessary knowledge to be successful, and if what they learned was from completion of graduate work, or from work experience on the job.

This current research could be expanded by adding a qualitative component. An analysis of interviews with individual Missouri special education directors would add to the body of the research. Such insight into why there were statistical differences in the perceptions between directors with fewer IEPs in their districts as compared to those directors with more 99 or more IEPs in their districts, and directors with doctoral degrees, of the population surveyed might provide concrete examples as to how higher education institutions can better meet the needs of students aspiring to be directors of special education.

A third recommendation would be to administer a similar survey to other populations, including superintendents, principals, district level administrators, assistant special education directors and directors of special education cooperatives. This expansion to other populations may determine if graduate programs are meeting the needs of all types of district-level administrators. Specific variables could be added to this suggested survey, including the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced

lunch, gender, English language learner status, and if the district is considered rural, urban, or suburban.

Concluding remarks. A need exists in public education for special education administrators to be effective leaders with the necessary knowledge to be successful. Graduate programs specific to the needs of aspiring special education directors would better prepare them for their first employment experience as a director. Additional studies that may reveal the perceptions of special education directors in other states surrounding Missouri may provide further feedback to institutions of higher learning regarding how to best prepare future special education directors.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Survey

Participation in full, or in part, is completely voluntary with the option of not answering any questions or discontinuing participation at any time. The survey is completely anonymous. Your answers will be combined with the responses of other participants in summary form. Information reported will not include any individuals or school districts. The completion of the survey will indicate your consent to participate and permission to use the information provided by you in the research study.

Please indicate the appropriate response.

1. Number of years as a director of special education. _____
2. Highest degree earned. _____
3. Number of student who have Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in my school district. _____

Please indicate your level of agreement that you learned about the following areas during your coursework in graduate school.

4. Special education law and regulations
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
5. Special education finance (budgeting and final expenditure reports)
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
6. Completing state reports (e.g. Child Count, Core Data, Exit Report)
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
7. Best instructional practices
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
8. Relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Please indicate your level of agreement that you learned about the following areas on the job.

9. Compliance with special education law and regulations
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
10. Special education finance (budgeting and final expenditure reports)
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

11. Completing state reports (e.g. Child Count, Core Data, Exit Report)

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

12. Best instructional practices

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

13. Relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Please indicate your level of agreement that learning about each of the following areas is necessary.

14. Compliance with special education law and regulations

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

15. Special education finance (budgeting and final expenditure reports)

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

16. Completing state reports (e.g. Child Count, Core Data, Exit Report)

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

17. Best instructional practices

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

18. Relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Appendix B: Letter Sent Via Email to Peer Reviewers of Survey

April 16, 2015

Dear Director of Special Education,

My name is Denise Buersmeyer. I am the special education director of the St. Joseph School District, and a doctoral student at Baker University. My advisor, Dr. Susan Rogers, suggested you as a contact.

I plan to study special education directors' perceptions of the extent their knowledge and skills were learned during graduate coursework, or on the job. The significance of this study maybe to contribute to the field of special education administration by suggesting improvements to graduate preparation programs based on the perceptions of special education administrators.

I have created an original survey for the purposes of the study, and am seeking peer reviewers. Peer reviews would assist is establishing content validity. I ask that you critique the survey for relevancy, provide feedback regarding the understandability of the questions, and offer suggestions for topics or questions not included that should be considered. You may do so by replying to this email. The survey is attached.

Thank you for your time, and consideration.
Sincerely,

Denise Buersmeyer

Appendix C: IRB Form



School of education
Graduate department

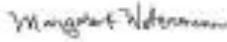
IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER _____
(irb USE ONLY)

Date: June 1, 2015

**IRB Request
Proposal for Research
Submitted to the Baker University Institutional Review Board**

I. Research Investigator(s) (Students must list faculty sponsor first)

Department(s) School of Education Graduate Department

Name	Signature	
1. Dr. Susan Rogers		Major Advisor
2. Margaret Waterman		Research Analyst
3. Dr. Russ Kokorada		University Committee Member
4. Dr. Kendra Lau		External Committee Member

Principal Investigator: Denise Buersmeyer 
 Phone: 816-262-3521
 Email: denise.buersmeyer@sjsd.k12.mo.us
 Mailing address: 11881 NE Hurlingen Rd., Easton, MO 64443

Faculty sponsor: Dr. Susan Rogers
 Phone: 913-344-1226
 Email: susan.rogers@bakeru.edu

Expected Category of Review: Exempt Expedited Full

II: Protocol: (Type the title of your study)

Missouri Special Education Directors' Perceptions of Their Knowledge,
Skills, and Graduate Preparation

Summary

In a sentence or two, please describe the background and purpose of the research.

Legalities and compliance regulations are associated with special education in Missouri. The purpose of this study is to determine whether special education directors learned about compliance with special education law, finance, and other matters during graduate school, or on the job, and do special education directors perceive that to be necessary.

The final purpose is to determine whether educational degree, years of experience, or number of IEPs affect special education directors' perceptions.

Briefly describe each condition or manipulation to be included within the study.

There are no conditions or manipulations included in this study.

What measures or observations will be taken in the study? If any questionnaire or other instruments are used, provide a brief description and attach a copy.

Will the subjects encounter the risk of psychological, social, physical or legal risk? If so, please describe the nature of the risk and any measures designed to mitigate that risk.

A survey will be completed by the subjects regarding the topics included in the purpose of the study. The subjects will not encounter any psychological, social, physical, or legal risks. See attached survey.

Will any stress to subjects be involved? If so, please describe.

There will be no stress to the subjects.

Will the subjects be deceived or misled in any way? If so, include an outline or script of the debriefing.

The subjects will not be deceived or misled in any way.

Will there be a request for information which subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive? If so, please include a description.

There will be a request from participants for their educational degree, and years of experience as a special education director, which is not considered to be personal or sensitive.

Will the subjects be presented with materials which might be considered to be offensive, threatening, or degrading? If so, please describe.

The subjects will not be presented with materials, which might be considered offensive, threatening, or degrading.

Approximately how much time will be demanded of each subject?

Participants should be able to complete the survey in approximately 15 minutes.

Who will be the subjects in this study? How will they be solicited or contacted? Provide an outline or script of the information which will be provided to subjects prior to their volunteering to participate. Include a copy of any written solicitation as well as an outline of any oral solicitation.

The subjects will be Missouri directors of special education. They will be contacted via email. See attached sample email.

What steps will be taken to insure that each subject's participation is voluntary? What if any inducements will be offered to the subjects for their participation?

The information provided in the written solicitation via email will indicate that participation is voluntary. There will be no inducements offered to the subjects.

How will you insure that the subjects give their consent prior to participating? Will a written consent form be used? If so, include the form. If not, explain why not.

The subject's voluntary completion of the survey will be the indicator of consent.

Will any aspect of the data be made a part of any permanent record that can be identified with the subject? If so, please explain the necessity.

No aspect of the data, or part of any permanent record will be identified with a subject.

Will the fact that a subject did or did not participate in a specific experiment or study be made part of any permanent record available to a supervisor, teacher or employer? If so, explain.

The fact that a subject did or did not participate in the study will not be part of any permanent record.

What steps will be taken to insure the confidentiality of the data? Where will it be stored? How long will it be stored? What will be done with it after the study is completed?

The survey data will only be known to the researcher, major advisor, and the research analyst, because the survey responses will be anonymous. The data will be stored only as long as necessary to compile the results in the web based software of Survey Monkey, and with the researcher. The results will be stored for 6 – 12 months. After the study is complete, the data will be destroyed.

If there are any risks involved in the study, are there any offsetting benefits that might accrue to either the subjects or society?

There are no risks involved in the study.

Will any data from files or archival data be used? If so, please describe.

No data from files or archival data will be used.

Participant Survey

Part I. Please mark the appropriate response.

1. Number of years as a director of special education: _____
2. Highest degree earned:
 _____ Master Degree
 _____ Specialist Degree
 _____ Ph.D./Ed.D.
3. Approximately how many students have Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in your school district? _____

Part II. Please rate your agreement with each of the following statements related to what extent you perceive you learned about the following areas during course work in graduate school.

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

4. I learned about compliance with special education law and regulations during course work in graduate school.
SD D N A SA
5. I learned about special education finance (budgeting and final expenditure reports) during course work in graduate school.
SD D N A SA
6. I learned about completing state reports (e.g., Child Count, Core Data, Exit Report) during course work in graduate school.
SD D N A SA
7. I learned about best instructional practices during course work in graduate school.
SD D N A SA
8. I learned about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders during course work in graduate school.
SD D N A SA

Part III. Please rate your agreement with each of the following statements related to what extent you perceive you learned about the following areas on the job.

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

9. I learned about compliance with special education law and regulations on the job.
SD D N A SA

10. I learned about special education finance (budgeting and final expenditure reports) on the job.
SD D N A SA
11. I learned about completing state reports (e.g., Child Count, Core Data, Exit Report) on the job.
SD D N A SA
12. I learned about best instructional practices on the job.
SD D N A SA
13. I learned about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders on the job.
SD D N A SA

Part IV. Please rate your agreement with each of the following statements related to what extent you perceive learning about the following areas as necessary.

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

14. Learning about compliance with special education law and regulations is necessary.
SD D N A SA
15. Learning about special education finance (budgeting and final expenditure reports) is necessary.
SD D N A SA
16. Learning about completing state reports (e.g., Child Count, Core Data, Exit Report) is necessary.
SD D N A SA
17. Learning about best instructional practices is necessary.
SD D N A SA
18. Learning about relationship building and collaboration with all stakeholders is necessary.
SD D N A SA

Appendix D: IRB Approval Letter



Baker University Institutional Review Board

August 12, 2015

Dear Denise Buersmeyer and Dr. Rogers,

The Baker University IRB has reviewed your research project application and approved this project under Expedited Status Review. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

Please be aware of the following:

1. Any significant change in the research protocol as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
2. Notify the IRB about any new investigators not named in original application.
3. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents of the research activity.
4. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.
5. If the results of the research are used to prepare papers for publication or oral presentation at professional conferences, manuscripts or abstracts are requested for IRB as part of the project record.

Please inform this Committee or myself when this project is terminated or completed. As noted above, you must also provide IRB with an annual status report and receive approval for maintaining your status. If you have any questions, please contact me at CTodden@BakerU.edu or 785.504.8440.

Sincerely,

Chris Todden EdD
Chair, Baker University IRB

Baker University IRB Committee
Verneda Edwards EdD
Sara Crump PhD
Erin Morris PhD
Scott Crenshaw

Appendix E: Letter Sent Via Email to Missouri Special Education Directors

July 24, 2015

Dear Colleague,

I am a doctoral student at Baker University. I am conducting a research study that investigates Missouri special education directors' perceptions of their knowledge, skills, and graduate preparation. I am surveying directors of special education identified by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. I would like to ask for your participation. The survey is available at <https://www.surveymonkey.com>.

I understand you may be very busy this time of year, but I hope you will take approximately 20 minutes to complete the mostly multiple-choice survey. The survey is completely anonymous. It will ask for your number of years as a director of special education, highest degree earned, and approximately how many students have Individual Education Plans in your district. Your answers will be confidential and combined with the responses of other participants in summary form. Information reported will not include any individuals or school districts. The completion of the survey will indicate your consent to participate and permission to use the information provided by you in the research study.

Thank you in advance for your participation in the study. If you have any questions about the survey, or would like a copy of the results, please contact me at 816-262-3521.

Sincerely,

Denise Buersmeyer
Director of Special Services
St. Joseph School District
St. Joseph, MO 64501