

**A STUDY OF FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE EXIT OF SPECIAL  
EDUCATION TEACHERS FROM THE SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM  
IN REGION 1 OF KANSAS**

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Submitted to the Faculty  
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Doctor of Education  
in  
Educational Leadership

April 2008

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## Abstract

Research indicates a national shortage of special education teachers in schools across America. The long-standing challenge in the area of special education teacher retention and attrition continues to be a serious threat to our educational system. Researchers and policy makers have expressed concern over the shortage of special education teachers. This shortage has been chronic since the late 1980s and has continued to increase. Incentives have been offered to retain special educators, but many of these offers have been unsuccessful.

This study attempted to determine factors that contribute to a special education teacher's decision to exit the classroom within the Region 1 area of Kansas during the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years. The study additionally sought to compare the ratings of the factor importance of the decision to leave the classroom among the five teaching groups clustered by years of experience (0-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, and 20 plus). Region 1 consisted of nine school districts in northeastern Kansas, near the Kansas City metropolitan area. A survey was mailed to 227 Region 1 special education teachers who had left their teaching assignments during the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years. The respondents were asked to complete a survey that offered fifteen potential factors contributing to their exit from the classroom. One hundred surveys were returned.

The results of this study indicated that paperwork and administrative support were two statistically significant factors that contributed to a special education teacher's decision to leave the classroom. Another factor, parental demands, did not show a significant difference from the one-sample t test, although it can be stated as a strong factor contributing to the decision to leave the classroom. The study also indicated that

the factor “lack of certification requirements” was found to have a significant difference among the mean ratings of the experienced teaching groups, with two marginally significant differences between special education teachers with 0-5 years of experience and those with 11-15 years of experience.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and thank the many individuals who have supported and assisted me throughout this process. Due to your belief in me as an individual, colleague, and friend, I have been successful with the completion of this study.

Thank you to Dr. Susan Rogers, major advisor, for your guidance, endorsement, and problem-solving ability. Your ambitious attitude and tenacity kept steering me along my path. Thank you to my committee members: Dr. Harold Frye, who has always been generous and kind-hearted; Dr. Kevin McCarthy, for your commitment to education; Dr. Ann Sanders, who was willing to give of her time and expertise at the last minute; and Dr. John Farrell, for your continual encouragement. John, you are wonderful and I will be forever grateful.

Thank you to my fellow Cohort One classmates. Together we succeeded as the first graduating class. It has been a joy to travel this journey with you. Thank you to my colleagues and friends within the Gardner Edgerton School District. Your support, assistance, and understanding are greatly appreciated. Thank you to four special individuals who continually assisted me along the way: Dr. Erin Dugan, Dr. Basil Kessler, Dr. Karl Krawitz, and Ms. Peg Waterman. Because of you, completion of this project became a reality.

Finally, thank you to my family and friends. My parents, Larry and Ila Jo Martin: your love, multiple conversations, and infinite wisdom gave me strength—you are my heroes! To my brothers, David and Rick, and their families: thank you for your understanding and support. My friends, you have been there to cheer me on. To all mentioned, thank you for believing that I could attain this goal.

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## CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

Today's research indicates a national shortage of special education teachers in schools across America. It is apparent through literature and state vacancy reports that special education classroom vacancies have become more difficult to fill. Shortages of fully qualified teachers have plagued special education for two decades and schools struggle to locate and hire special education teachers (Bishop, Brownwell, Langley, Seo, and Sindelar 1). The Focus on Exceptional Children report stated that in 1999 the Bureau of Labor Statistics projected demand for more than 135,000 special education teachers between 1998 and 2008 (Bishop et al. 2). In 2007 alone, Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) reported school districts were unable to fill 138 special education positions ("Vacancy Report" 8). Several factors contributed to the shortage of special education teachers. With the inception of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997, citizens were assured that a free and appropriate public education was available for all students with disabilities. In 2001, with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), accountability for the academic performance of students with disabilities increased. These statutes had an impact on the preparation and retention of highly qualified special education teachers.

The Kansas State Department of Education reported in 2006 that 29,412 certified teaching employees were working in classrooms (KSDE "Principals Building Report" 1). Of those highly qualified teachers, 4,300 were certified to teach special education. This number represents nearly 11% of the teaching work force dedicated to teach special education. Not all endorsed special education teachers actually teach in the special

education classroom. Some of these teachers elect or are administratively transferred to teach in the regular education classroom.

Special education teachers who are not highly qualified are often able to secure teaching positions by requesting special education licensure waivers. This process can be a positive avenue for interested individuals who want to pursue teaching positions in special education. In 2006, Kansas had 362 teachers who were able to teach in the special education classroom because they were granted a waiver from the Kansas State Department of Education (“Licensed Personnel Report” 14).

Once special education teachers secure teaching positions, it is equally important for administrators and fellow teachers to develop relationships with them and ensure they have the necessary tools for a successful classroom. In a 2004 article, Bonnie Billingsley emphasized the significance of retaining special education teachers, stating that it is extremely important to support the needs of special education teachers within the educational environment (“Special Education Teacher Retention and Attrition” 53). It is becoming more difficult to locate, hire, and retain quality special education teachers. Studies compiled by Boe et al. showed more special education teachers (20%) leave special education, as compared to general education teachers leaving general education (13%) (qtd. in Sirk 21).

During the 2004-05 school year, KSDE reported an aggregate total of 89.5 vacancies for special education classrooms (“Licensed Personnel Report” 14). During the 2005-06 school year, KSDE reported an aggregate total of 86.2 vacancies for special education classrooms (“Licensed Personnel Report” 14). The total number of special education classroom vacancies for the 2004 through 2006 school years was 175.7. The

differences between 2004 and 2006 are not attributed to attrition. Due to the enactment of NCLB, Billingsley and McLeskey reported that, at least in part, the special education teacher shortages were due to the lack of highly qualified staff (1). The vacancies in Kansas could have been affected by the lack of highly qualified staff.

The retention of high quality special education teachers must become a major focus of school districts. School districts must have in place tools and programs to assist with teacher retention. Research indicated that the retention of special education teachers is influenced by numerous factors, including paperwork, high caseloads, parental demands, working conditions, professional development, and lack of administrative support (Otto and Arnold 3). In order to sustain special education teachers in the classroom, it is important that schools and administrators focus on areas researched and acknowledge those areas of need in today's classroom teachers. While emphasis needs to continue on recruitment of teachers into the field of special education, the focus must include retaining the teachers that enter into the special education teaching profession (Gersten, Keating, and Yovanoff 4). Research suggested that major findings concerning building-level support included the following issues related to the principal: 1) lack of understanding of what teachers do in their classrooms; 2) failure to recognize the significance of teachers' work challenges and accomplishments; 3) limited assistance with specific problems; and 4) reluctance to involve teachers in determining the shape of the school's special education programs (Billingsley et al. 3).

Special education teachers may choose to leave the profession due to the lack of certification or requirements established by state agencies. The Billingsley and McLeskey study concluded that special education teachers are more likely to leave their profession

than are their regular education counterparts (2). This, in part, may be due to the additional requirements for staff not only to be highly qualified in content areas, but also to be highly qualified in special education. Administrators need to recognize the requirements placed on special education teachers to be highly qualified in content areas, which could greatly influence the teacher retention rate. The same reason holds true for district human resource personnel, as they look to recruit new teachers into the profession. It is important for administrators to acknowledge the factors that have the greatest influence on teacher retention. This information is important for program planning, collaboration, and decision-making instances when determining the needs and expectations of special education classroom teachers. Not only do special education teachers need to be highly qualified, but they also need to possess the necessary skills of collaboration and teamwork, and possess a specific knowledge base within their specific area of teaching.

In summary, if the nation continues to fail to address factors, which research has shared, that affect a teacher's decision to leave the profession, then administrators will face increasing shortages. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to listen to the reasons teachers have given for choosing to exit the profession, and to address them accordingly.

#### Background of the Study

This study was conducted in the Region 1 area located in northeastern Kansas. Kansas City sits within direct proximity of three counties. Region 1 includes parts of Johnson, Douglas, and Wyandotte counties. Geographically, Region 1 is partially bounded on the north by a small section of Leavenworth County and a larger portion of Wyandotte County, on the east by the state of Missouri, on the south by Miami County,

and on the west by Douglas County. Region 1 includes the following school districts: Shawnee Mission, Blue Valley, Olathe, DeSoto, Gardner Edgerton, and Spring Hill, [located in Johnson County], Turner and Wyandotte County Cooperative [located in Wyandotte County], and Lawrence [located in Douglas County]. Figure 1 identifies Douglas, Johnson, and Wyandotte counties, where all Region 1 school districts are located.

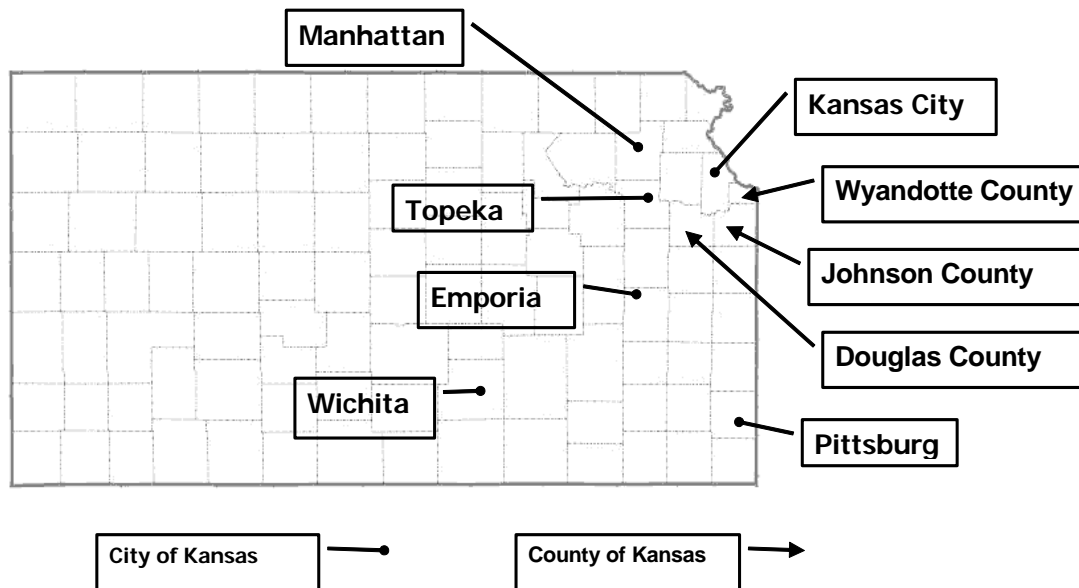


Fig. 1. Map of Kansas depicting certain cities and counties (A Map and Graphics Company, 2007)

Figure 2 illustrates the northeast corner of the state of Kansas and identifies the nine school districts represented in the Region 1 Area. Six of the nine school districts are located in Johnson County, two of the school districts are located in Wyandotte County, and one of the school districts is located in Douglas County.



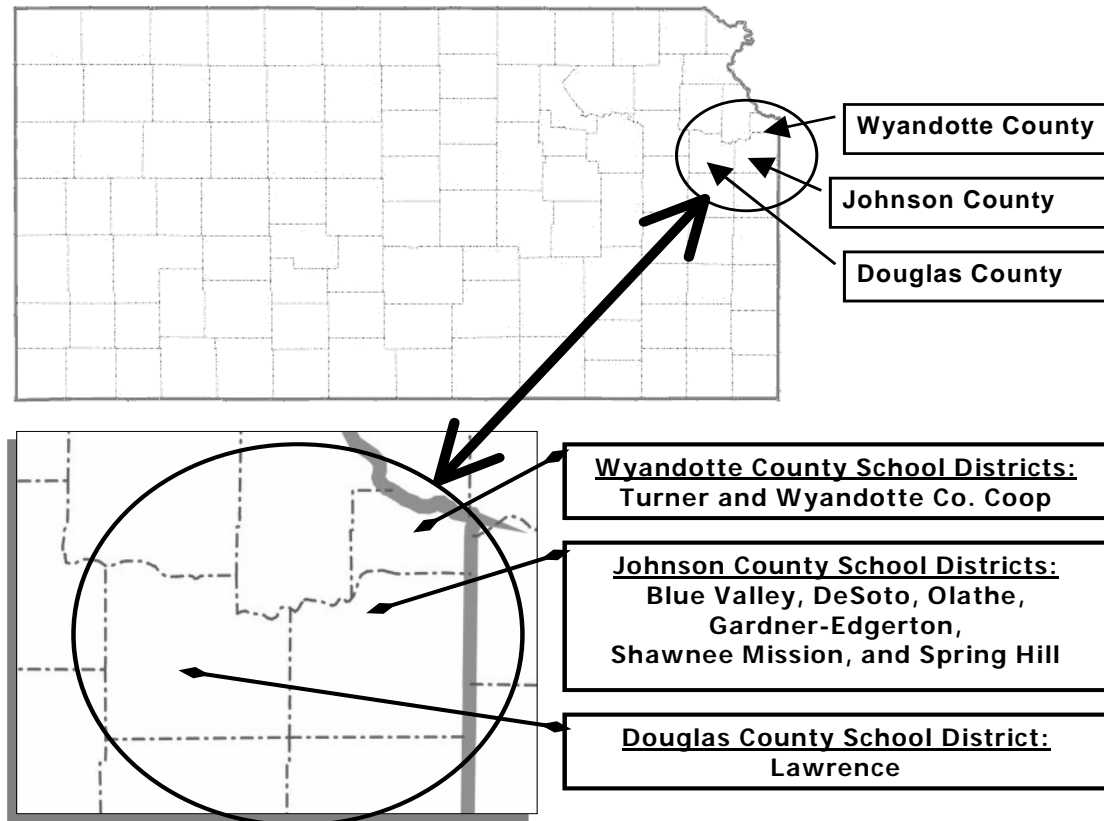


Fig. 2. Northeast Kansas Region 1 Area. (A Maps and Graphics Company, 2007)

According to the 2000 census, the population of Johnson County was 451,086. The 2006 estimated population for Johnson County was reported at 516,731, which was a 14.5 % increase from the 2000 census. The 2000 census also reported Johnson County as having 48,627 people with disabilities living within its boundaries. The per capita income for Johnson County is \$30,919, with a median household income of \$66,651.

The same information can be reported for Douglas and Wyandotte Counties. According to the 2000 Census, the populations of Douglas County and Wyandotte County were 99,960 and 157,880, respectively. The 2006 estimated population for Douglas County was 112,123, which represented a 12% increase from the 2000 census. The per capita income for Douglas County was \$37,547 and the median household

income was \$53,991. The 2006 estimated population for Wyandotte County was 155,509, which represented a 1.5% decrease from the 2000 census. The per capita income for Wyandotte County was \$33,784 and the median household income was \$40,333.

Figure 3 represents the household populations in the nine school districts in Johnson, Douglas, and Wyandotte counties. Shawnee Mission is the most populated school district of those represented and Spring Hill is the least populated.

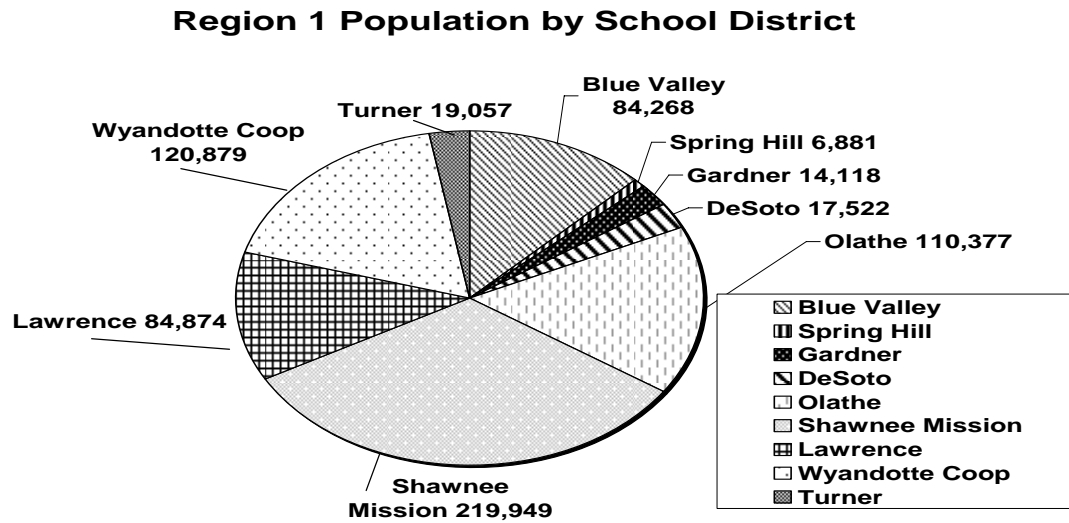


Fig. 3. Region 1 Population by School District 2007 (National Center for Education Statistics 2007)

Figure 4 represents the total head count for each of the nine school districts. The Shawnee Mission School District has the highest total district head count with 28,523 pupils and the Spring Hill School District has the fewest pupils, with a student population of 1,713. The total head count of students attending schools within Region 1 is 117,902. The average total student population for the nine schools districts within the Region 1

area is 13,100. Three districts in Region 1 have an all-student enrollment of less than 5,000. Three other districts have enrollments between 5000 and 10,000. The final three school districts of Region 1 have enrollments greater than 20,000. These school districts each have students representing a variety of social economic statuses, ethnicity, and cultural diversity, in addition to their populations of students with exceptionalities.

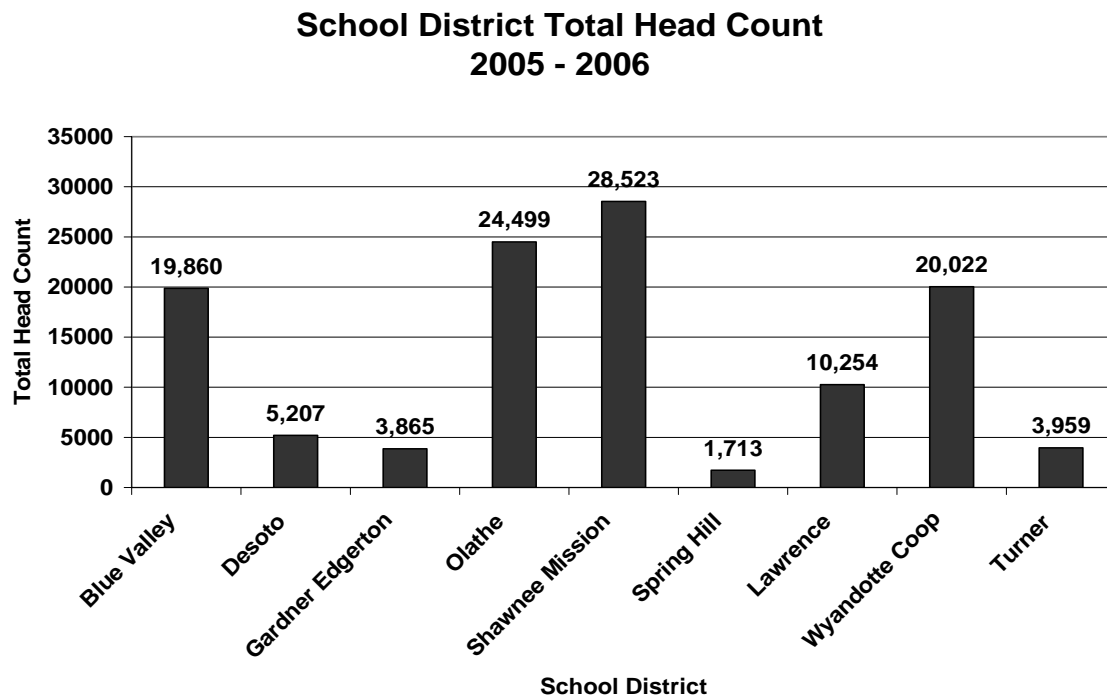


Fig. 4. School District Headcount (KSDE “School District Total Head Count,” 2007)

Figure 5 represents the total number of individual education plans (IEPs) in each of the six school districts. Shawnee Mission has the highest number of IEPs, totaling 4,805. Spring Hill has the fewest number of IEPs, totaling 184. DeSoto has the lowest percentage of IEPs with 8%, while Shawnee Mission has the highest percentage of IEPs with 17%.

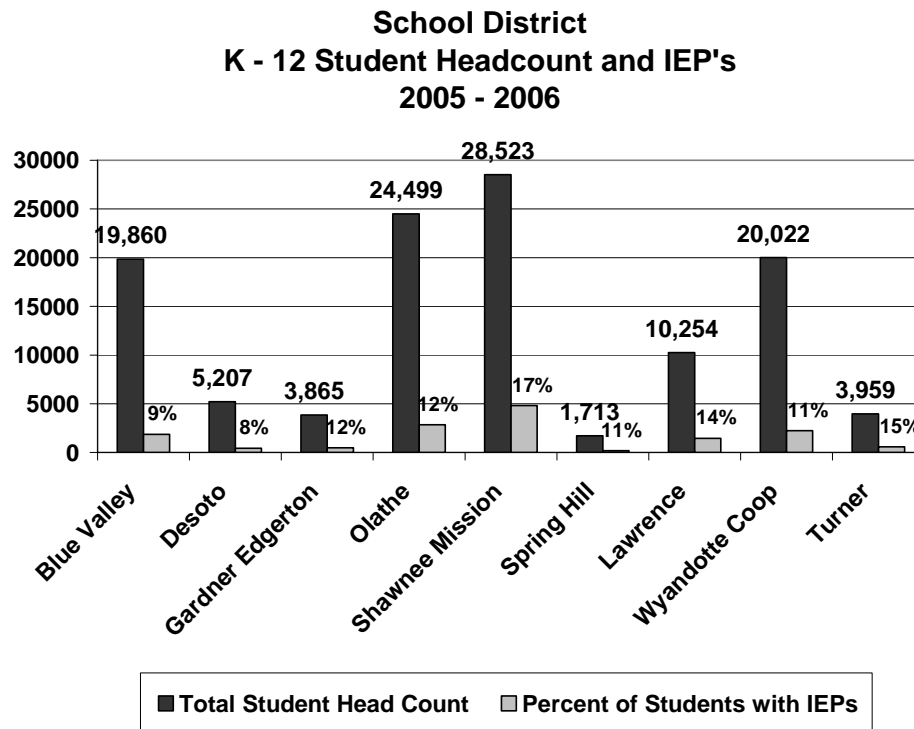


Fig. 5. District Headcount and IEPs. (KSDE "Principals' Building Report," 2006)

Figure 6 represents the total number of Region 1 special education teachers employed in each school district for the 2004 through 2006 school years. Figure 6 also denotes the percentage of special education teachers who chose to leave the special education classroom from each respective school district. The three school districts that employed the largest number of special education teachers were Olathe, Shawnee Mission, and Wyandotte County Cooperative. Yet, the three school districts that had the highest percent of teachers leaving were Gardner Edgerton, Spring Hill, and Turner.

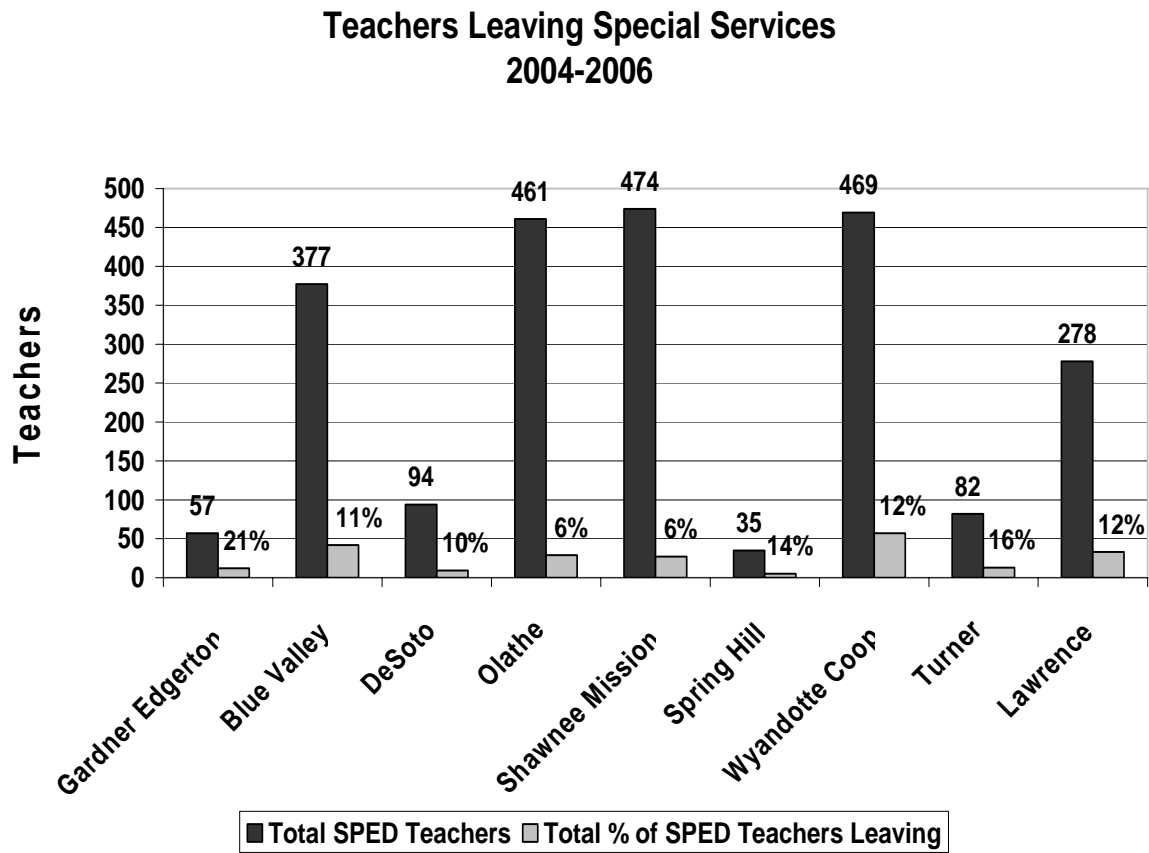


Fig. 6. Teachers Leaving Special Services. (KSDE “Personnel by Type.”)

In summary, this study was conducted in Region 1 of Kansas. Graphs depicted the layout of the school districts and their populations in relation to one another. Information was shared regarding student population, IEPs and the percent of special education teachers leaving the district. This information will be valuable as the focus of the study is shared.

#### Statement of the Problem

Studies consistently identified the highest group of special education teachers at risk for attrition as those with 5 or less years of experience (Otto and Arnold 2). Various

studies have stated reasons special education teachers leave the classroom. No research was found to be specific to the Region 1 area of Kansas to determine why special education teachers leave the classrooms.

Studies referenced in the literature review acknowledged special education teachers' determining factors that contributed to their decision to leave the classroom. The literature review prioritized these factors. The literature demonstrated that special education teachers are more apt to leave their position than are their general education counterparts. This study attempted to determine specific factors that caused the special education teachers in the Region 1 geographical area of Kansas to leave the special education classroom. The researcher believes the findings from this study can help local and state leadership understand the mitigating factors behind the exit of so many special education teachers.

#### Purpose of the Study

As noted by the Council for Exceptional Children, special education teaching conditions pushed the field into crisis. Issues related to special education teacher shortages and attrition was of concern to administrators who work to recruit and retain special educators ("Report Addresses" 67). School districts within Region 1 reported experiencing shortages of highly qualified special education teachers, as evidenced by the number of special education teachers on special education waivers. The Kansas State Department of Education reported that Region 1 had 56 teachers on special education waivers in 2006 ("Licensed Personnel Report" 15). That means 56 teachers need to continue their education to obtain full certification and will not have the full range of special education skills necessary to impart knowledge to students. Having these teachers

on waivers supports the claim put forth by Billingsley that a teacher shortage faces our nation, and research indicated it would continue through the upcoming years (“Special Education Teacher Retention” 39). As special education teachers retire or leave the profession for other opportunities, it is increasingly difficult to replace them.

This study determined the factors contributing to special education teachers leaving the special education classroom, including identification of the factors that contribute most strongly to leaving. The study determined if number of years of special education experience exhibited differences, and in addition, the study reported any factors, or combination of factors, which, if altered, affected the special education teacher’s decision to leave the classroom.

#### Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that it contributes valuable insight into the reasons special education teachers from Region 1 exited their positions. The shortage of special education teachers becomes a more apparent need when examining the number of vacant special education teaching positions in the Region 1 area. During June 2006, 19 vacant special education positions existed within Region 1 (“Vacancy Report” 1-8), causing 19 classrooms that did not have a highly qualified teacher. It is important to identify and prioritize the factors that contribute to special education teachers leaving the special education classroom. The results of this study may be utilized by school district administrators to develop strategies to retain special education teachers in the classroom, the district, and the profession. This information could prove vital for public school districts working towards the retention of special educators.

## Overview of Methodology

This study used a non-experimental survey research design, as subjects were neither randomly selected nor were they randomly assigned to a research control group. The method of data collection was a survey instrument developed for this study. The study was a combined qualitative and quantitative research design. The paper-and-pencil survey instrument gave the respondents the opportunity to utilize a 5-point Likert-type scale and indicate which factors influenced them to leave the special education classroom. In addition to the quantitative data provided by the survey, respondents also answered questions in narrative form, stating any additional factors that caused them to leave the special education classroom. The survey allowed the respondents to rank the top four factors that contributed to their leaving the special education classroom. These same respondents were provided the opportunity to offer written feedback. A total of 227 special education teachers who left their positions in Region 1 area of Kansas during the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years were selected to participate in the study. Their selection was based on the fact that the respondents left the special education classroom for one of the defined reasons. No other selection criterion was used.

The study used a teacher perception instrument to survey both beginning and experienced special education teachers who left their teaching positions during the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years. By comparing these findings to previous studies of similar design, the intended outcome was to identify the factors that caused special education teachers to leave the classroom, and then to prioritize those factors from most to least influential.



The survey data were collected and analyzed with a one-sample t test and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The one sample t test was used to test the importance of each factor. The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test for the differences between the means of the five groups of special education teachers against the fourteen defined factors. In order to determine the significant differences, the researcher utilized the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

### Research Questions

To investigate why special education teachers choose to leave the special education classroom, the following research questions were developed:

1. What factors contribute to special education teachers making the determination to leave the special education classroom?
2. Does the number of years of experience teaching special education make a difference in why special education teachers leave the special education classroom?
3. What factors appear to have the highest frequency of explanation as to why special education teachers leave the special education classroom?

### Research Hypotheses

In order to investigate the factors that contribute to the special education teacher leaving the classroom, the following 15 research hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance. Testing hypotheses 1-14 determined if a factor contributed to the special education teacher's decision to leave the classroom. Testing hypothesis 15 determined if the number of years in teaching special education made a difference.

Hypothesis 1: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the paperwork factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 2: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the lack of administrative support factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree or disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 3: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the caseload/class size factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 4: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the lack of professional development factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 5: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the additional training or certification factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 6: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the salary factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 7: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the student exceptionality intensity factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree or disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 8: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the parental demands factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 9: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the other career opportunities factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 10: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the transfer to general education factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 11: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the lack of certification factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 12: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the number of IEPs factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, neither agree or disagree, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 13: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the relocation factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom

Hypothesis 14: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the lack of technology factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 15: The number of years of experience teaching special education makes a difference in why special education teachers leave the classroom.

### Limitations and Delimitations

For the purpose of this study, the following limitations and delimitation are acknowledged and stated.

1. Data collected is from the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years.
2. The study is limited to educators in a public school environment and the Region 1 area of Kansas and may not be generalizable to other geographic regions.
3. There was potential for unequal group sizes with regard to years of teaching experience of special education teachers.

The only delimitation in this study was the decision to use a population of northeastern Kansas teachers in the Region 1 area. This delimitation will limit the ability to apply this research outside of the Region 1 area.

### Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, the following assumptions are acknowledged:

1. All school districts that participated in this study classified their special education teachers in the same manner, regardless of their individual certification.
2. All school districts that participated in this study followed the same procedural guidelines relative to specific special education classrooms and student identification.
3. All school districts participated in the same recruitment and retention efforts regarding special education teachers.

4. All special education teachers were honest and truthful in answering the survey questions.
5. All school districts in Region 1 provided a comprehensive list of special education teachers who had left the special education classroom.

#### Definition of Key Terms

The following terms have been defined for the understanding of this study.

Highly qualified teacher: The law requires that public elementary and secondary school teachers have obtained full state certification or passed the state teacher licensing examination; hold a license to teach in the state; and not have had a certificate or license requirement waived under emergency, temporary, or provisional conditions (National Education Association (NEA) 1).

Intensity of support needs: The amount of direction given to the teacher by the building administrator in regard to caseload, staffing, technology, paperwork, discipline, and professional development.

Region 1: A cooperative group of special education administrators representing the nine school districts in northeastern Kansas who meet monthly to discuss special education topics and best practices. The school districts include Shawnee Mission #512, Blue Valley #229, Gardner Edgerton #231, Olathe #233, Spring Hill #230, DeSoto #232, Turner #202, Lawrence #497 and Wyandotte County Special Education Cooperative #500. School districts that make up Wyandotte County Cooperative include Kansas City, Kansas; Bonner Springs; and Piper (Kansas Association of Special Education Administrators 1).

Special education provisional license: This license provides a teacher who holds a valid Kansas teaching license with a provisional subject or grade level endorsement or certification/licensure waiver for the assignment (Fultz 3).

Special education waiver: A licensed elementary or secondary education teacher in Kansas may obtain a temporary waiver if the following three fulfillments occur: admitted to and enrolled in an accredited university, completed a plan of study, and submitted a waiver application to KSDE (University of Kansas 2).

Years of teaching experience: The special education teachers are divided into five groups. Determination of their experience is based on recertification requirements required by the state of Kansas. For the purpose of this study, the special education teacher's years of experience are divided into the following five groups: 1) 0-5 years, 2) 6-10 years, 3) 11-15 years, 4) 16-20 years, and 5) 20 plus years of experience.

#### Organization of the Study

This report of the research study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One includes the purpose of the study, the background of the study, significance of the study, overview of methodology, research questions, research hypothesis, assumptions, limitations and delimitations, and definition of key terms. Chapter Two reviews the current literature related to this study and addresses previously studied research areas of special education teacher factors that contribute to special education teachers leaving the classroom. Chapter Three describes the methodology: research design, sample, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and the data analysis. Chapter Four describes the results of the data analysis. These results are presented in a collection of narrative, graph, and table formats. Chapter Five provides the conclusions derived from this study,

outlines the limitations of the study, and lists implications for future research. The final component of Chapter Five is the summary and conclusions regarding factors contributing to special education teachers' decision to leave the classroom and what effect, if any, those factors have on the retention of special education staff.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

The long-standing challenge in the area of special education, teacher retention and attrition, continues to be a serious threat to our educational system. Kaff and other researchers reported that for over a decade, researchers and policy makers have expressed concern over the shortage of special education teachers (10). The shortage of fully certified teachers for students aged 6-21 years with disabilities has been chronic since 1987-88 and has increased annually, from 7.4% in 1993-94 to 13.4% in 2002-03; a shortage of approximately 54,000 special education teachers, including estimated vacant positions (Boe, "Long Term Trends" 138). Lawmakers and administrators offered incentives and conducted research to explore retention possibilities (Kaff 12) in order to fill educator positions requiring expertise in learning disabilities, behavioral disorders, mental retardation, and a variety of other areas involving students with disabilities. The majority of the incentives have been unsuccessful, as special education jobs remain unfilled, and administrators struggle to maintain quality special education classrooms (Billingsley 39). A multitude of studies, including Billingsley's studies in 2002 and 2004, Embich's study in 2001, and the Otto and Arnold study in 2005, have attempted to explicate the problems regarding special education teacher retention. These studies sought practical solutions for special education teacher burnout in an attempt to impact attrition. Despite the attempts to understand the issues surrounding special education retention, it appears the recurrent special education teacher crisis has no immediate end in sight.



This chapter presents a specific review of the literature examining factors contributing to special education teachers leaving the classroom. The literature review includes a historical legal overview of special education, parallel legislation and policies, and factors influencing special education teacher attrition. Factors of particular interest found in the research concentrated on the needs of special education teachers.

### Historical Legal Overview of Special Education

In order to understand attempts to retain special education teachers and the unique difficulties associated with such efforts, it is important to present an overview of the legislative and subsequent policy initiatives that have directed the discipline of special education for the past forty years.

The legal aspects and accountability of special education have increased tremendously during the past four decades. There was a time when students with disabilities did not attend public school and many states turned these children away. In the event they attended school, more than likely, they did not attend their local school and they were placed in inappropriate programs. This meant they were transported to separate schools outside of their neighborhood or community. During the late 1960s the legal requirements for educating students with disabilities began to change; the law initiating these changes was P.L.94-142, also known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHCA). President Gerald Ford signed this piece of legislation into law on November 29, 1975.

EHCA officially recognized the need to address educational supports and services for students with disabilities and set the foundation for understanding the importance of the role of the special educator. The legislation pledged federal monies to all levels of the

special education delivery system, i.e., early identification, due process, and teacher recruitment and preparation (State University of New York 1). The purpose of EHCA was to ensure that children with disabilities would be able to access public schools and would be granted a free appropriate public education. This became known as FAPE, which emphasized that children with disabilities would be able to attend public schools and receive special education and related services designed to meet their specific individual and unique needs. Prior to 1975, children with disabilities were educated on a limited basis. Since its passage in the mid-seventies, this law has been amended no less than five times. These amendments have significantly influenced how students with disabilities are taught; how teachers, administrators, and parents perceive special education; and how such services are provided and implemented (Martin, Martin, and Terman 25-37).

During the mid 1980s, amendments to the EHCA addressed the education of preschool children. During this time schools began to educate all children beginning at the age of three. In 1990 the EHCA was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and a shift in special education language occurred. IDEA inspired Americans to embrace student-centered language and shift from terminology such as “handicapped” to “a child with a disability.” This shift in language gave deeper understanding to teachers and parents regarding an individual’s overall disability instead of acknowledging only their handicap, and put the child first, before the disability (Martin et al. 25-37).

In 1990 Congress extended the anti-discrimination provisions, just as they did with Section 504 (American with Disabilities Act), which was enacted in 1973. Section

504 is defined as a national law that protects qualified individuals from discrimination based on their disability (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services 1). Further attention was given to an individual with a disability when this act helped codify protections of the Rehabilitation Act of 1975. The Rehabilitation Act and ADA set the stage for the passage of IDEA and future amendments to all three pieces of federal legislation during the next fifteen years (Martin et al. 25-37).

The IDEA of 1997 was signed into law on June 4, 1997, during the presidency of Bill Clinton. This amendment further strengthened the rights of students with disabilities and assisted them in benefiting from school reform efforts (Vohs and Landau 1). It was during this timeframe that substantial changes in the way students with disabilities received educational services at school began to occur. One of these changes included the collection of data regarding the number of children identified in special education disaggregated by their race, ethnicity, and gender, often referred to as disproportionality. Disproportionality is data collected to see if over-representation or under-representation within these areas occurred within special education, and if the population was similar to that of the total student population (EMSTAC 1).

In addition to the landmark amendments in 1990 and 1997, this law was most recently reauthorized in late 2004. It included the following changes: 1) an extensive definition of highly qualified teacher, 2) reduction of paperwork, 3) homeless provisions, 4) increased funds, 5) increased risk pools for high-cost IDEA services, 6) increased private school services, 6) increased children's participation in assessments, 7) increased funds available for early intervening services, 8) changes to procedural safeguards, 9) monitoring focus on student performance, and 10) extension of part C beyond age two

(Apling and Jones Summary). Part C is defined as services to children with disabilities between the ages of zero and two (State University of New York 2).

#### Parallel Legislation and Policies

In January 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act. NCLB was originally known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This law placed increased accountability on school districts and individual schools. It provided unprecedented new flexibility for states and local school districts. It also required states to pay increased attention to teacher quality; in particular, subject matter expertise for secondary teachers, including special education teachers. NCLB called upon schools to shift from a compliance position to a result-driven accountability mode. It also called for improved educational choices and options for parents (Fact Sheet 1-6). NCLB required highly qualified teachers to 1) hold at least a bachelor's degree, 2) have full state certification as a teacher or have passed the state licensure exam and hold a license to teach, 3) demonstrate competence in each academic subject in which the teacher teaches, and 4) to be able to teach students with disabilities with severe and profound disabilities in an elementary, self-contained classroom (Goetzinger 1). The *highly qualified* status can be a challenge for school districts if teachers hold a certification in special education but not in one of the content areas. A special education teacher cannot deliver core content instruction to students with disabilities if they do not have the proper highly qualified status (NEA 1).

In 2004, during its latest revision, IDEA was renamed the Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). On December 3, 2004, President George W. Bush signed the IDEIA (P.L. 108-446), a major reauthorization and revision

of IDEA. This law went into effect on July 1, 2005. Several amendments to this law included emphasis on transition to post-secondary education, paperwork reduction, re-evaluation, parental rights, and discipline procedures. Although it was the intent of lawmakers to scale back IDEA, other provisions and accountability measures put in place by IDEIA, such as increased paperwork, strong parental demands, and increased class sizes contributed to the exodus of special education teachers from the classroom and profession (Apling and Jones 2).

Within the state of Kansas, state compliance monitoring requirements are in place to ensure that proper special education services are offered to students and their families. The Focused Assistance and Monitoring (FAM) compliance system in Kansas, as noted on the District Status Report card, requires districts to fulfill requirements on six indicators. These include: 1) graduation rate; 2) drop out rate; 3) assessment data; 4) services in the regular education classroom; 5) services in the least restrictive environment; and 6) early childhood in the least restrictive environment (KSDE “Performance Review Indicators” 1). Data regarding these indicators is reported on the District Status Report Card. If indicators are not met, technical assistance or a decrease in federal funding can occur (KSDE, Student Support Services, “Focused Assistance” 2).

#### Factors Influencing Special Education Teacher Attrition

Several factors were identified as contributing to special education teachers leaving the classroom. Billingsley stated that efforts to reduce attrition should be based on an understanding of the factors that contribute to special educators’ decisions to leave the field (“Special Education Teacher Retention and Attrition” 39). This section provides a description of each of the following fifteen factors identified by the researcher: 1)

paperwork; 2) administrative support; 3) caseload/class size; 4) lack of professional development; 5) additional educational training; 6) salary; 7) student exceptionality; 8) parental demands; 9) other career opportunities; 10) transfer to general education; 11) lack of certification; 12) number of individual education plans (IEPs); 13) relocation; 14) lack of technology; and 15) other.

### *Paperwork*

Even with the advent of the newest IDEIA amendments, the trail of required paperwork within public education can be overwhelming for teachers. The “Bright Futures Report” from CEC stated that the most common reason cited in the literature for special education teachers leaving the profession was due to paperwork (Coleman 2). Paperwork for conducting IEP meetings alone can be a daunting task. Some IEPs can expand to 50 pages or more. Special education teachers are responsible for conducting five to twenty-five annual IEP meetings a year. The preparation required for IEP meetings can be monumental; and the pressure placed upon special education teachers can be challenging. The excessive paperwork that special education teachers are confronted with continues to cause many teachers to report feeling overburdened in their jobs (Goetzinger 35).

Embich agreed that many special education teachers feel they are more overworked than their regular education colleagues because special education students frequently demand increased preparatory time and paperwork from their instructors (60). Necessary paperwork for regular education teachers includes grading, parental contacts, data collection, progress monitoring, and report cards. In addition to those general education requirements, special education teachers are required to write individualized

education programs (IEP), collect intensive numerical and anecdotal data on students, work collaboratively with administrators and regular education colleagues to ensure student success, write behavior management plans for students, contact parents two to three times weekly, and write individualized lesson plans based on student IEP goals and objectives (Adams 24-25).

When IDEA is due for reauthorization, the amount of special education paperwork will be at the center of the discussion. Though Congress had hoped to reduce the excessive paperwork burden, it is apparent that the problem resides, in part, separate from special education. In fact, state education agencies and local school boards regulate paperwork as they seek to interpret and enforce the tracking and reporting requirements of NCLB, IDEIA, and other relevant federal and state education legislation. The amount and extent of paperwork is significantly related to the overall manageability of special educators' jobs (Billingsley, "Special Education Teacher Retention" 48). The large amount of paperwork special education teachers produce, multiplied by the number of students on their caseloads, contributes to teachers leaving the profession.

#### *Administrative Support*

Building and district level administrators are viewed as necessary support personnel for special education teachers and for their success as faculty members. In 2002, the Oregon Special Education Recruitment and Retention Project conducted a study of recently hired special educators (Oregon Dept. of Education 2). The study, conducted by Boyer and Gillespie, reported survey results stating that 85% of the respondents who indicated they had support specifically noted, "a building administrator who was knowledgeable in IDEA and supportive of the special educator's role was

important to them” (1.13). The respondents shared that it was important to their continuance in the position to have a building administrator cognizant of special education law. Another study, conducted by Embich, noted that a perceived lack of administrative support frequently leads to burnout, as many special education teachers feel their hard work and dedication remains unappreciated by administrators, in terms of both oral and written praise (58).

Lack of administrative support in their first years of teaching is one of the most commonly cited reasons by special education teachers who leave the profession (Durtschi 5). Researchers found that teachers thrive under a principal who fosters collegiality among peers, stimulates creativity, provides opportunities for professional learning and influences commitment (Wutke 23). Many special education teachers perceive that the building level administrator distinctly makes a difference as to whether they feel supported. The following four areas were noted as concerns from special education teachers regarding their building administrator: 1) lack of understanding about what occurs within the special education classroom, 2) failure to recognize the significance of teachers’ work challenges, 3) inadequate levels of assistance with specific problems, and 4) reluctance to involve teachers in determining the shape of the school’s special education programs (Gersten, Gillman, Morvant, and Billingsley 224). Administrators can choose to oversee the number of special education students in classrooms and assist staff by monitoring those numbers prior to an unmanageable increase.

As previously mentioned, The “Bright Futures Report” from CEC stated that another top reason special education teachers leave the profession is due to the lack of administrative support (Coleman 2). Administrators may unintentionally increase stress



on special education teachers by assigning further duties, such as lunch, recess or hallway duties, serving on building or district level committees, and other extraneous duties. Lack of administrative support is a prominent factor that contributes to special education teachers leaving the field.

#### *Caseload/Class Size*

A report conducted by the Council of Exceptional Children (CEC) indicated that the decision to exit the classroom might be due in part to the size of the teacher's caseload (Coleman 67). Often, special education teachers report that their caseloads are too high. The Council for Exceptional Children reported that 61% of special education teachers cited large caseloads and class sizes as a major problem (Sack 2). Special education teachers, within the resource room or self-contained setting, feel the increased number of students on their caseload is overwhelming. This may happen for reasons such as an increased number of identified students with disabilities, inadequate facilities, or unfilled teaching positions. These classrooms can become overcrowded, and coupled with the increased intensity, diversity, and needs related to individual student's behavior; the teacher often can feel weighed down.

Goetzinger found that higher rates of attrition exist among teachers who have highly diverse groups of students on their caseloads (33). When special education teachers serve a wide variety of exceptionalities and diverse needs of students, they are more likely to leave the profession. The Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education Report (SPeNSE) stated that 6% of special education teachers planned to leave the profession as soon as possible (Carlson et al. 9). The special education teachers who planned to leave immediately stated that 17% of their workload was unmanageable. The report also noted the different disabilities

on special educators' caseloads, which included 21% with one disability, 47% with two to three types of disabilities, 24% with four to five types of disabilities and 8% with more than six types of disabilities on their caseloads (9). Today's special education teachers must be innovative, adaptive, and prepared to use an array of instructional approaches that suit students with a wide variety of needs and exceptionalities. Coleman wrote an article for Council for the Exceptional Children, which reported caseload (class size and composition) as the primary concern of special education teachers (2).

Higher student caseloads, combined with the challenges of managing diverse learning and behavioral needs of students with disabilities, meeting excessive paperwork demands, working with insufficient resources such as lack of updated instructional materials, and inappropriate community learning activities may cause many special education teachers to feel overloaded, stressed, and ineffective in their relationships with students (Goetzinger et al. 26). According to Billingsley ("Special Education Teacher Retention" 49), special education teachers may have left the field of special education due to the diversity of caseloads. In addition, Billingsley (49) stated that 33% of special education teachers indicated that their class size/caseload was too large.

The state of Kansas relegates the development guidelines for class size and caseload requirements to the individual school district, called the local education agency (LEA). "It shall be the policy of the LEA to have in place a procedure for determining an appropriate class size and caseload that will ensure the provision of FAPE for each student with an exceptionality" (KSDE, Student Support Services, "Local Education" 2). When special education caseloads become too large, the teacher has more difficulty teaching and attending to the student's individualized needs. Therefore, as research

suggests, higher caseloads may cause the special education teacher to become stressed and to harbor feelings of ineffectiveness.

### *Lack of Professional Development*

Meaningful and well-planned professional development is vital to the success of improving teacher instruction and is helpful in increasing teacher commitment to the profession (Goetzinger 41). Teachers who have the opportunity to learn in a collegial and supportive learning environment are the most likely to be committed to their schools (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future 19). Professional development must provide the "hook" and anticipatory set needed for teachers to reel in students. Effective instruction has an anticipatory set, elements of teaching input, guided practice, independent practice, and closure. It is important for educators to model the concepts and elements of effective instruction inside a professional growth model; the process occurs over time. Professional development for the special education teacher is often overlooked by administration. Professional development for special educators must blend with regular education expectations, while allowing ample time and materials needed to support special education.

Many recently prepared special education teachers said their pre-service programs did not address specific knowledge and skills important to teaching, such as supervising paraprofessionals (77%), accommodating culturally and linguistically diverse students' needs (51%), using professional literature to address issues encountered in teaching (49%), and collaborating with general education teachers (47%) (Carlson et al 9.). Not surprisingly, the SPeNSE Key Findings stated these were some of the areas in which

special education teachers reported feeling least skillful and requiring ongoing professional growth.

An additional reason professional development is important to special education teachers is the increase in student needs in classrooms. A study conducted by Kaff noted that students with disabilities are needier and present complex problems. In Kaff's study, 25% of special educators reported they lacked the training and expertise to work with the varying disabilities in their classrooms (14).

It is important that special education teachers are connected to professional development activities related to their field. Teachers who participate in appropriate and meaningful professional development activities carry an enthusiasm and knowledge base into the classroom. Professional development will continue to be necessary for special education teachers to feel adequate in the classroom.

#### *Lack of Certification Requirements*

Recent research demonstrated that teacher quality has a greater impact on student achievement than any other educational factor (Rockoff 1). However, there is a concern that overall teacher quality is a variable, and hard-to-staff schools and special education positions have an even more difficult time recruiting and retaining quality teachers (Muller and Burdette 1). Given the NCLB Act of 2001 and IDEA of 2004 mandating a highly qualified teacher in every public school classroom, the lack of qualified applicants has led to the employment of teachers without appropriate certification and training (Conrey 22).

KSDE reported that across Kansas 276 teachers were on special education waivers for the 2004-05 school year, and 362 teachers were on waivers for the 2005-06

school year (“Licensed Personnel Report” 15). Of the 276 teachers on waivers during the 2004-05 school year, 125 teachers were still employed but in a different capacity the following year. As mentioned previously, of the 362 teachers on waivers during the 2005-06 school year, 164 teachers became employed in a different capacity the following year (“Licensed Personnel Report” 15). A teacher on a waiver holds a teaching license but not in the endorsed area of special education. Often teachers will return to higher education to obtain their special education endorsement for licensure. The state of Kansas allows a teacher who is working toward licensure to teach in a special education classroom on a waiver until he/she obtains a valid teaching license in the area being taught. Kansas reported that the number of K-12 unlicensed teachers assigned to teach special education classes (i.e., teachers on waivers) increased from 298 in 2001 to 326 in 2006, an increase of 9.4% of unlicensed teachers over the five-year period (“Licensed Personnel Report” 15). The increased percentage of teachers on waivers is evidence that Kansas continued to have difficulty obtaining licensed special education teachers for the classroom.

The data presented in this section supports that Kansas has difficulty recruiting and securing licensed personnel to teach special education. The waiver opportunity supports the challenge to secure special education teachers, but the issue of staff with a lack of certification requirements remains.

### *Salary*

Salary continues to be an issue for all teachers, and salary is a contributing factor to special education teachers leaving the field. During an interview, Dr. Bruce Passman reported, “When special education salaries are low, it compounds the problem of

recruiting and retaining teachers for the field” (Toplikar 2). A report by America Federation of Teachers (AFT) Research and Information Services noted that the average teacher salary, special and general education, increased between 2003-04 and 2004-05 by 2.2% to \$47,602 nation wide. While this is good news, nationally, teacher pay still lost ground against the cost of living, which rose by 3.4%. AFT reported this is the second consecutive year that average teacher pay has declined relative to inflation (AFT 1). Across the nation, teachers lost spending power for themselves and their families, as inflation outpaced increases in teacher salaries in 2006 (NEA 3).

Along with 27 other states, Kansas saw a decline in the average teacher salary (12.5%) over the past decade. The average tenured teacher’s salary for Kansas in 2004-05 was \$39,351, which was noted as ranking 38<sup>th</sup> in the nation for teacher pay (AFT 29). Region 1 school district administrators reported the average teacher salary in this area of Kansas as \$42,000 (Region 1 Administrators). As noted in the AFT report, when teacher wages are compared to those of other professionals, those in education are paid less and wages lag behind by a substantial degree (5). Butterfield referenced a study conducted by Boe, Barkanik, and Leow in 1999, which determined that increasing teachers’ salaries lessened the likelihood of attrition (32). Ostlund noted, from Billingsley’s report, that special education teacher salary is the one variable included in research examining work environments that is the most consistently correlated with retention. Billingsley indicated that higher salaries help mitigate opportunity costs associated with other job possibilities, and several studies have revealed a consistent relationship between salary and teachers’ intentions to stay among both general and special educators (qtd. in Ostlund 54).

School districts around the nation and within Kansas have become more diligent in providing incentives for special education teachers. Financial incentives may include signing bonuses and a willingness to negotiate salary. Region 1 administrators reported in an interview that one of the nine school districts offers a signing bonus for special education teachers. They also shared non-financial incentives, which included mentoring programs, professional development opportunities, technology, and lower case loads. They reported that several of the Region 1 school districts had flexibility in negotiating special education teacher salaries (Region 1 Administrators).

Billingsley (“Special Education Teacher Retention” 53) noted that one of the summary findings regarding special education teacher turnover was attributed to salary. Furthermore, Billingsley stated that district and school working conditions, as well as work assignment factors (e.g., salary, climate, support, and role demands) contribute to leaving (53). In summary, salaries of special education teachers continue to be a reason they leave the field. Although school districts are creative with offering incentives, the demands for special education teachers persist.

#### *Student Exceptionality Intensity*

Intensity levels of students with disabilities have grown since the inception of PL94-142. Special education teachers express concern over the intensity and difficulty of working with a wide range of disabilities. A special education teacher was quoted as saying, “Many of my students have complex problems” (Kaff 13). This intensity, associated with a wide range of disabilities, could be difficult, and at times, overwhelming for the special educator. The expectation and professional obligation to meet the needs of all types of students with disabilities can be exhausting. When students

have such intensity, specialized training and an astute understanding of the exceptionality is expected from the teacher. Research by Gehrke indicated that beginning special education teachers struggled with meeting the needs of their students in terms of addressing a wide range of student abilities across disability areas (33).

There is growing concern among educators that intensity and diversity are both on the rise. As the student population becomes increasingly diverse, student needs also diverge and escalate. Special education teachers view intensity of student needs as a factor to exit the classroom. As these needs continue to rise, there may be fewer special education teachers in the field (Conrey 49).

Students with emotional disturbance exhibit behavior that was not witnessed in prior years. Students with autism have intensified actions, such as hitting, biting, screaming, and darting. These were not present a decade ago. This may be in part due to the increase in diagnosis of autism and other disabilities, but nonetheless, special education teachers work in classrooms that have intense and varying disabilities and significant individual needs (Region 1 Administrators). The Council of Exceptional Children reported that the range and intensity of students' needs has increased, yet little has been done systematically to support teachers in meeting these needs (Coleman 4).

#### *Parental Demands*

IDEA stated that parents must be informed of their children's rights and they may fully participate in decisions being made regarding their child. This constitutes the parent as being a full respondent and active member of their child's IEP team. IEP team decisions are made with consensus, not by just one member of the team. Therefore, decisions are not what only the parent shares or expects (PTA 1).



In the previously mentioned survey by Kaff, special education teachers reported that parents are strong advocates for their children, but they also place unreasonable expectations and demands upon the special education teacher. These parents expect to receive all the services designed to meet the needs of their child, regardless of the resources available (14). Parental demands can vary depending upon the need of the student or, at times, the severity of his/her exceptionality. Billingsley conducted a study and shared that “working with parents” is noted as one out of twelve general concerns for beginning teachers (“Supporting Experienced” 412). Parents can be strong advocates for their child, but while doing so they could also be placing unreasonable demands upon the special education teachers.

Drs. Tom and Estelle Lombardi conducted a survey of special education teachers’ and administrators’ perceptions of special education. The study was a comparison between Portugal and the United States. Within this study, special education professionals ranked parental support as 2.26 on a Likert rating scale of 1 (*poor*) and 4 (*excellent*). This survey indicated that special education teachers understand that parental support is important (Lombardi and Lombardi 1-7).

#### *Other Career Opportunities*

The literature provided many reasons why special education teachers decide to leave the profession. A few of those reasons include difference in salary, interest in another career, and personal reasons. When teachers leave the classrooms, they tend to migrate to other teaching jobs or leave the profession altogether (Mikkelsen 2.1). When teachers decide to leave the classroom, the shortage of special education teachers is increased.

Salary is the factor that is relevant to special education teachers deciding to leave the profession altogether. In 2005, a national study was conducted on teacher salary trends. Twenty-three different occupations within the college of education cluster, including occupations such as accountants, civil engineers, financial analysts, surveyors, and others were analyzed. Of the twenty-three different occupations, nineteen had a higher annual mean wage increase than teachers. Teachers who make a career change most likely increase their annual salaries, as well as experience a greater percentage increase in their annual salaries from one year to the next (American Federation of Teachers 2). Salaries of special education teachers are lower than are those in other careers.

#### *Transferred to General Education*

School administrators often find that special educators request transfers to general education classroom teaching positions. Since schools do not want to relinquish a valuable employee, they often grant these transfers. Such lateral movement adds to the decline in the numbers of special education teachers. Ostlund reviewed a study by Muller and Markowitz, which estimated that special education teachers transfer to general education at a rate ten times greater than the rate at which their counterparts in general education transfer to special education (Ostlund 58).

Special education teachers are asked to perform multiple duties at a higher rate than their general education colleagues. Special education teachers are responsible for not only understanding and modifying the general education curriculum, but they are also expected to differentiate the curriculum content to individualize the instruction. Studies indicated that special education specific responsibilities, such as the number of

individualized meetings, increased paperwork, and intensity of parental demands, begin to weigh upon the special educator (McLeskey, Tyler, and Flippin; Muller and Markowitz; Ostlund). Some of these reasons could play a role in the decision of the special educator to transfer to general education. McLeskey, Tyler, and Flippin reported that a greater proportion of special education teachers transferred to general education (8.8%) than general education teachers transferred to special education positions (1%) (11).

The enactment of NCLB and the provision that teachers must be highly qualified has also had an impact on special education teachers transferring to general education. Prior to the 2006 school year, teachers could teach special education with limited certification. Once it was required that teachers must be highly qualified, many special education-teachers had no choice but to transfer to general education, because they held endorsements only in areas such as learning disabilities, mental retardation, or behavior disorders and did not hold additional endorsements in English, social studies, math or science. The special education teacher must hold endorsements not only in special education, but also in the content area being taught to be deemed highly qualified (NEA 1).

### *Relocation*

While relocation is mentioned minimally in the research, it was shown as a contributing factor to why special education teachers leave the classroom. In the study conducted by Kaff, within the realm of personal issues, 7% of the respondents noted relocation was their reason for leaving the classroom (14). A study conducted to identify factors that lead to retention of all teachers stated that one third of teachers leave the

profession within five years. Within this study, relocation is noted as an external factor contributing to attrition (Fox and Certo 7). In a study conducted by Billingsley et al., it was found that 37% of special education teachers indicated they left the profession due to personal reasons, including relocation (“Special Education Teacher Retention” 44).

In summary, although few studies single out relocation, it is noted as a contributing factor of special education teachers leaving the classroom. It is understandable, for various reasons, why special education teachers make the choice to relocate.

#### *Lack of Technology*

Most educators can attest that today’s society is in a technological age. Technology is advancing at an unforeseen rate and schools’ attempts to keep pace with this growing field can be complex and expensive. Nonetheless, special education teachers’ technology classroom needs have increased. Administrators within Region 1 reported that special education technology needs increased, with the following occurring: IEPs becoming Web-based, a broader understanding of assistive technology, and the use of PowerPoint presentations in teaching (Region 1 Administrators).

Research conducted by Leis in 2005 investigated factors influencing 179 early childhood teachers’ adoptions of technology into their classrooms. The study shared that more technology training for special education teachers was needed. Teachers within a portion of this study stated that they felt that they were not adequately prepared to teach students how to use computers effectively. Technology support can come in the form of equipment, time, and training and some schools do not provide, or are reluctant to provide, the proper technology needed. The lack of training regarding technology did not

significantly relate to teachers' personal use of computers. Teachers stated that technical issues prevented them from fully utilizing all aspects of the computer (Leis 41).

A second research study was conducted by Oswald in 1995 that explored special education teachers' use of technology in their classrooms. Oswald found that special educators have very limited computer resources available to them in the classroom, and the computers to which they have access are antiquated. Oswald's study found that one third of the current special education teachers in the study did not utilize technology for instructional purposes, which may be due to the lack of appropriate technology. Oswald concluded that in order to increase the special education teacher's use of technology, adequate resources needed to be provided (1).

A research study conducted by Morales in 2007, based on two rural school districts in New Mexico (121), determined that special education teachers needed to be provided with technology training; however, the lack of appropriate hardware and software provided little incentive to pursue the training. The study commented that in order to expect special education teachers to utilize the vast array of technology properly, schools must provide adequate technology resources. Morales's findings supported the idea that computer technology is scarce in special education classrooms.

The above three research studies concluded while professional development was occurring with special education teachers in the realm of technology, it was evident that proper technological tools, including updated hardware and software, are vital for teachers to utilize technology effectively within their classrooms. The lack of technology in special education classrooms can be a detriment to the success of a special education teacher.

Dr. Christy Ziegler stated in an interview that there are three barriers to technology use in the special education classroom. The first barrier is access to or awareness of technology to support the diversity of learners. The second barrier is knowledge of how to apply technology in the learning environment, and the last barrier is finding the support, whether it is technical or professional development, to sustain the technology in the classroom. When special education teachers experience these barriers, they are more apt to leave the classroom (Ziegler).

Teachers must have the essentials of technology, such as desktop computers, relevant software, and other technology devices to teach effectively. When schools do not view technology as a priority, teacher enthusiasm and student achievement could suffer.

In summary, the lack of technology within the special education classroom exists and is a factor in decisions by special education teachers to leave the classroom. Even when technology is available, it is not used to its best advantage because teachers are not properly trained to use it. Schools must keep pace with technology if they expect their teachers to utilize it effectively to teach students with disabilities.

#### *Other Factors*

Other factors contribute to special education teachers leaving the classroom, including litigation, service delivery, and student performance. One of those factors is the growing area of litigation pertaining to special education. According to the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDE), special educators say that one of the most challenging problems they face each year is the high cost of litigation (Aheam 4). Due process is a rule within IDEA that allows disputes to be resolved between the school and parents (Wright and Wright 1). From 1991 through 1995, the

number of due process requests increased an average of 4.3% per year, and the number of hearings held increased an average of 10% per year. From 1996 to 2000, the number of requests increased an average of 10.4% each year, but the number of hearings held decreased at the average rate of 4.0% per year. These data reveal that requests for a hearing have continued to increase nationally each year over the ten-year period, and more rapidly in the most recent five years examined (Aheam 4). In fact, total expenditures on special education mediation, due process, and litigation totaled about \$146.5 million for all special education students in public schools (Aheam 6).

Special education teachers are expected to follow the guidelines of NCLB and IDEA. Often special education administrators are the only personnel within a school district who have in-depth knowledge and understanding of IDEA. Indeed, it is the principal who has day-to-day contact with the special education teacher. When legal issues surface, it is important to have a legal foundation. If the special education teacher knows that the building principal has an understanding of the legal requirements, the teacher can be confident that the building administrator will be supportive. When administrators are knowledgeable and supportive, teachers feel that their load has been lightened, but when this is not the case, problems emerge. When that support is present, the teacher will likely feel less anxious about the legal aspects of the job and concentrate on teaching students. The pressure and fear experienced by special education teachers related to a possible lawsuit contributes to some teachers leaving special education (Coleman 2).

Service delivery is another factor that contributes to special education teachers leaving the classroom. The expectations of meeting student needs in the inclusive setting

can be daunting and overwhelming for teachers if they do not have the proper support. The move toward inclusion contributes to role conflict for some special educators. It is expected that students be served in a variety of settings, such as the general education classroom, resource room, or self-contained classroom. Diverse service delivery models, such as the three listed above, are determined by IEP teams and can cause conflict if team members disagree upon service delivery for students (Billingsley, “Special Education Teacher Retention” 48).

One factor that may contribute to special education teachers leaving the classroom is the expectation of improved academic performance, as measured by the increased expectations of statewide student assessments. Special education teachers experience pressure to have students perform at high levels on assessments. Escalated expectations from administration, parents, and NCLB requirements can be daunting for teachers. A study conducted by Hanzlicek in 2006 found that special education teachers experience pressure to select the proper assessment and to have students master the test (99). She also noted that the addition of adequate yearly progress (AYP) places unnecessary pressure on special education teachers (100). AYP is an individual state’s measure of progress to ensure that students achieve academic standards (U.S. Department of Education 1). NCLB requires four types of assessments, including the general assessment, general assessment with accommodations, modified assessment, and alternative assessment. Depending upon which assessment is determined by the student’s IEP team, multiple measures of preparation, modification, and participation is expected.



In summary, the three factors listed above were not addressed in this study, but were found in the review of literature. These factors provided relevant information contributing to special education teachers leaving the classroom.

### Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature regarding factors found to contribute to special education teachers leaving the classroom. The literature review identified fifteen contributing factors; it also addressed the growing number of special education teachers leaving the classroom. The increasing number of special education teachers leaving the classroom is not only a regional crisis, but a national issue. While studies have been conducted regarding special education teacher recruitment and attrition, these studies have been deficient in exploration of multiple factors that contribute to attrition specifically in Kansas and Region 1. The research represented here explored regional issues that may help identify those issues and systematically address solving the decline of special education teachers remaining in the field.

Chapter Two consisted of the review of literature regarding the historical legal overview of special education and parallel legislation and policies. This chapter also included factors stated within the literature that recognized reasons special education teachers leave the classroom. Fifteen factors were researched and identified as contributing to the special education teachers' decision to leave the classroom. Chapter Three presents the research design, instrumentation, research questions and hypotheses, data collection and analysis, and summary.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

For school districts in Region 1 to meet the demand of attrition and retention of special education teachers, the factors that cause them to exit the classroom must be addressed. The purpose of this study was to determine those factors and determine if any factors were more prevalent in the special education teacher's decision to leave the classroom. This chapter presents the description of the research design and methodology, population, instrumentation, research hypotheses, data collection, data analysis, and summary. The population, special education teachers, is presented with a description of the survey instrument, which includes specific variables and data collection. The independent variable is denoted by five categories, which include special education teachers with the following years of special education classroom experience: 0-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, and 20 plus years of experience. The dependent variables are the identified factors reported as contributing to the decision to leave the special education field.

#### Research Design and Methodology

A qualitative and quantitative study was designed to investigate the factors that influence special education teachers to leave the classroom in the Region 1 area of Kansas. The quantitative section of the study was designed to measure the factors specific teaching experience groups selected as their reasons for leaving the special education classroom. The qualitative section of the study was designed to describe personal demographics of special education teachers who have left the classroom. Respondents

answered questions pertaining to their personal teaching demographics, certification requirements, length in the special education classroom, and type of classroom they taught (i.e., interrelated, mental retardation, learning disability, emotional disturbance, gifted, or early childhood disability) and the school district they left. They were also asked to indicate if any factors had higher priority for their decision to leave the classroom.

In summary, the study was designed to investigate possible factors that cause special education teachers to leave the classroom. It was equally important to determine if the number of years of experience of the special education teacher had any relevance to their decision to leave the classroom.

#### Population and Sample

The population for this study consisted of 227 special education teachers, holding a valid Kansas certification, waiver, or provisional license, who left the special education classroom during the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years within Region 1. Research respondents held special education teaching positions in one of the nine Region 1 school districts. They were asked to indicate which school district they were employed by when they chose to leave the school district. These same respondents were asked to complete the survey regarding factors contributing to leaving their classrooms.

Each of the nine school districts within the Region 1 area granted permission to the researcher to access their personnel databases and determine the names and addresses of special education teachers who resigned from their special education teaching assignment during the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years. The researcher identified the group of respondents utilized in this study through this process.

All 227 special education teachers were sent a mailing that included a cover letter (see Appendix A) and the survey instrument (see Appendix B). The cover letter identified the researcher, explained the research study, and solicited the individual's volunteer participation to complete the survey. Two school districts with student enrollment greater than 10,000 students wanted to contact their past employees through the district, rather than providing the information to the researcher. In these two cases, the researcher gave the survey, cover letter, and stamped envelopes to the school districts for them to address and mail to the respondents. A total of 38% indicated their willingness to participate by returning the survey during the first mailing. In order to increase participation in this study, a second letter of request was sent. That request, along with the first, produced a total sample of 100 respondents, 45% of the population. Fifteen letters were returned as undeliverable.

#### Instrumentation

The survey instrument developed for this study provided data pertaining to the hypotheses as set forth. The paper-and-pencil survey consisted of three sections:

- 1) General demographic information
- 2) Factor ratings and rankings
  - A: 15 questions utilizing a 5-point Likert-type scale
  - B: Prioritize by rank order, the top four factors that influenced the decision to leave the classroom
- 3) General comments: The general comments section consisted of one area asking whether there was any combination of factors, if altered, that would have affected the special education teacher's decision to leave the classroom.

Section 1 of the instrument included general demographic information: gender, total years of teaching experience, years of special education teaching experience, current special education certification, area teaching before they left the special education classroom, current assignment, and the Region 1 school district where they were employed when they left the special education classroom. Details of the area/discipline they were teaching before they left the special educational classroom included the following special education classroom configurations: learning disability, mental retardation, emotionally disturbed, gifted, early childhood disability, and interrelated.

Section 2-A of the instrument was a 5-point Likert-type scale providing the respondent with different levels of agreement: *strongly agree*, *agree*, *neither agree or disagree*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*. Fourteen factors solicited the respondent's response on the Likert-type scale and included paperwork, administrative support, caseload/class size, lack of professional development, additional education or training, salary, student exceptionality intensity, parental demands, other career opportunities, transferred to general education, lack of certification requirements, number of IEPs, relocation, and lack of technology. At the end of the fourteen factors, the survey included an additional factor labeled *other*. This gave the respondent an opportunity to identify a new factor or refine one of the previous factors listed. Section 2-B asked respondents to list the top four factors, beginning with the strongest or most prominent, that most influenced the respondent to leave the special education classroom.

Section 3 consisted of one general comment section allowing the respondent to expand upon the decision to leave the special education classroom, utilizing a *yes/no* comment. If the respondent answered *yes*, there was an additional inquiry asking them to

specify any factors, or combination of factors, which if altered, would have affected the decision to leave the special education classroom. At the completion of the survey, there was a statement asking the respondents if they wanted an executive summary of the study. If yes, results would be sent to the respondent utilizing the address provided by the school district.

No measures of internal consistency or technical adequacy were derived for this instrument, given the explanatory purpose of this study and the subsequent subjective nature of respondents' answers. In an effort to establish content validity, the researcher sought feedback from university personnel, teachers not associated with the research, and other doctoral candidates. These individuals critiqued the survey for clarity of directions, design preference, and validity of information gathered, and they provided constructive suggestions for improvements of the overall survey.

### Research Hypotheses

The study was designed to determine the factors that most contribute to special education teachers making the decision to leave the special education classroom. The study was also used to find out if the number of years of experience teaching special education made a significant difference in the teacher's decision to leave the special education classroom. The following research hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance.

Hypothesis 1: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the paperwork factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 2: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the lack of administrative support factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree or disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 3: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the caseload/class size factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 4: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the lack of professional development factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 5: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the additional training or certification factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 6: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the salary factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 7: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the student exceptionality intensity factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree or disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 8: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the parental demands factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 9: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the other career opportunities factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 10: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the transfer to general education factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 11: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the lack of certification factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 12: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the number of IEPs factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, neither agree or disagree, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 13: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the relocation factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom

Hypothesis 14: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the lack of technology factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

Hypothesis 15: The number of years of experience teaching special education makes a difference in why special education teachers leave the classroom.



### Data Collection

The data were collected via the survey developed for this study and distributed to 227 special education teachers who left the special education classroom in the Region 1 area of Kansas during the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years.

The researcher contacted each of the nine Region 1 school districts in Kansas by telephone. The school districts contacted included Blue Valley, DeSoto, Gardner Edgerton, Lawrence, Olathe, Shawnee Mission, Spring Hill, Turner, and Wyandotte County Special Education Cooperative (Bonner Springs, Piper, and Kansas City, Kansas). The researcher obtained an informal verbal approval from the following school districts: DeSoto, Gardner Edgerton, Spring Hill, Turner, Lawrence, and Wyandotte County Special Education Cooperative. The researcher obtained formal approval from the Blue Valley, Olathe, and Shawnee Mission school districts. These districts required that specific paperwork be submitted prior to permission being granted. The researcher completed a "Request to Complete a Research Study" form specific to each district and included a copy of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) request approved by Baker University. The "Request to Complete a Research Study" and IRB request are included in Appendix C. The researcher was successful in obtaining permission from all nine school districts.

Following the initial contact of each school district with final approval granted by the Superintendent, Associate Superintendent, or District Research Committee, the researcher sought to obtain a list of special education teachers that left each of the identified school districts during the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years. The researcher worked directly with the Superintendent, Director of Human Resources, or Director of

Special Education of the nine school districts to obtain the appropriate database from the respective districts. These individuals provided the necessary list of staff that left their school district within the following teaching assignments: learning disability, mental retardation, emotionally disturbed, gifted, early childhood disability, and interrelated.

Once the lists of survey respondents were gathered, the researcher worked directly with the human resources department from each school district to obtain mailing addresses of the prospective respondents. The researcher placed a code with each respondent's name to ensure confidentiality of returned surveys. This code was written on the survey. The survey, including the cover letter, was mailed to each prospective respondent. The researcher mailed the surveys for each school district except for the Blue Valley and Lawrence School Districts. These two school districts mailed the surveys from the district offices rather than having the researcher mail them. The researcher provided the postage stamps for those two school districts. All surveys mailed included a self-addressed stamped envelope directed to the researcher's home address. All surveys were returned to the researcher's home address.

The survey packet included the survey and a cover letter from the researcher introducing herself, explaining the scope of the research, the reason for their selection, permission granted from their prior employing school district, and that their participation was voluntary and confidential, as well as a stamped return envelope addressed to the researcher. It also outlined components of the survey, expected time commitment, return information, university approval, and the researcher's contact information. Respondents' consent was noted as being voluntary when the respondent completed and returned the survey. Therefore, an Informed Consent form was not necessary for this study. The cover

letter defined the voluntary consent upon return of the survey. Due to confidentiality, no signatures were needed for consent to be given.

### Data Analysis

This study consisted of three distinct data analysis procedures. Measures of central tendency and other descriptive tools were used to provide a description of the respondents by the independent variable, years of special education teaching experience, which was categorized by five groups. The general information contained the following subgroups: gender, total years of teaching experience, years of special education teaching experience, special education certification, an identifier of which area taught immediately before exiting the special education classroom, representation of current assignment if still employed by the school district but serving in a different capacity, and the identification of the employing school district.

Research hypotheses 1-14 were tested using a one-sample t test to determine if respondents' ratings on the importance of each individual factor assisted in their decision to leave the special education classroom. Hypothesis 15 was tested using 14 one-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA), testing the difference between the means of more than five groups on one factor or dimension (Salkind 167). For purposes of this study, those groups are determined by their years of special education teaching experience, 0-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, and 20 plus.

The third analytic procedure was a review and organization of written comments that provided rationale for the selection of those factors. Such an analysis was included to provide readers with a summary report of the most prominent factors for leaving the profession, as identified by the five special education teacher groups.

## Summary

This non-experimental clinical research study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to study fifteen factors that contributed to special education teachers deciding to leave the classroom. The survey was distributed to 227 special education teachers, holding from one to over twenty years of experience, who left the special education classroom. Of that population, 100 or 45% completed the instrument and provided valid data for testing the research hypotheses. Data were collected through a survey with a 5-point Likert-type scale. In addition to demographic data and the fourteen factors, the survey provided respondents the opportunity to rank order the top four factors contributing to their departure. The survey concluded with an opportunity for the respondents to narrate any factors or combination of factors, which if altered, would have affected their decision to leave the special education classroom.

In summary, this chapter defines the study, which included the following areas: introduction, problem statement, research design, population sample, instrumentation, research hypothesis, data collection, data analysis, and summary. Chapter Four presents the results and findings of the study and includes the descriptive statistics for the survey response data.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine factors that special education teachers chose as reasons to leave the special education classroom. A second purpose of this study was to determine if the number of years of teaching experience made a difference to special education teachers leaving the classroom. A final component of the study required the respondents to rank their most influential four factors for leaving the special education classroom. Identifying specific factors that contribute to special education teachers leaving the classroom could assist district administration in dealing with a shortage of special education teachers in classrooms across the nation, and specifically in Region 1 of Kansas. When specific factors are identified as to the exit of special education teachers, this information can assist school district personnel and university professors to help these teachers to remain in the field.

In studying the factors that contribute to special education teachers leaving the classroom, the following research questions were established:

1. What factors contribute to special education teachers making the determination to leave the special education classroom?
2. Does the number of years of experience teaching special education make a difference in why special education teachers leave the special education classroom?
3. What factors appear to have the highest frequency of explanation as to why special education teachers leave the special education classroom?

In order to gather data on what factors contribute to special education teachers leaving the classroom, a teacher perception survey instrument was administered. This survey was administered during the spring of 2007. Specific information gathered from respondents included general demographics, rating factors contributing to the special education teacher leaving the classroom, priority of those factors, and general comments.

### Methodology Summary

This study began in the spring of 2007 with a population of 227 special education teachers from Region 1, located in the northeastern part of Kansas, near the Kansas City metropolitan area. The special education teachers were selected from the nine school districts located in Region 1: Blue Valley, DeSoto, Gardner Edgerton, Lawrence, Olathe, Shawnee Mission, Spring Hill, Turner, and Wyandotte County Cooperative. Qualitative and quantitative data were obtained from the teacher perception survey. Data was collected through a mailing initiated by the researcher during the spring of 2007, and returned to the researcher through summer 2007.

### Description of the Population

The population was composed of both female and male special education teachers in Region 1 who made the decision to leave their current special education teaching assignment during the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years. Their years of experience ranged from their first year in the classroom to beyond 20 years of experience. The years of experience of these teachers were divided into the following five groups: 0-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, and 20 plus years.

The survey was mailed to 227 respondents, and yielded an overall return rate of 45% (n = 100). The survey was utilized for data analysis. Respondents were asked to

provide demographic information, rate fifteen factors that contributed to their decision to leave the classroom, and share any descriptive comments they deemed important.

This chapter describes the data collected by the survey instrument and responses used in the hypothesis testing. Additionally, the chapter presents a detailed analysis of the descriptive and statistical results, as well as the summary of results. The final section provides a chapter summary and introduction to Chapter Five.

### Descriptive Results

The following descriptive statistics provide demographic information about the respondents including; the Region 1 school district the respondent left, gender, total years of teaching special education, current special education certification, and type of special education classroom they were teaching prior to leaving. A second component to the descriptive statistics included a prioritized rank order of which four factors influenced the respondent the most to leave the classroom. The final descriptive section included an open-ended comment section. A one-way summary table was utilized to present the descriptive statistics.

One hundred special education teachers responded to the survey. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the number of respondents for each school district of Region 1.

Table 1

## Respondents by School District

Region I School District	Surveys sent	Surveys returned	Return Percentage
Blue Valley	42	13	31%
Lawrence	33	17	52%
Spring Hill	5	1	20%
DeSoto	9	5	56%
Olathe	29	12	41%
Turner	13	6	46%
Gardner Edgerton	12	11	92%
Shawnee Mission	27	10	37%
Wyandotte Coop	57	25	44%
Total	227	100	45%

Data show that ninety of the respondents were female, nine were male, and one was considered missing. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the gender count.

Table 2

## Respondent Gender Count

Gender	f
Female	90
Male	9
Missing	1
Total	100



The data show that the two groups with the most respondents were those with 0-5 years of experience (n = 26) and those with 20 + years of experience (n = 25). The group with the least respondents was 16-20 years of experience (n = 11). Two respondents did not complete this section, resulting in missing data. Table 3 provides a breakdown of the special education teachers by experience.

Table 3

## Special Education Teaching Experience

Special Education Years of Experience	f
0-5	26
6-10	19
11-15	17
16-20	11
20 +	25
Missing Data	2
Total	100

Data show that 89 of the respondents held full certification in an endorsed area of special education, while 8 were provisionally certified and 1 was teaching on a waiver.

Table 4 provides a breakdown of the special education certification count.

Table 4

## Special Education Certification

Special Education Certification	f
Provisional	8
Waiver	1
Full Certification	89
Missing Data	2
Total	100

Data show that 41 respondents taught in the interrelated special education classroom (an interrelated special education classroom consist of students of differing disabilities that are grouped based upon educational needs instead of their categorical label), while 15 taught in the classroom with students classified with mental retardation. An additional 11 taught in the classroom composed of gifted and talented students. The remaining three classrooms included learning disability classrooms (9 respondents), early childhood disabilities (8 respondents), and emotional disturbance (behavioral disorders) (7 respondents). Respondents also selected areas not provided in the survey, including speech language, deaf hard of hearing and special education coordinator. These three areas produced a total of six respondents. Table 5 provides a breakdown of the area of special education teaching count.

Table 5

## Area of Special Education Teaching

Special Education Instruction	f
Learning Disability	9
Mental Retardation	15
Emotional Disturbance	7
Gifted	11
Early Childhood Disability	8
Interrelated	41
Missing Data	3
Deaf Hard of Hearing	1
Speech Language	4
Coordinator	1
Total	100

The following descriptive statistics, utilizing a one-way summary table, depicts how respondents ranked and prioritized the 15 factors as noted in Section 2-B of the survey. Fifty respondents completed this portion of the survey. The four factors consistently ranked the highest among the respondents were 1) lack of administrative support, 2) other, 3) relocation, and 4) other career opportunities. The four factors consistently ranked second highest among the respondents included: 1) paperwork, 2) administrative support, 3) caseload class size, and 4) salary. Table 6 provides a breakdown of the rank ordering of the factors.

Table 6  
Factors Ranked by Priority

Factor	#1 Rank	#2 Rank	#3 Rank	#4 Rank
Paperwork	8	12	11	6
Lack of Administrative Support	16	11	9	6
Caseload / Class Size	4	9	7	7
Professional Development	2	2	2	3
Educational Training	0	1	1	0
Salary	4	8	6	5
Student Intensity	1	6	8	1
Parental Demands	4	5	2	1
Other Opportunities	11	4	2	3
Transfer to General Education	1	0	2	1
Lack of Certification	2	1	0	1
Relocation	15	3	1	1
Lack of Technology	0	1	1	4
Other	16	2	1	1

The final component of the descriptive statistics is found in Section 3 of the survey. Respondents were given the opportunity to share additional comments or unlisted factors that contributed to their decision to leave the special education classroom. Forty-seven respondents elected to comment in Section 3. The most frequent comments were categorized into four similar themes consisting of 1) lack of administrative support, 2) overwhelming paperwork, 3) salary, and 4) other.

## Statistical Results

This section contains the results of the hypothesis testing regarding the fourteen factors. It first describes the results of the one-sample t test utilized to test the first fourteen hypotheses for each of the fourteen factors. Second, it describes the results of the one-factor ANOVA utilized for comparing ratings for the five teaching experience levels among the fourteen factors. Detailed results of hypothesis tests 1-14 conducted by SPSS output are found in Appendix D.

### *Paperwork*

H<sub>1</sub>: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the paperwork factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

A one-sample t test was conducted to determine if respondents' ratings on the importance of paperwork to the decision to leave the special education classroom were significantly different from the null hypothesis rating of 3 = *neither agree or disagree*. The result of the test indicated that there is a significant difference between the average rating of 3.2857 and the hypothesized mean of 3 ( $t_{91} = 2.041$ ,  $p = .044$ ). Because the mean rating is greater than 3, it can be concluded that paperwork is a significantly important factor in teacher's decisions to leave the special education classroom.

### *Administrative Support*

H<sub>2</sub>: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the lack of administrative support factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree or disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

A one-sample t test was conducted to determine if respondents' ratings on the importance of administrative support to their decision to leave the special education classroom were significantly different from the null hypothesis rating of 3 = *neither agree or disagree*. The result of the test indicates that there is a significant difference between the average rating of 3.4000 and the hypothesized mean of 3 ( $t_{90} = 2.782$ ,  $p = .007$ ). Because the mean rating is greater than 3, it can be concluded that administrative support is a significantly important factor in a teacher's decision to leave the special education classroom.

#### *Caseload/Class Size*

H<sub>3</sub>: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the caseload/class size factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

A one-sample t test was conducted to determine if respondents ratings of the importance of caseload/class size to the decision to leave the special education classroom were significantly different from the null hypothesis rating of 3 = *neither agree or disagree*. The result of the test indicated that there is no significant difference between the average rating of 3.2135 and the hypothesized mean of 3 ( $t_{88} = 1.580$ ,  $p = .118$ ).

#### *Lack of Professional Development*

H<sub>4</sub>: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the lack of professional development factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

A one-sample t test was conducted to determine if respondents' ratings of the importance of lack of professional development to the decision to leave the special

education classroom were significantly different from the null hypothesis rating of 3 = *neither agree or disagree*. The result of the test indicated that there is a significant difference between the average rating of 2.5556 and the hypothesized mean of 3 ( $t_{90} = -3.824$ ,  $p = .000$ ). It can be concluded that the factor is a significantly unimportant factor because the mean rating is less than the hypothesized value of 3.

#### *Additional Education or Training*

H<sub>5</sub>: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the additional training or certification factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

A one-sample t test was conducted to determine if respondents' ratings on the importance of additional education or training to the decision to leave the special education classroom were significantly different from the null hypothesis rating of 3 = *neither agree or disagree*. The result of the test indicated that there is a significant difference between the average rating of 2.486 and the hypothesized mean of 3 ( $t_{87} = -4.615$ ,  $p = .000$ ). It can be concluded that the factor is a significantly unimportant factor because the mean rating is less than the hypothesized value of 3.

#### *Salary*

H<sub>6</sub>: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the salary factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

A one-sample t test was conducted to determine if respondents' ratings on the importance of salary to the decision to leave the special education classroom were significantly different from the null hypothesis rating of 3 = *neither agree or disagree*.

The results of the test indicated that there is no significant difference between the average rating of 3.1000 and the hypothesized mean of 3 ( $t_{89} = .797$ ,  $p = .428$ ).

#### *Student Exceptionality Intensity*

H<sub>7</sub>: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the student exceptionality intensity factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree or disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

A one-sample t test was conducted to determine if respondents' ratings on the importance of student exceptionality intensity to their decision to leave the special education classroom were significantly different from the null hypothesis rating of 3 = *neither agree or disagree*. The result of the test indicated that there is no significant difference between the average rating of 2.9773 and the hypothesized mean of 3 ( $t_{87} = -.163$ ,  $p = .871$ ).

#### *Parental Demands*

H<sub>8</sub>: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the parental demands factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

A one-sample t test was conducted to determine if respondents' ratings on the importance of parental demands to the decision to leave the special education classroom were significantly different from the null hypothesis rating of 3 = *neither agree or disagree*. The result of the test indicated that there is no significant differences between the average rating of 2.7556 and the hypothesized mean of 3 ( $t_{89} = -1.960$ ,  $p = .053$ ).



### *Other Career Opportunities*

H<sub>9</sub>: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the other career opportunities factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

A one-sample t test was conducted to determine if respondents' ratings on the importance of other career opportunities to their decision to leave the special education classroom were significantly different from the null hypothesis rating of 3 = *neither agree or disagree*. The result of the test indicated that there is no significant difference between the average rating of 3.0112 and the hypothesized mean of 3 ( $t_{88} = .074, p = .941$ ).

### *Transferred to General Education*

H<sub>10</sub>: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the transfer to general education factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

A one-sample t test was conducted to determine if respondents' ratings on the importance of transferred to general education to their decision to leave the special education classroom were significantly different from the null hypothesis rating of 3 = *neither agree or disagree*. The result of the test indicated that there is a significant difference between the average rating of 2.0349 and the hypothesized mean of 3 ( $t_{86} = -7.268, p = .000$ ). Because the mean is 2.0349, it can be concluded that the factor is a significantly unimportant factor because the mean rating is less than the hypothesized value of 3.

### *Lack of Certification Requirements*

H<sub>11</sub>: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the lack of certification factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3 *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

A one-sample t test was conducted to determine if respondents' ratings on the importance of lack of certification requirements to the decision to leave the special education classroom were significantly different from the null hypothesis rating of 3 = *neither agree or disagree*. The result of the test indicated that there is a significant difference between the average rating of 1.7614 and the hypothesized mean of 3 ( $t_{88} = -11.554, p=.000$ ). Because the mean is 1.7614, it can be concluded that the factor is a significantly unimportant factor because the mean rating is less than the hypothesized value of 3.

### *Number of IEPs*

H<sub>12</sub>: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the number of IEPs factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree or disagree*, in their decision to leave the classroom.

A one-sample t test was conducted to determine if respondents' ratings on the importance of number of IEPs to their decision to leave the special education classroom were significantly different from the null hypothesis rating of 3 = *neither agree or disagree*. The result of the test indicated that there is no significant difference between the average rating of 3.0330 and the hypothesized mean of 3 ( $t_{90} = .234, p = .816$ ).

### *Relocation*

H<sub>13</sub>: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the relocation factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

A one-sample t test was conducted to determine if respondents' ratings on the importance of relocation to their decision to leave the special education classroom were significantly different from the null hypothesis rating of 3 = *neither agree or disagree*. The result of the test indicated that there is no significant difference between the average rating of 2.7586 and the hypothesized mean of 3 ( $t_{86} = -1.421$ ,  $p = .159$ ).

### *Lack of Technology*

H<sub>14</sub>: The special education teacher determined that the importance of the lack of technology factor is significantly different from the mean rating of 3, *neither agree nor disagree*, in the decision to leave the classroom.

A one-sample t test was conducted to determine if respondents' ratings on the importance of lack of technology to their decision to leave the special education classroom were significantly different from the null hypothesis rating of 3 = *neither agree or disagree*. The result of the test indicated that there is a significant difference between the average rating of 2.1136 and the hypothesized mean of 3 ( $t_{88} = -8.227$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Because the mean rating is greater than 3, it can be concluded that lack of technology is a significantly unimportant factor because the mean value is less than the hypothesized value of 3.

Hypothesis 15 stated the number of years of experience teaching special education makes a difference in why special education teachers leave the classroom.

The following fourteen tables describe the results of the one-factor ANOVA utilized for comparing ratings for the five teaching experience levels among the fourteen factors.

A one-factor ANOVA was used to compare ratings of the importance of paperwork to respondents' decision to leave the special education classroom among the five experience levels. No significant difference was found among the mean ratings of the experience groups ( $F_{4,86} = .853$ ,  $(p) = .496$ ). These results are viewed in Table 7.

Table 7

## Paperwork by Years of Experience

Years	M	SD	N
0-5	3.0800	1.28841	25
6-10	2.9444	1.21133	18
11-15	3.4118	1.37199	17
16-20	3.5556	1.66667	9
20 +	3.5909	1.33306	22
One Way ANOVA	F = .853	p = .496	

A one-factor ANOVA was used to compare ratings of the importance of administrative support to respondents' decisions to leave the special education classroom among the five experience levels. No significant difference was found among the mean rating of the experience groups ( $F_{4,85} = 1.404$ ,  $(p) = .239$ ). These results are viewed in Table 8.

Table 8  
Administrative Support by Years of Experience

Years	M	SD	N
0-5	3.2000	1.19024	25
6-10	3.6111	1.33456	18
11-15	3.6471	1.41161	17
16-20	2.5556	1.50923	9
20 +	3.6190	1.43095	21
One Way ANOVA	F = 1.404	p = .239	

A one-factor ANOVA was used to compare ratings of the importance of caseload/class size to respondents' decisions to leave the special education classroom among the five experience levels. No significant difference was found among the mean rating of the experience groups ( $F_{4,84} = .440$ ,  $p = .779$ ). These results are viewed in Table 9.

Table 9  
Caseload/Class Size by Years of Experience

Years	M	SD	N
0-5	3.4000	1.11803	25
6-10	2.8889	1.27827	18
11-15	3.3125	1.30224	16
16-20	3.2222	1.48137	9
20 +	3.1905	1.40068	21
One Way ANOVA	F = .440	p = .779	

A one-factor ANOVA was used to compare ratings of the importance of lack of professional development to respondents' decisions to leave the special education classroom among the five experience levels. No significant difference was found among the mean rating of the experience groups ( $F_{4,85} = .714$ ,  $p = .585$ ). These results are viewed in Table 10.

Table 10

## Lack of Professional Development by Years of Experience

Years	M	SD	N
0-5	2.4000	.91287	25
6-10	2.6667	1.13759	18
11-15	2.7059	1.31171	17
16-20	2.1111	1.05409	9
20 +	2.7143	1.1462	21
One Way ANOVA	$F = .714$	$p = .585$	

A one-factor ANOVA was used to compare ratings of the importance of additional education or training to respondents' decisions to leave the special education classroom among the five experience levels. No significant difference was found among the mean rating of the experience groups ( $F_{4,83} = 1.208$ ,  $p = .314$ ). These results are viewed in Table 11.

Table 11  
Additional Education or Training by Years of Experience

Years	M	SD	N
0-5	2.7600	1.01160	25
6-10	2.5000	.85749	18
11-15	2.3529	1.22174	17
16-20	1.8750	.83452	8
20 +	2.5000	1.10024	20
One Way ANOVA	F = 1.208	p = .314	

A one-factor ANOVA was used to compare ratings of the importance of salary to respondents' decisions to leave the special education classroom among the five experience levels. No significant difference was found among the mean rating of the experience groups ( $F_{4,85} = .424$ ,  $p = .791$ ). These results are viewed in Table 12.

Table 12  
Salary by Years of Experience

Years	M	SD	n
0-5	2.9200	1.11505	25
6-10	3.3889	1.14475	18
11-15	3.0588	1.24853	17
16-20	3.0000	1.11803	9
20 +	3.1429	1.35225	21
One Way ANOVA	F = .424	p = .791	

A one-factor ANOVA was used to compare ratings of the importance of student exceptionality intensity to respondents' decisions to leave the special education classroom among the five experience levels. No significant difference was found among the mean rating of the experience groups ( $F_{4,83} = 1.755$ ,  $p = .146$ ). These results are viewed in Table 13.

Table 13

Student Exceptionality Intensity by Years of Experience

Years	M	SD	n
0-5	2.6667	1.30773	24
6-10	2.6111	1.24328	18
11-15	3.5882	1.17574	17
16-20	3.1111	1.53659	9
20 +	3.1000	1.25237	20
One Way ANOVA	F = 1.755	p = .146	

A one-factor ANOVA was used to compare ratings of the importance of parental demands to respondents' decisions to leave the special education classroom among the five experience levels. No significant difference was found among the mean rating of the experience groups ( $F_{4,85} = .242$ ,  $p = .914$ ). These results are viewed in Table 14.



Table 14  
Parental Demands by Years of Experience

Years	M	SD	N
0-5	2.7200	1.30767	25
6-10	2.5556	1.04162	18
11-15	2.9412	1.19742	17
16-20	2.7778	1.39443	9
20 +	2.8095	1.12335	21
One Way ANOVA	F = .242	p = .914	

A one-factor ANOVA was used to compare ratings of the importance of other career opportunities to respondents' decisions to leave the special education classroom among the five experience levels. No significant difference was found among the mean rating of the experience groups ( $F_{4,84} = 1.891$ ,  $(p) = .120$ ). These results are in Table 15.

Table 15  
Other Career Opportunities by Years of Experience

Years	M	SD	N
0-5	3.5000	1.41421	24
6-10	3.0000	1.37199	18
11-15	3.2353	1.48026	17
16-20	2.6667	1.80278	9
20 +	2.4286	1.12122	21
One Way ANOVA	F = 1.891	p = .120	

A one-factor ANOVA was used to compare ratings of the importance of transfer to general education to respondents' decisions to leave the special education classroom among the five experience levels. No significant difference was found among the mean rating of the experience groups ( $F_{4,81} = 2.147$ ,  $p = .082$ ). These results can be viewed in Table 16.

Table 16

## Transferred to General Education by Years of Experience

Years	M	SD	N
0-5	2.5200	1.58430	25
6-10	1.6875	.79320	16
11-15	1.6875	.87321	16
16-20	2.4444	1.66667	9
20 +	1.8000	.83351	20
One Way ANOVA	F = 2.147	p = .082	

A one-factor ANOVA was used to compare ratings of the importance of the lack of certification to respondents' decisions to leave the special education classroom among the five experience levels. A significant difference was found among the mean importance ratings of the experience groups  $F_{4,83} = 2.804$ ,  $p = .031$ . These results appear in Table 17. The means for the five experience levels are presented in the Figure 7. A follow up Tukey HSD indicated two marginally significant differences between groups. Lack of certification importance ratings were different (mean difference = .828,  $p = .059$ ) between special education teachers with 0-5 years of experience and those with 11-15

years of experience. Lack of certification importance ratings were different (mean difference = 1.018,  $p = .061$ ) between special education teachers with 0 – 5 years of experience and those with 16 - 20 years of experience.

Table 17

Lack of Certification Requirements by Years of Experience

Years	M	SD	N
0-5	2.2400	1.30000	25
6-10	1.7059	.77174	17
11-15	1.4118	.61836	17
16-20	1.2222	.44096	9
20 +	1.7500	1.01955	20
One Way ANOVA	F = 2.804	p = .031	

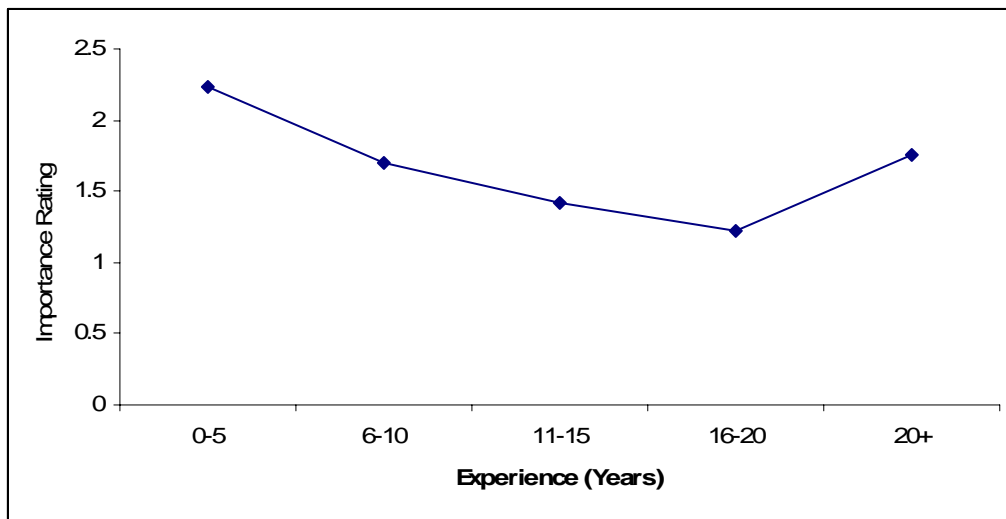


Fig. 7. Means for the five experience levels for lack of certification requirements.

A one-factor ANOVA was used to compare ratings of the importance of number of IEPs to respondents' decisions to leave the special education classroom among the five experience levels. No significant difference was found among the mean rating of the experience groups ( $F_{4,86} = .330$ ,  $(p) = .857$ ). These results can be viewed in Table 18.

Table 18

## Number of IEPs by Years of Experience

Years	M	SD	N
0-5	2.9600	1.36870	25
6-10	2.8333	1.38267	18
11-15	3.0588	1.08804	17
16-20	3.4444	1.58990	9
20 +	3.0909	1.44450	22
One Way ANOVA	F = .330	p = .857	

A one-factor ANOVA was used to compare ratings of the importance of relocation to respondents' decisions to leave the special education classroom among the five experience levels. No significant difference was found among the mean rating of the experience groups ( $F_{4,82} = .626$ ,  $(p) = .645$ ). These results can be viewed in Table 19.

Table 19

## Relocation by Years of Experience

Years	M	SD	N
0-5	2.9167	1.55806	24
6-10	2.4118	1.58346	17
11-15	3.1875	1.75950	16
16-20	2.6667	1.80278	9
20 +	2.5714	1.43427	21
One Way ANOVA	F = .626	p = .645	

A one-factor ANOVA was used to compare ratings of the importance of lack of technology to respondents' decisions to leave the special education classroom among the five experience levels. No significant difference was found among the mean rating of the experience groups ( $F_{4,83} = 1.305$ ,  $(p) = .275$ ). These results can be viewed in Table 20.

Table 20

## Lack of Technology by Years of Experience

Years	M	SD	N
0-5	2.2000	1.00000	25
6-10	1.8125	.54391	16
11-15	1.8235	1.01460	17
16-20	2.2222	1.20185	9
20 +	2.4286	1.16496	21
One Way ANOVA	F = 1.305	p = .275	

## Summary

This chapter described the demographics of individuals participating in this study, rank order of the strongest factors in the decision to leave, and general comments. It also described the results of the hypothesis tests conducted on fourteen factors that were expected to be causes for special education teachers to leave the classroom. Finally, it described the effects the fourteen factors had on the different experience levels of teachers and which factors made a significant difference.

The final chapter, Chapter Five, presents the summary, conclusions, and recommendations for further research. Chapter Five also comments on the information and insight gained from the literature review, as well as contributions of the study and possible needs based on the findings of this study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Introduction

A shortage of special education teachers exists in schools across the United States. Shortages in special education teachers have plagued our nation for two decades. It has been reported that 98% of the nation's school districts report shortages of qualified special education teachers. During the 2000-01 school year, approximately 47,500 special education positions were filled by uncertified personnel (Workforce Watch 1). The U.S. Department of Labor projects that by the year 2016, the need for special education teachers will increase by 15%. Our nation will require an additional 65,411 special education teachers (1-10).

The Region 1 area of Kansas also experienced a shortage of special education teachers. School districts continually had to hire new teachers. This need will increase as the number of students with disabilities increases and veteran teachers retire. During the years of 2004-05 and 2005-06, KSDE reported 175.7 special education classroom vacancies ("Certified Licensed Personnel Report" 15). Although this number could be due partially to attrition, the need exists to obtain special education teachers. Through research and current reports, it is apparent that these classrooms are increasingly difficult to fill.

The review of literature presented specific factors that influence the special education teacher to leave the classroom. A report noted in Focus on the Children stated that research conducted over the past decade shares the following broad reasons as to why special education teachers leave the classroom: 1) teacher characteristics, 2) working

conditions, and 3) affective responses to the job (Bishop et al. 3). These factors, along with a variety of other factors, influence the special education teacher to leave the classroom.

This study sought to determine the factors that contributed to special education teachers leaving the classroom in the Region 1 area of Kansas. A second component of this study analyzed and attempted to determine if there were any differences between the five experienced teaching groups: 0-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, and 20+ years of experience. Finally, the study reviewed those factors that had the highest frequency of explanation as to why special education teachers decided to leave the classroom. The previous chapter reported the results of the study. This chapter shares the summary of results, discussion of results, conclusions, recommendations for further research, and study summary.

### Summary of Results

The five areas of demographic data selected included 1) Region 1 school district, 2) gender, 3) years of special education teaching experience, 4) type of special education classroom taught, and 5) special education certification. The findings indicated that 100 respondents completed the survey, with the majority being female. The Region 1 school district with the highest frequency of respondents was the Wyandotte County Cooperative, while the school district with the lowest frequency of respondents was Spring Hill. Special education teaching experience was divided into five groups. The 0-5 years of special education teaching experience had the highest frequency, ( $f = 27$ ), and second was the 20 plus years of experience, ( $f = 26$ ). The remaining three groups were very close. The highest frequency of classroom taught was interrelated at 41 individuals



and the lowest, emotionally disturbed, at a frequency rate of 7 being taught. The majority of the respondents (90) held full special education certification.

The second section of data was the ranked factors. Fifty (50%) respondents completed Section 2-B of the survey. The following four factors were ranked the strongest by respondents: 1) lack of administrative support, 2) other, 3) relocation, and 4) other career opportunities. The final section of data was the general comment section. Forty-two respondents chose to share comments, which the researcher categorized into four common themes; 1) lack of administrative support, 2) overwhelming paperwork, 3) salary, and 4) other. The respondents wrote remarks regarding one of these four areas.

Next, the study focused on the factors that contributed to special education teachers leaving the classroom. Hypotheses 1-14 showed ratings of the respondents' decisions regarding each factor that influenced them to leave the special education classroom. The fourteen factors were also rated emphasizing the five groups of teaching experience. Of the fourteen factors, two factors indicated a significant difference in a special education teacher's decision to leave the classroom. These two factors were paperwork and administrative support. The findings indicated that paperwork and administrative support made a statistically significant difference in the special education teacher's decision to leave the classroom. It can be concluded that paperwork and administrative support are significantly important factors to special education teachers when deciding to leave the classroom.

The remaining 12 factors were found to be non-significant. However, respondents rated a variety of factors pertaining to their decision to leave; none of these factors were found significant. Statistical analysis was not applied to factor 15, noted in the survey as

*other*, but it warrants mentioning. Factor 15 referred back to the literature review in three areas; including litigation, service delivery and student performance. All three of these areas provided relevant information contributing to special education teachers leaving the profession.

Hypothesis 15 compared ratings of the importance of the respondent's decision to leave the special education classroom among the five experience teaching groups and each of the fourteen factors. In this analysis, the results of the ANOVA indicated a difference in importance of teachers with differing years of experience. A follow-up Tukey HSD indicated two marginally significant differences between groups. Special education teachers with experience between 0-5 years of teaching and those between the 11-15 years of teaching showed a marginally significant difference. It can be concluded that lack of certification requirements is significantly important to the special education teacher with 0-5 years of teaching experience.

#### Discussion of Results

In this study, the results of why special education teachers choose to leave the classroom are comparable with research conducted by Billingsley, Otto and Arnold, and others. This is understandable, as a large number of special education positions are vacant. Paperwork and administrative support are two strong factors that contribute to a special education teacher's decision to leave the classroom. The study indicated that parental demands were at the non-significant level. Although parental demands did not show a significant difference from the one-sample t test, it can be stated as a high factor contributing to a special educator's decision to leave the classroom. The factors found not

significant included the following: number of IEPs on a teacher's caseload, salary, student exceptionality or intensity, other career opportunities, and class size/caseload.

In addition, this study targeted the number of years of teaching experience in regard to leaving the classroom. Special education teachers with 0-5 years of experience are more apt to exit the classroom than are their veteran counterparts if they do not possess the proper certification. A significant difference was found among the mean importance ratings of the five experience groups in the area of lack of certification. This is understandable, as states allow certification requirements to be obtained over only a short period of time. If the special education teachers do not have the proper certification within that certain period, they must leave the classroom.

This study indicated which specific factors were more important to special education teachers than other factors. The two most important factors were paperwork and lack of administrative support. The implications of this study's findings are important, as school administrators and district level personnel struggle to not only attract special education teachers to their districts, but also to retain those they currently have. If school district administrators are aware of factors that contribute to special education teachers leaving their classrooms, then specific attention can be given to those factors and progress can be made in securing and retaining teachers.

### Conclusions

Three distinct conclusions can be drawn from this study. One conclusion shares that paperwork is a substantial burden on the special education teacher. This can be true with the amount of paperwork special education teachers are expected to produce. Paperwork expectations begin with the number of IEPs written annually, coupled with

monitoring of the IEP and, finally, the amount of data collection. These types of paperwork make teaching special education a daunting task.

The second conclusion is the importance of administrative support for special education teachers. When administrative support is absent, the special education teacher is more likely to exit the classroom. Administrators can have a powerful influence upon the special education teacher. Special education teachers view administrative support as extremely important and necessary to teach special education.

The third conclusion states that special education teachers with 0-5 years of experience are more likely to leave the classroom due to lack of certification. It can be determined that new teachers entering the profession who have not obtained their full certification after a specific period of time will have no choice but to leave the special education classroom.

Finally, these factors (paperwork, lack of administrative support, and lack of certification) for the 0-5 years of experienced teachers should garner attention from school district officials, building administrators, other teaching staff, and university professors. When these factors are acknowledged and addressed, special education teachers may feel able to remain in the classroom for longer duration. Special education classrooms and programs can be effective only when talented and effective special education teachers remain in those classrooms in order to teach students with disabilities. Future research should focus on factors that would keep the special education teacher in the classroom for a longer career. It also should focus on strategies that could assist school personnel and administration in recognizing and supporting the special education teacher.

### Recommendations for Further Research

The conclusions of this study offer the following recommendations for further research:

1. An in-depth study examining the relationship between the special education teacher and the district and building administrator.
2. A detailed study examining how special education paperwork can be reduced, yet continue to meet the requirements of IDEA and NCLB.
3. A comparison between different experience levels of special education teachers and the type of classroom they teach, such as interrelated, emotional disturbance, specific learning disability, gifted, early childhood, and mental retardation.
4. What specific characteristics building administrators and special education directors require for beginning special education teachers (0-5 years of experience) to remain in the classroom.
5. A detailed study examining factors that contribute to the special education teacher's exit of the classroom conducted across the state of Kansas.

### Study Summary

Special education teachers provide a multitude of resources while in the work environment. They are expected to manage caseloads of varying numbers of student exceptionalities and disabilities. They are expected to ensure that their students continue to make progress within their individualized educational plans. They are expected to be the expert when any type of disability or behavior presents itself. They are expected not only to teach students within their learning resource centers, but to include students in the

regular education setting to the highest extent possible. They are expected to be experts on the laws and regulations that govern special education. Finally, they are expected to communicate, problem solve, and proactively meet the needs of parents on a frequent basis. Special education teachers may not realize there are many factors that could contribute to their decision to leave the classroom. With these expectations, it is understandable why there is a crisis of special education teachers in Region 1 and the nation. Schools and administrators place many expectations upon the special education teacher. The plight of the special educator must be heard.

As our nation continues to experience the shortage of special education teachers, the factors to retain these teachers must be put into action. Research has been conducted in this area, but it needs to continue to be an area examined in depth within the educational arena.

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## APPENDIX A: COVER LETTER

## Introduction Letter

Dear Special Education Teacher:

My name is Judy Martin and I am a doctoral student attending Baker University. My research focuses on special education teacher retention in Region 1 of Kansas. Research indicates that there are an increasing number of special education teachers leaving the profession. I am conducting a study to analyze the factors that may contribute to special education teachers leaving the profession. I am surveying special education teachers who have left the special education classroom after the 2004-2005 or 2005-2006 school years.

You have been selected to participate in this study because you resigned from one of the Region 1 school districts. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and will remain confidential. At no time will I ask you to identify your name on the survey.

I have enclosed the survey I am asking all respondents to complete. The survey consists of three parts: 1) demographic, 2) factors contributing to your leaving the special education classroom, and 3) comments. It is anticipated that the survey can be completed in 15 minutes. Once it is completed, please return the survey in the self-addressed stamp envelope.

I have gained approval to conduct my research through the Institutional Review Board at Baker University and your prior district's administration. I truly appreciate your willingness to assist me in this research. This study will share valuable information pertaining to special education teachers and the factors that contribute to their decision to leave the special education classroom.

If you have questions or if you would like a copy of the results, please contact me at 913-856-2080 or e-mail [martinj@usd231.com](mailto:martinj@usd231.com) . Thank you for your participation and agreeing to complete the survey.

Respectfully,

Judy Martin  
Baker Doctoral Student  
Baker University

## APPENDIX B: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

## Survey of Former Special Education Teachers

**Section One: General Information**

**Code:** \_\_\_\_\_(office use)

Please place an (X) in the appropriate box for each area.

**A. Gender:** M  F

**B. Years of Total Teaching Experience:**

1 – 5       6 – 10       11 – 15       16 – 20       20 +

**C. Years of Special Education Teaching Experience:**

1 – 5       6 – 10       11 – 15       16 – 20       20 +

**D. Please indicate your current Special Education certification:**

Provisional       Waiver       Fully SPED Certified

**E. Before you left the Special Education classroom, what area were you teaching:**

LD       MR       ED       Gifted       ECD       Interrelated

**F. If you are still employed by a school district, what area best represents your current assignment.**

<p><b>General Education Classroom:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> PK or Elem.      <input type="checkbox"/> Middle</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Secondary</p>	<p><b>Other:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Administrative      <input type="checkbox"/> Classified</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Special Education</p>
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**G. Please indicate which Region 1 school district you were employed by when you left your Special Education classroom during the 2004-2005 or 2005-2006 school year:**

<input type="checkbox"/> Blue Valley	<input type="checkbox"/> DeSoto	<input type="checkbox"/> Gardner-Edgerton
<input type="checkbox"/> Lawrence	<input type="checkbox"/> Olathe	<input type="checkbox"/> Shawnee Mission
<input type="checkbox"/> Spring Hill	<input type="checkbox"/> Turner	<input type="checkbox"/> Wyandotte County Coop

**Section Two-A:** Using the following scale, indicate for each factor your level of agreement that the factor contributed to your decision to leave the special education classroom by placing an "X" in the appropriate box. If you would like to expand, please write in the comment section provided.

Mark (X) one box on each line.

<b>Factors Contributing to my decision to leave the SPED Classroom</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither Agree or Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
1) Paperwork <b>Comment:</b>					
2) Administrative Support <b>Comment:</b>					
3) Caseload/Class Size <b>Comment:</b>					
4) Lack of Professional Development <b>Comment:</b>					
5) Additional Education or Training <b>Comment:</b>					
6) Salary <b>Comment:</b>					
7) Student Exceptionality Intensity <b>Comment:</b>					
8) Parental Demands <b>Comment:</b>					
9) Other Career Opportunities <b>Comment:</b>					
10) Transferred to General Education <b>Comment:</b>					
11) Lack of Certification Requirements <b>Comment:</b>					
12) Number of IEPs <b>Comment:</b>					
13) Relocation <b>Comment:</b>					
14) Lack of Technology <b>Comment:</b>					
15) Other <b>Comment:</b>					

**Section Two-B:**

From the 15 factors above, please list in order, beginning with the strongest factor, the top four which most influenced you leaving the special education classroom.

Factors	Explanation
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

**Section Three: Comments**

Is there any factor or combination of factors which, if altered, would have affected your decision to leave the Special Education classroom?

Yes  No

Please specify:

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**Other Comments:**

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If you would like an executive summary of the results of this study, please check here:

Yes

Please return the survey in the envelope provided. Thank you for your participation in this important study.

APPENDIX C: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

21 February 2007

Judy Martin  
11404 W. 112 Terrac  
Overland Park, KS 66210

Dear Ms. Martin:

The Baker University IRB has reviewed your research project proposal (P-0025-0207-0221-G) and approved this project under Expedited 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.

The Baker University IRB requires that your consent form must include the date of approval and expiration date (one year from today). Please be aware of the following:

1. At designated intervals (usually annually) until the project is completed, a Project Status Report must be returned to the IRB.
1. Any significant change in the research protocol as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
2. Notify the OIR about any new investigators not named in original proposal.
3. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported to the IRB Chair or representative immediately.
4. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity. If you use a signed consent form, provide a copy of the consent form to subjects at the time of consent.
5. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.

Please inform Office of Institutional Research (OIR) or myself when this project is terminated. As noted above, you must also provide OIR with an annual status report and receive approval for maintaining your status. If your project receives funding which requests an annual update approval, you must request this from the IRB one month prior to the annual update. Thanks for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Marc L Carter, PhD  
Chair, Baker University IRB

CC: Susan Rogers



## APPENDIX D: STATISTICS TABLES

## One-Sample Statistics

Factors	N	M	SD	Std. Error Mean
Paperwork	91	3.2857	1.33571	.14002
Administrative Support	90	3.4000	1.36407	.14379
Caseload / Class Size	89	3.2135	1.27450	.13510
Lack of Professional Development	90	2.5556	1.10271	.11624
Additional Education	88	2.4886	1.03939	.11080
Student Intensity	88	2.9773	1.30408	.13902
Parental Demands	90	2.7556	1.18332	.12473
Other Career Opportunities	89	3.0112	1.42617	.15117
Transfer to General Education	86	2.0349	1.23143	.13279
Lack of Certification	88	1.7614	1.00567	.10720
IEPs	91	3.0330	1.34537	.14103
Relocation	87	2.7586	1.58456	.16988
Technology	88	2.1136	1.01065	.10774
Salary	90	3.1000	1.19032	.12547

## One-Sample Test

Factors	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff	95% Conf. Int. of the Difference	
	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Paperwork	2.041	90	.044	.28571	.0075	.5639
Administrative Support	2.782	89	.007	.40000	.1143	.6857
Caseload/Class Size	1.580	88	.118	.21348	-.0550	.4820
Lack of Professional Development	-3.824	89	.000	-.44444	-.6754	-.2135
Additional Education	-4.615	87	.000	-.51136	-.7316	-.2911
Student Intensity	-.163	87	.871	-.02273	-.2990	.2536
Parental Demands	-1.960	89	.053	-.24444	-.4923	.0034
Other Career Opportunities	.074	88	.941	.01124	-.2892	.3117
Transfer to General Education	-7.268	85	.000	-.96512	-1.2291	-.7011
Lack of Certification	-11.554	87	.000	-1.23864	-1.4517	-1.0256
IEPs	.234	90	.816	.03297	-.2472	.3132
Relocation	-1.421	86	.159	-.24138	-.5791	.0963
Technology	-8.227	87	.000	-.88636	-1.1005	-.6722
Salary	.797	89	.428	.10000	-.1493	.3493