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# The Role of Administrative Support in the Retention of Special Education Teachers

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*RUNNING HEAD: Administrative Support*

Title Page

The Role of Administrative Support in the Retention of Special Education Teachers

Atinart Koonkongsatian

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Education

School of Education and Counseling Psychology

Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

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## Administrative Support

## Signature Sheet

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the Chair of the Master's program, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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Administrative Support

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## Administrative Support

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### Abstract

Administrative support of special education teachers can be a determining factor towards their success in teacher retention, motivation, and overall well-being. Special education teachers manage paperwork, meetings, and other administrative duties in addition to their teaching responsibilities. The extensive workload often leads these teachers to feel stressed, inadequate, and most importantly, this reduces their desire to continue working in their field. Administrative support of special education teachers can play an important role in promoting retention, increasing motivation, and supporting the overall well-being of a special education teacher. Their caseload of students is extensive, and often these teachers do not receive clearly defined administrative support. An administrator can support special education teachers by reducing their various non-teaching duties. A review of the literature revealed that special education teacher retention is problematic. Effective administrative support can be a determining factor in special education teacher retention. For the purposes of this study, the researcher obtained permission to gather information from special education teachers using an interview format. A total of five special education teachers commented on the quality and effectiveness of administrative support that they received. Results indicated that special education teachers desired more communication from administrators as well as support in non-teaching duties.

**Keywords:** administrative support, special education teachers, retention



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### Chapter 1 Administrative Support

First year special education (SPED) teachers face many challenges in their positions that are different compared to other beginning teachers. For example, I as a SPED intern teacher for students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) frequently attended advanced university classes following a full day of teaching and after-school meetings. The intern teacher was responsible for planning instruction in the areas of Algebra, Biology, Study Skills and Physical Education with limited access to materials and resources. A supportive administrator during this initial teaching experience made this year successful.

An administrator can provide a beginning SPED teacher with support during Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, as well as support with parents and how to communicate appropriately and confidently. A supportive administrator is a role model and mentor to all new teachers, particularly SPED teachers. A supportive administrator can play a large role in increasing teacher satisfaction, success and overall happiness. However, a non-supportive administrator can contribute greatly to teacher dissatisfaction leading to the professionals to leave a teaching position. An administrator who does not support teachers can greatly contribute to a decrease in overall teacher retention (Billingsley, 1993). SPED teacher perceptions of their level of administrative support teachers form the foundation of this study.

### **Statement of Problem**

The level and quality of administrative support can be a determining factor in the retention of SPED teachers. Proper administrative support includes mentoring new teachers,

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interacting as a team member in parent meetings, allocating materials, sharing administrative responsibilities, and anything that contributes to enhancing the curriculum.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to investigate SPED teacher perceptions of the types and level of administrative support necessary for their retentions as professionals in a school setting. This study addresses what administrative support is, and identifies some of the important types of administrative support that are of greatest help in the retention of SPED teachers.

## Research Questions

What types of administrative support can best support SPED teachers and help with SPED teacher retention rates? More specifically, how is administrative support defined? What are the specific types or categories?

## *Definition of Terms*

### 1) Administrative support

Administrative support in this paper is defined as various types and levels of support that an administrator can provide for SPED teachers such as: curriculum support, parent support, procedural/paperwork support, etc.

### 2) SPED teachers

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SPED teachers in this paper refer to an umbrella term of Special education teachers that include: Education Specialists, RSP teachers, Special Day Class teachers, and any other teacher that works with students with special needs and an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

### 3) Teacher retention

Teacher retention in this paper is defined as whether or not teachers choose to remain at their current school and/or decide to retire based on various factors. In this paper, the main factor that will be focused upon is the role that administrative support has in the retention of SPED teachers.

## Theoretical Rationale

Maslow (1943) in his theory of motivation identified that individuals have basic needs that must be met in order to promote a sense of well-being. His hierarchy consisted of five main basic needs in increasing order of importance: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. For the purpose of this study, the researcher examined three needs, love, esteem, and self-actualization.

Administrative support personnel should consider Maslow's basic needs. In terms of love, administrators need to consider how to make teachers feel supported and a part of the overall school dynamic. In terms of esteem, administrators need to make teachers feel appreciated and recognized for their hard work. Lastly, in terms of self-actualization,

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administrators need to provide teachers with opportunities to grow and develop personally through professional development opportunities and more.

## Assumptions

Administrators who do not show effective leadership, guidance, and support of special education teachers often determine whether or not SPED teachers continue at a school site. SPED teachers who do not receive a certain level of support may either resign from teaching or move to other schools. Factors of an effective administrator include leaders who communicate positively with their teachers, maximize efficiency during meetings, and offer professional development opportunities.

## Background and Need

Billingsley (2004) conducted a literature review on SPED teacher retention and attrition. The study was intended to inform researchers and policymakers of attrition factors, as understanding why SPED teachers were leaving the field would be critical in terms of improving SPED teacher retention. Data were obtained through the search of various electronic databases such as ERIC. The data were analyzed through about a ten-year time period, starting from around 1990 to the early 2000s. The results of the study showed that poor work environment factors such as administrative support or a poor working climate can lead to increased teacher attrition. This study was important in that it documented the overall attrition of SPED teachers over a decade of research. It addressed the need for future research on how to best combat the

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attrition of SPED teachers, and illustrated the role of administrative support in the retention of SPED teachers as well.

## Summary

SPED teachers, especially those beginning their career, have expectations and additional responsibilities that other newly employed teachers do not have. They have additional meetings, are responsible for IEPs, and work with student populations that are more difficult to manage in terms of behavior and academic growth. As a result of these added stressors, the retention of special education teachers is an issue that many schools face today. This study addresses factors that increase retention, more specifically, the impact and role that administrative support has in the retention of SPED teachers. It is important to determine what constitutes administrative support, as well as which one of those categories and aspects are most impactful and supportive for SPED teachers. The following is a review of literature on the focus of this study.

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### Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

#### **Introduction**

This section is an examination of the research literature on administrative support for the retention of special education teachers. Information was gathered from academic library searches using online resources. Research information is organized in the following categories: Historical Context and Review of the Academic Research.

#### **Historical Context**

Billingsley (1993) conducted a study that reviewed and examined existing research related to special education teacher retention and attrition. Billingsley designed this study to serve as a point of reference for future researchers and policymakers. The data were obtained through computer research of ERIC and other research databases. The type of the study used was a conceptual model of the influences of teachers' career decisions that focused essentially on the three decisions that teachers face: stay, transfer, or exit. This model was then used to interpret the various research findings that were related to teacher retention and attrition in special education. The findings showed that two specific variables consistently linked to special education teacher retention and attrition were a lack of administrative support and role ambiguity issues. This study helped to increase exposure to the special education teacher retention issues. It also began to shape and define the factors that could contribute to lower special education teacher retention rates.

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### **Review of the Academic Research**

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Researchers Bettini, Cheyney, Wang, and Leko (2015) summarized the job characteristics theory and used that summary to provide suggestions for administrators that are interested in the retention and support of special educators. The main findings of their study were that special educators could best be supported through social support, autonomy, feedback, task significance and task interdependence.

A strength of this study was that it focused specifically on providing strategies and techniques for administrators to help use for the retention and support of SPED teachers. A weakness of this study was that the findings were derived from a research field that did not necessarily correlate to education in that it was a field of research in the area of psychology. This study provided documentation on specific strategies that administrators could use to support SPED teachers.

Variables that influenced teachers' commitment and job satisfaction were examined by Billingsley and Cross (1992). The subjects of the study included both general and special education teachers. A questionnaire was sent to a random sample of 558 special educators and 589 general educators in Virginia. The researchers found that job satisfaction was associated primarily to three variables: greater leadership support, work involvement, and lower levels of role conflict.

A strength of this study was that it used a random sample of both general and special educators. The broad sampling and inclusion of two types of teaching positions provided a good

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range of data. A weakness of this study was that it was conducted using a questionnaire from only one state in the United States. This study documented that administrative support in the terms of leadership as a variable played a large role in teacher job satisfaction.

A review of the literature by Bozonelos (2008) examined the connection between administrative support and SPED teacher retention. The focus of this study was to discuss how administrators can increase the retention of SPED teachers through offering emotional support, instrumental support, information support and appraisal support. Bozonelos (2008) used existing data from prior studies that focused on key terms such as teacher attrition and studies that focused on administrators and their role in teacher retention. Bozonelos also used research data from the Study of Personnel needs in Special Education (SPeNSE).

A strength in this study was that it defined administrative support through four specific categories, which would help in terms of better providing support in an accurate and consistent manner. A weakness in this study is that Bozonelos (2008) only used existing data, and research trends and data can change over time. This study provides specific documentation on how administrators can best support SPED teachers in order to increase teacher retention overall.

Kaff (2004) conducted a study that focused on examining the difficulty of retaining SPED teachers and why SPED teachers wanted to leave their field of teaching. The information in this study was collected through questionnaires mailed to about 400 teachers in Kansas. Kaff (2004) attributed SPED teachers leaving the field due to the following: a lack of administrative support, classroom concerns, and individual issues. A strength in this study was that it addressed the growing shortage of SPED teachers through the definition of three key reasons. A weakness in this study was that it would not generalize as the data was obtained entirely through one state



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in the United States. This study provided documentation that SPED teacher retention problems were affected by the lack of administrative support, among other issues.

Researchers Otto and Arnold (2005) focused their study on experienced SPED teachers and their perceptions of administrative support. A questionnaire was distributed to over 200 special education teachers in South Texas. The results showed that experienced SPED teachers perceived their administrators as generally supportive, which was completely opposite of the perceptions of beginning SPED teachers. A strength in this study was that it addressed the opposite perceptions of administrative support from beginning SPED teachers vs. experienced SPED teachers. This direct contrast of perspectives could help pinpoint more specific ways for administrators to support beginning SPED teachers through the perspective and viewpoint of experienced SPED teachers. A weakness in this study was that it did not address why there was such a difference in perspective between beginning and experienced SPED teachers. This study provided documentation on the role of administrative support as perceived by experienced SPED teachers.

Prather-Jones (2011) conducted a study on how school administrators could influence the retention of SPED teachers for students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD). The data in this study was obtained through face-to-face interviews with about 10 SPED teachers in a Midwest metropolitan area. The results of the study showed that administrative support was a crucial factor in increasing teacher retention for SPED teachers. Three factors were discussed. A strength in this study was that it addressed how administrative support could help influence SPED teachers' decisions to remain in their career field. A weakness in this study was that the researchers only interviewed teachers who did not leave their field, and that interviewing

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teachers who had left would have provided more data. This study provided documentation on three defining factors of administrative support that helped influence SPED teachers' decision to stay at their current teaching positions.

Researchers Steinbrecher, Fix, Mahal, and McKeown (2015) conducted a study on administrators' perspectives towards special educator knowledge and skills. Through understanding their perspectives, a greater knowledge base of how to best support SPED teachers could be obtained. In order to obtain their data, the researchers interviewed 5 administrators in a large school district located in the southwest region of the United States. Results showed that a lack of knowledge of special education practices and roles by administrators could lead to role ambiguity for SPED teachers. Without this knowledge base, administrators are unable to effectively evaluate SPED teachers, and this could lead to increased attrition rates among SPED teachers. A strength in this study was that researchers interviewed administrators directly and were able to obtain data using their perspectives. A weakness of this study was that generalization would be limited due to the small number of participants. This study provided documentation of the role of administrative support, and the implications of how ignorant administrators could lead to role ambiguity in SPED teachers.

Tickle, Chang, and Kim (2011) conducted a study on administrative support and the role that it played in teacher satisfaction and intent to stay in teaching. Data were obtained through the 2003-2004 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) teacher questionnaire from about 34,000 teachers. The SASS was administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Results showed that administrative support was identified as the most significant predictor of teacher job satisfaction. A strength of this study was the large sample size, which could lead to

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increased generalization of results. A weakness of this study was that it did not address teacher attrition internationally. This study provided documentation of the importance of administrative support in the retention of teachers overall.

Valeo (2008) conducted a study on teacher and administrator perspectives that investigated what both parties involved constituted as support. The researcher examined what kind of support administrators believed that they had given versus what kind of support that teachers felt that they needed. Data were obtained through formal interviews given to six elementary school teachers and five administrators. Results showed that administrators felt that they were supporting their teachers but that the teachers did not feel that they were being supported. The differing viewpoints were a cause of concern for the researchers. A strength in this study was that it addressed the contrasting viewpoints of teachers and administrators in relation to support and indicates a clear need for a clearly defined role of administrative support. A weakness in this study was that only general education teachers were interviewed, which could lead to a lack of generalization for other teaching positions such as special education teachers. This study provided documentation on the importance of administrative support, and how differing perspectives between administrators and teachers could lead to a lack of success.

### *Shortage of SPED Teachers*

Researchers Albrecht, Johns, Mounstevan, and Olorunda (2009) developed a pilot study that examined the working conditions of teachers for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD). Over 700 teachers completed a survey consisting of multiple choice questions and responses. The study identified risk factors for EBD teachers that contribute to teachers

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leaving the field, and also identified resiliency factors that contribute to teacher retention. The survey results indicated that beginning EBD teachers had an increased risk for leaving teaching and that the lack of administrative support and its availability was an important factor in teacher decision-making. Some resiliency factors included positive relationships among peers and administrators as well as SPED teacher use of stress management techniques.

A strength in this study included the discussion of techniques and strategies for administrators and SPED teachers to implement that could help reduce risk factors leading to teachers leaving the profession. A weakness of this study was that the survey itself was voluntary and not distributed a random, representative population. This could result in concerns for the validity of the responses. This study provided documentation as to how risk factors, including that of administrative support, have contributed to teachers leaving the profession.

Andrews and Brown (2015) conducted a study that examined the perception of SPED teachers in terms of their ideal teaching experience versus what they experience in actuality. Fourteen SPED teachers were given The Perceptions of Success Inventory for Beginning Teachers (PSI-BT). The study examined how the discrepancy between the two perceptions could lower SPED teacher retention rates due to dissatisfaction and unhappiness. The results of the study showed that SPED teachers' daily experiences of teaching were significantly lower than their perceived experiences of teaching. A strength of this study was that Andrews and Brown (2015) demonstrated how SPED teacher perceptions towards their job could make a difference in teacher retention. A weakness of this study was that it was only conducted in one school district. Comparing results in multiple school districts would most likely have led to greater insight. This

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study provided documentation on how SPED teacher perception of their jobs could lead to dissatisfaction and contribute to SPED teachers leaving the field.

Billingsley (2007) conducted a case study that focused on special educators in an urban district who left because of three main reasons: personal reasons, dissatisfaction, and better job opportunities elsewhere. Data were collected through the use of a questionnaire that asked teachers why they left the districts over a three-year period. Data were based on what was learned from 99 leavers, that is, SPED teachers who left the district. The researcher concluded the case study with a recommendation for strategic planning of how to best implement three initiatives that would have a positive effect on teacher retention. The first initiative was to create a responsive teacher induction program in order to better support beginning special education teachers. The second initiative was to improve work conditions, and one main focus of that was to reduce the amount of paperwork that SPED teachers were responsible for. The last initiative was to give teachers an option for transferring to a different placement within the district. A strength of this case study was the finding of three initiatives that would help the retention of SPED teachers. A weakness of this study was that it focused on only one school district, whereas a comparison of multiple school districts would have yielded more results and data. This study provided documentation on SPED teachers leaving the field of teaching.

Brunsting, Sreckovic and Lane (2014) conducted a review of research on teacher burnout SPED teachers from 1979 to 2013. Data were obtained through the summarization of research articles. Results indicated that the three factors most associated with burnout were: role ambiguity, role conflict, and administrative support. The authors concluded that administrators need to provide both emotional and instrumental support for SPED teachers to ease their stress

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and burden. A strength in this study was that the researchers used specific research articles that contained data relevant to their focus. A weakness in this study was that the researchers did not include possible ways to support teachers based on their research data. This study documents that administrative support, or a lack thereof, is a significant factor in the burnout of SPED teachers.

Researchers Jones, Youngs and Frank (2013) focused on the relationship between beginning SPED teachers, their general education teacher colleagues and how those relationships could play a factor in the retention of special education teachers. A survey was given at the beginning of the year, and again at the end of the year to about 180 teachers. The majority of those teachers were general education teachers. The study found that relationships between beginning SPED teachers and their colleagues can play a significant role in teacher retention due to teacher satisfaction and a sense of belonging. A strength in this study was that it addressed the need for SPED teachers to have a sense of community and social belonging with their teacher colleagues as a strategy for the retention of SPED teachers. A weakness in this study was that it did not address how other colleagues, such as administrators, could provide an additional source of support. This study provided documentation that SPED teacher retention was especially high for beginning SPED teachers.

Kennedy and Burstein (2004) examined an induction program established in 1992 by the California Department of Education. The program was called the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program. Data were collected from various activities by participating teachers and their mentors. The findings from the data suggested that BTSA was effective, and that BTSA does contribute to a positive increase in teacher retention. A strength in this study was that it showed the effectiveness of induction programs for beginning teachers as a way to

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increase teacher retention. A weakness in this study was that it did not address other induction programs effectiveness in other states, which could indicate a lack of generalization to other state programs. This study provided documentation that on lowered teacher retention rates, and how an induction program could be used as a strategy to increase beginning teacher retention rates.

Researchers Nance and Calabrese (2009) conducted a study that focused on how the additional legal requirements of SPED teachers as a reason for why SPED teachers left their teaching position. Data was collected from about forty current and former SPED teachers through mixed-methods, which included semi-structured interviews. Results showed that SPED teachers felt overburdened by additional legal requirements such as state assessments and other legal changes. A strength in this study was that it collected from both retired and current SPED teachers, which provided more data through multiple perspectives. A weakness in this study was that the data was collected through one large special education agency and that may indicate a lack of generalization due to no variation. This study provided documentation for increased legal requirements as a reason for SPED teachers leaving their teaching position.

Thornton, Peltier and Medina (2007) conducted a study that addressed the SPED teacher shortage and offered proactive strategies on how to reduce that shortage. The researchers obtained their data through prior research. An example of a proactive strategy was to increase the SPED teacher candidacy pool in order to have more applicants. A strength in this study was that the researchers offered specific strategies for reducing the SPED teacher shortage. A weakness in this study was that the researchers obtained their data through other research studies and did not conduct their own study or methodology. This study provided documentation of the SPED teacher shortage.

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White and Mson (2006) conducted a study on the components of a mentoring program for beginning SPED teachers. The researchers focused specifically on mentoring programs for SPED teachers, as the majority of the research beforehand was conducted on general education teachers. Their study asked SPED teachers and their mentors whether or not they felt that mentoring programs were important in teacher retention and job satisfaction. Data for this study was obtained through surveys mailed to about 240 SPED teachers and about 250 mentors. The results showed that mentoring programs for SPED teachers were considered very meaningful and helpful by all participants. A strength in this study was that it addressed how important mentoring programs were in the retention and support of beginning SPED teachers. A weakness in this study was that not all SPED teachers participated in these mentoring programs. This study provided documentation of the importance of mentorship programs in reducing SPED teacher shortages.

## *Administrators as Mentors*

Researchers Cancio, Albrecht, and Johns (2013) conducted a study that focused on the definition of administrative support through a survey administered to teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD). The purpose of the study was to examine how the definition of administrative support as perceived by EBD teachers played a role in the attrition and retention of said teachers. A survey was emailed to about 1800 CCBD members who teach students with EBD. The study results discovered that administrators who provide emotional support are most likely to have EBD teachers who are satisfied with their job and are more likely to remain in their teaching position. A strength in this study was that the researchers were able to



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target a select group of SPED teachers (EBD teachers) with high attrition rates and really focus on finding data to help support said teachers. A weakness in this study was that it was an exploratory study, and that might mean that it would be harder to generalize to other SPED teacher position types. This study documents that administrators who provide emotional support are preferred by SPED teachers and that administrative mentorship through emotional support is a good strategy to provide support for SPED teachers.

Researchers Cancio, Albrecht and Johns (2014) examined how administrative support, including principal support, could help retain SPED teachers who work with students with Emotional Behavior Disorders (EBD). The researchers focused on five strategies that administrators can use to help the retention of SPED teachers. The researchers used data from a survey of SPED teachers for students with EBD that were conducted by the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders (CCBD). The researchers concluded that a lack of administrative support was a key factor in SPED teacher retention. The researchers stated that a key supportive role were those of induction and mentoring programs through administrators. A strength in this study was that the researchers stated specific strategies and techniques for supporting SPED teachers. A weakness in this study was that the researchers used data from a survey in 2007, and did not conduct their own research. This study documents the importance of induction and mentoring programs for the support of SPED teachers.

Researchers Correa and Wagner (2011) conducted a literature review that examined the role that principals have in the induction of beginning SPED teachers. The article examined research on the role of the principal in SPED induction, as a promoter of a positive school climate, and on their role as an instructional leader. The authors examined research on the

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administrator's role on the induction of beginning SPED teachers. They concluded that a supportive principal provided multiple professional development opportunities as well as formed positive and "informal" relationships with co-workers and staff. A strength in this study is that the researchers focused specifically on how a principal could support beginning SPED teachers. A weakness in this study is that the study did not discuss other administrative positions or address how they could support beginning SPED teachers. This study documents the key role that principals can play as mentors in order to support beginning SPED teachers.

Frost and Kersten (2011) focused on the role of elementary school principals as leaders and mentors for special education teachers. The study examined the principals' level of special education knowledge and the extent of their involvement with their Special Education teachers. Data for the study were obtained through an online survey sent to about 130 elementary school principals in one county in Illinois. The results of the study found that principals who held a teaching credential in the field of special education were more likely to have more knowledge on how to best support their special education staff as well as also being more involved in general with special education. However, principals without a special education credential were less likely to be involved. The study concluded with the suggestion that all administrators engage in more fieldwork and graduation courses that are in the field of special education in order to best provide support for special education staff members. A strength in this study was that it addressed specific training opportunities for administrators that would best enable them to support SPED teachers. A weakness in this study was the small sample size, which does not necessarily mean that the results could be generalized. This study documented the importance of

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a leadership and mentorship role that principals should strive for in order to best support SPED teachers.

Researchers Karge and Freiberg (1992) examined beginning SPED teachers, their induction process, and how administrative support could play a role in the retention of SPED teachers. The data collected for this study was a secondary analysis of the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), which was a questionnaire taken by 23,088 Public School teachers. The findings concluded that administrative support is highly important to beginning SPED teachers through mentoring and other beginning induction programs. A strength in this study was that the researchers confirmed previous research that led to SPED teacher attrition, and offered strategies to help increase retention rates. A weakness in this study was that it focused only on the SASS, and that it did not examine other perspectives or characteristics. This study provided documentation for administrative support through the form of induction and mentoring programs.

Researchers Madigan and Scroth-Cavataio (2012) conducted a study that focused on supporting SPED teachers through high-quality mentorship programs. The researchers defined the role of a mentor, and stated how mentorship roles were most often administrators or veteran teachers. The study offered several strategies on how to be an effective mentor for SPED teachers. A strength of this study was that it emphasized the importance of a mentorship role for the support of beginning SPED teachers. A weakness of this study was that researchers obtained their data through other sources, and did not conduct their own data collection or methodology. This study provided documentation on the importance of mentorship in the support of SPED teachers and how administrators were most often placed in those key positions of a mentor.

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### **Summary**

The literature shows that administrative support is often a key factor in the retention of SPED teachers. Administrative support was also typically defined as both emotional, in addition to curriculum and parental support. The research also showed that the shortage of SPED teachers was highest among those just beginning in the field. Lastly, the research showed that administrative support is highly effective when presented in the form of a mentorship or leadership role.

The literature review also showed that there is a shortage of special education teachers nation-wide. As stated previously, administrative support is often cited as one of the main reasons for why a special education teacher would leave their teaching position. Various factors are also discussed in terms of contributing as well.

The focus of the present research study continues to address the role that administrative support has on the retention of SPED teachers through the extension of literature and a more focused definition of what SPED teachers consider most important in terms of administrative support.

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### Chapter 3 Method

#### **Research Approach**

This study utilized a qualitative research approach through an in-depth, free response interview for SPED teachers. Qualitative research typically involves the researcher analyzing data collected through such interviews using informed judgment to identify the major themes and patterns (Patten, 2012). It explores the role that administrative support has in the retention of SPED teachers. It also seeks to define administrative support through the specific perspectives of SPED teachers. The researcher conducted a literature review that examined the various definitions of administrative support as through the perspectives of both teachers and administrators. The literature review also examined the shortage of SPED teachers, and addressed the role of administrative support in SPED teacher attrition and retention. Lastly, the researcher examined the effectiveness of administrative support through the role of mentorships towards SPED teachers.

#### **Research Site**

This study was conducted during the spring semester of the 2016-17 school year at a comprehensive public high school in Northern California where the researcher was teaching a Special Day Classroom for students diagnosed as Emotionally Disturbed (ED). The school had a student population of about 1775 students, made up of an almost equal ratio of male to female students. The school was 68% Non-Hispanic and 32% Hispanic. Other minorities made up small

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percentages of the population with the majority being White or Hispanic. The school was one of two public high schools in a small town of about 60,000 people.

The school district of this site employed a total of 878 staff members and educated 7,400 students. The district consisted of six elementary schools, two charter schools, two junior high schools, a community school, two high schools, and three continuation high schools. The district also offered an independent study program as well as an adult education program.

## Participants

The participants in this study were five SPED teachers with a varying amount of years taught among one another. Each person was assigned a pseudonym to preserve confidentiality in reporting their responses to questions. The first participant was a high school male SPED teacher with four years of teaching experience in a Special Day Classroom for students diagnosed with emotional disturbances (ED). He is currently in the same position. The second participant was a female SPED teacher with 15+ years of teaching experience in a multitude of special education programs. Currently, she is a high school SPED teacher. The third participant was also a female SPED teacher with one year of teaching experience. She is currently a middle school SPED teacher in the resource program. The fourth participant is a male SPED teacher with two years of teaching experience. He is currently a SPED teacher in the elementary school setting. The fifth participant is a female SPED teacher with four years of teaching experience. She is currently a SPED teacher in the elementary school setting.

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### **Access and Permissions**

The researcher received permission to conduct this study as part of his master's thesis through written consent via his school administrator. Special education teachers interviewed were colleagues at the same school site or within the same school district.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher informed all participants in the study about their rights as participants. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic being discussed, the researcher emphasized the following:

1. That participation was voluntary, and that the participants could withdraw from the study at any time with no consequences.
2. That every effort would be taken to make sure that data collection occurred during a mutually convenient time and place.
3. That the information collected in this study would be anonymous and confidential.

This paper adheres to the ethical standards for protection of human subjects of the American Psychological Association (2010). Additionally a research proposal was submitted and reviewed by the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), approved and assigned number 10533.

### **Interview Questions**

1. How would you define administrative support in regards to SPED teachers?

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2. What are the three most important types of support that you feel that an administrator should provide for you as a SPED teacher?
3. As a SPED teacher, what factors do you feel contribute to SPED teachers leaving either their teaching positions and/or the field of Special Education itself?
4. As credentialed teachers in the state of California, all beginning teachers must participate in a two-year induction program. For SPED teachers, what are your perceptions of the effectiveness of those induction programs in relation to your teaching position specifically?
5. What are your perceptions of the effectiveness of an administrator who takes on a mentorship role with SPED teachers?

### **Data Analysis Approach**

The researcher first examined the interview notes and transcripts. Secondly, the researcher reviewed each interview transcript individually to compare and contrast the similarities and differences between the responses of the participants. While examining the interview notes and transcripts, the researcher also looked for key words in each question that indicated a main idea. The researcher then focused on identifying the three most important types of support as advocated for by the participants as well as determining what key factors contributed to SPED teachers wanting to leave their teaching position or the field of SPED entirely. This was done by generating a list of answers and data collected through the



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participants. In order to be as detailed in the examination as possible, the researcher organized the findings by interview question.

## Data Validity and Reliability

### *Clarification of researcher bias.*

In Chapter 1, researcher bias was articulated in writing under the sub-heading, “Assumptions.” The researcher is very passionate about this topic, yet took careful steps to ensure limiting conveying an opinion in the data collection process. He reviewed and checked his interview questions with his thesis advisor and peers, he sought out SPED teachers of varying types other than that of his own, and he acknowledged his researcher bias in Chapter 1 under the sub-heading “Assumptions.” Finally, all phases of this project were subject to close examination by an external advisor who is experienced in quantitative and qualitative -research methodology.

## Reporting the Findings

The results of this study are presented through a “discussion of trends and/or themes based on words, not statistics” (Patten, 2012, p.19). This is typically how qualitative research is presented when discussing results. The results would be discussed in more of a narrative form, through identifying the differences and commonalities between the participant responses to the five interview questions that the researcher identified as most important in regard to the primary research question. To maintain privacy, pseudonyms were used for the participants, as well as

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any administrators, teachers, and/or students the participants mentioned by name during their individual interviews.

Under the sub-heading, Discussion and Analysis of the Findings,” the researcher attempted to identify the common themes and responses in order to further examine the results in regards to the primary research question. The researcher also compares the findings of the study with the present research available as another method of determining the role of administrative support towards SPED teachers.

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## Chapter 4 Findings

**Description of Site**

Interviews were conducted within one local school district, with several teachers from a special education program located within the district. Five teachers within the district, 4 currently still within district and 1 teacher who moved to a different district, were interviewed, including 2 elementary school teachers, 1 middle school teacher, and 2 high school teachers.

**Teacher Data**

Five teachers within the district, with one teacher who recently taught within the district but is now currently at a new school district, were interviewed, including 2 elementary school teachers, 1 middle school teacher, and 2 high school teachers. All names have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Years of Service</b>	<b>Subject Area</b>	<b>Highest Degree</b>
Lily	Female	Asian	25	2	Special Education	Masters
Frank	Male	Caucasian	35	4	Special Education	Bachelors
Rihanna	Female	Chinese-Caucasian	30	8	Special Education	Masters
Andy	Male	Asian	30	3	Special Education	Bachelors
Beyonce	Female	Caucasian	51	29	Special Education	Masters

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Participants primarily included teachers with 8 or fewer years of experience, with 1 teacher with more than 25 years of experience. It is assumed that new SPED teachers naturally experience “growing pains” and typically need a strong base of support from administrators and colleagues. Some challenges that they have experienced tend to be vivid, therefore, readily available to discuss compared to teachers with more years of experience. However, one participant does have more than 25 years of experience. The knowledge and experience of this participant added a different viewpoint and perspective than that of the teachers with 8 or fewer years of experience. All teacher participants are in the field of special education and work under an umbrella of special education positions such as the following; resource program teacher, special day class teacher (mild/moderate), special day class that serve students with moderate to severe disabilities, and resource specialist.

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The following comments emerged from the interview questions.

How would you define administrative support in regards to SPED teachers?

Lily: I think admin should have a good strong solid background in SPED law. Familiarity with IEPs, including familiarity with students with disabilities and how they work in classrooms or in a public school setting. For the secondary level making sure kids are in the correct levels that they need to be in and helping school counselors and teachers that. Elementary level too. So they can make decisions that impact the students.

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Frank: To me what that looks like are administrators who are available to answer questions to provide guidance for areas that may be unfamiliar or unknown professional development that may be relevant to the students that are being served. For example, a training on dealing with students who have experienced trauma if you work with students with ED (emotional disturbances). It also looks like leadership in a sense that a special educator doesn't have to solve problems outside of their wheelhouse or area of expertise. Someone to rely on to help make difficult decisions or help guide their teaching program or students as opposed to having to solve problems on their own that should be dealt with at the administrative level. That's it.

Beyonce: They support us in IEP meetings; it is mandatory that they are there, at their school site. It can be a challenge to get them to the meetings due to their schedule. I feel like were supported in our admin meetings. If you have a good admin you have good support. They support us with discipline issues and escalated IEPs.

Rihanna: I guess for one just being there to back teachers up. Like support, especially when there is conflict with families. For me I'm having students that are being diagnosed or need to be, so trying to help me help the families that way towards wanting to get there. Having an administrator there to help me with parent meetings. Someone else to help. Providing understanding for what happens in the classroom, support with resources like classroom materials, curriculum. And allowing time for collaboration.

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Andy: So administrative support is making sure that teachers and students have all the necessary curriculum that's involved and materials and in my case since I work in a mod-severe class that sensory issues are met. We had a student that bangs his head, and we need a helmet for that. That kind of took a long time. They need to be proactive and a little more quicker with that. We had about 2-3 weeks where we had to use our hands. Support us emotionally, especially with new teachers. Last year I had a really difficult class with a lot of swearing and difficult behaviors and no one told me what was going to happen even though they knew these students from prior years and you know with them knowing this—they weren't preemptive, I wish they were more ahead of their game. They were reactionary instead of preemptive.

Lily's answer described how administrative support could be defined by how well-versed an administrator is on SPED law, IEP procedures, and students with special needs overall. She seemed to feel that having prior background knowledge in SPED would have a strong impact on administrative support. Frank had a concrete idea of what administrative support should look like. He wanted administrators to be present in meetings to answer questions, provide guidance, and make tough decisions. He also mentioned that administrators should know their teachers and help provide them with professional development opportunities that were relevant and meaningful. Beyonce had difficulty defining administrative support. She gave concrete definitions of what she felt administrative support should be like and felt strongly that part of what defines administrative support should include support in IEP meetings. Rihanna's definition

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of administrative support centered on administrators and their availability for teachers in a helpful and understanding manner. Lastly, Andy's definition of administrative support discussed support in terms of curriculum and material. What Andy also focused on was the timeliness of said support, as he described how a situation without administrative support was detrimental to his student's health and well-being.

## Types of Support

What are the three most important types of support that you feel that an administrator should provide for you as a SPED teacher?

Lily: Listening for sure. Hearing out what the teacher is experiencing in the classroom.

Collaboration between the admin and teachers. It also comes back to knowledge of special education law and IEPs and familiarity with that. Familiarity with SPED law, services, the IEP processes. I think administrators, as much as they have on their plates, to be well-versed, to know what would be best for even 1 particular student.

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Frank: #1 is administrators should shield me from unnecessary squabbles or red tape hassles so that I don't have to stress or be concerned about higher up decisions trickling down to disrupt the job that I am trying to do. The second thing is administrators should set up clear lines of communication so that we can have an open, constructive dialogue about what's needed at the classroom for the students and so that situations can be dealt with in a timely manner. What I also need for an administrator is for them to take my experience, expertise, opinions into account in their decision making so that we can work collaboratively to solve problems, etc.

Beyonce: #1 is that they need to be supportive of IEP meetings and flexible when we have to schedule them quickly or if they're contentious. #2 is discipline, needing to be fair but also willing to work with a student depending on their issues. I guess 3 would be staff development and support of us in our instruction and curriculum.

Rihanna: Guidance like if you're having a problem that they're there to talk through with you. Then, giving you ideas or resources to get through that problem. Understanding the needs of the classroom to make it work and have a good curriculum, helping to get the materials you need or curriculum that you might need. Intervening when necessary. Being straightforward with you, like if there is something that I could do better so that they could just tell you so that you could improve your teaching in a way. Having evaluations is nice to have critical feedback, because sometimes it's just all good, because how can I improve?



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Andy: As a new teacher, just being in the classroom and knowing what I can work on. Give me feedback. I'm on an isolated campus by myself, I don't have other SPED teachers working with me. Being a new teacher I don't know if what I'm doing is correct I don't know if I have the right materials, I just need that support for them to be there is huge. If they're not there they don't know what is happening and I don't if I'm what I'm doing is right or wrong. I just want them to be present, Just be there for us, show us that you care about our classroom that you care what is happening to our students that they have the right materials and sensory tools. Be there emotionally, this job is emotionally-taxing. There's a lot that is on our shoulders day in and day out at times I feel that I can't express that to our admin. At the same time I have it all pent up and I feel like it's get to a big bubble and I burst on our admin because I feel that there isn't an open door where we can talk about these things where I'd feel like we were being scrutinized. The third thing is that I feel like they put a lot of admin stuff on us as teachers, like attendance, it's hard to take time out of the day to do admin stuff. We have a person in the office who can do that for us. It's not our job, putting stuff on us that isn't in the job description. I don't think that's very fair to us.

Lily stated that her three most important types of support were: 1) Listening, 2) Collaboration, and 3) Overall knowledge of SPED procedures and law. She felt that administrators that could listen would know how to better support SPED teachers in the classroom. Frank stated that his three most important types of support were: 1) A shield and

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protector from bureaucracy and other higher up decisions, 2) Clear lines of communication, and 3) Shared decision-making that considered his experience and opinions. Frank valued trust and communication between administration and SPED teachers. Beyonce's three most important types of support were: 1) Support in IEP meetings, 2) Support with discipline matters involving students as well as understanding their special needs and challenges when considering consequences, and 3) Staff development opportunities and support in the curriculum. Beyonce valued administrative support more on the side of IEP matters and administrative processes that involved her students. For Rihanna, her three most important types of support were: 1) Guidance and support for teachers with challenging decisions and situations as well as follow-through with resolving said matters, 2) Understanding the needs of the classroom in order to properly provide support with resources and curriculum, and 3) Being straightforward with teachers in feedback and evaluations. Rihanna desired administrators who were caring, understanding, and honest with SPED teachers. Andy stated that his three most important types of support were: 1) Having a physical presence in the classroom for honest evaluation and to create an understanding of his specific classroom needs and challenges, 2) Support SPED teacher's emotionally and provide an open space for him to discuss frustrations freely without feeling judged, and 3) Reducing the amount of "administrative" work that are unique to SPED teachers and their job demands. Andy valued an administrator who was supportive emotionally and focused on reducing the outside duties of a SPED teacher.

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### **Retention**

As a SPED teacher, what factors do you feel contribute to SPED teachers leaving either their teaching positions and/or the field of Special Education itself?

Lily: It comes back to my previous answer. Not listening, not having the means of collaboration. It's very hard to put my finger to it. In my personal experience, I think what happened was my admin wanted the best for all of their teachers, took on an ambitious plan, to have 12 different classrooms at 13 different sites, and then the classes with very high needs and difficult students and all of these teachers needed a ton of support. Including myself. Especially coming in as a newer teacher, it was my first year as a credentialed teacher fresh out of the credential program. A lot of ways, I felt that I didn't know what I was doing all the time. I felt like a lot of my issues, with my staff, students and myself, I felt that it wasn't working out. I knew that the intention was there. Multiple things, to put that into summary, you have admin who have well intentions that I recognize but I think that there is no single factor, some things that I don't even know myself.

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Frank: Lack of support in every dimension possible. Financially in providing for classroom supplies and materials, lack of support in terms of dealing with the overhead of all the politics and paperwork and complicating factors that are unique to SPED in respect to IEPs, etc. I would also say that being overworked and underpaid is an obvious no-brainer, every teacher works more hours than they're paid and every teacher is paid way less than is reasonable for the amount of sanity that is lost in the job of SPED. So, people leave because they get burnt out they get fried, people leave the profession b/c from my own experience SPED departments and communities really aren't as well-heard or respected or taken seriously and therefore not given the ability to function at least in a comprehensive high school campus setting in a way that is constructive and beneficial to students. The limitations and restrictions put to them cause them to want to move on. It's an extremely emotionally taxing position and I've never heard of SPED teachers getting support above and beyond the services available to them to help them process or deal with some of the issues or strains that might present themselves.

Beyonce: I would say litigious IEPs are probably one reason. Discipline issues and lack of training and lack of knowledge in how to be a good disciplinarian. I think the stress of the job in that there's a lot of extreme emotional situations that make it difficult for the adults to have to be aware of. Just the amount of things we're asked to do. All the paperwork we have to keep up the legalities. And then just trying to balance all the legal paperwork with what the kids actually need.

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Rihanna: I guess burnout because we're working so hard to try to help the students and their families and not always sometimes not feeling appreciated. You get really tired of working a lot. And maybe you're not seeing progress or conflict happens with families and that kind of turns you off sometimes too. Or if you're trying so hard in the classroom and no one else is trying to help what you're doing. Families aren't trying to help you so the students aren't going to progress a lot or as much as they could if what they're doing is also not being supported.

Andy: There's actually been a couple of times where I felt like I really wanted to quit. To be honest it's again it's just feeling that support to know that they're there for me, there were a few days where there were kids literally destroying the classroom, I voiced my concern to admin and they'll come in and help us out but there are no BIPs administered or data taken from the admin. It can be very taxing on someone to deal with that day in and day out. It took two months for that to be taken care of. Most teachers just get burnt out. It's a really exhausting job. In some cases, like last year, I didn't take any breaks. I didn't have the staff, I had to watch my kids during lunch. I had to go to the hospital for severe acid reflux because I was too stressed out. So this year I made it a point to take my lunch break, but in turn I had to take away academic time for my students so that I could take care of myself. I don't feel that teachers in SPED take that time to take their breaks because they don't feel like they can or have the staff to do that.

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Lily had a difficult time answering this question. She felt overall that there was no one single factor, but a multitude. One key point that she continued to emphasize was listening. She acknowledges that her administration seemed intent on helping her, but that having the intent does not necessarily mean that the support was effective or helpful. Frank also discussed a multitude of factors regarding this question. His focus was a lack of support in a multitude of fields as well as SPED teachers feeling overwhelmed and burnt-out. He felt that there was a lack of respect and understanding for SPED teachers overall in comparison to the amount of work and hours that all SPED teachers put in for their students and classrooms. Beyonce discussed how litigious IEP meetings, stressful situations, and paperwork all led to SPED teachers leaving their field and/or job position. She felt that SPED teachers had too much to do, and that they ended up leaving due to feeling overwhelmed and emotionally-taxed. Rihanna felt that burnout was a factor, and that she did not always feel appreciated as a SPED teacher after working long hours before, during, and after school. She also mentioned parent conflict and a lack of support in the classroom. One interesting factor she mentioned was the lack of support at home as well. SPED teachers do their best to help students at school but no follow-through at home could lead to delayed or loss of progress. Rihanna's responses focused on how SPED teachers felt underappreciated and had too heavy of a workload. Andy also discussed factors related to a lack of administrative support and not feeling like administrators were able to help him resolve his daily challenges in the classroom in a timely manner. He also discussed factors of stress, being over-worked, and not being able to take breaks could lead to burnout and SPED teachers leaving their teaching positions as well.

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### **Induction Program**

As credentialed teachers in the state of California, all beginning teachers must participate in a two-year induction program. For SPED teachers, what are your perceptions of the effectiveness of those induction programs in relation to your teaching position specifically?

Lily: Diddly squat. I was talking with this to my BTSA mentor, and we saw that there is not whole lot of emphasis on classroom management or managing difficult behaviors. Having taught ED and now teaching RSP with difficult 8<sup>th</sup> graders, specifically the ones we have now, on constant survival mode in the classroom...does the induction program show us how to do that? No, not really. Instructional practices you know sure, like cool ideas, but kinda like the same stuff I can pull off Pinterest. Collaborating with my other colleagues. All I see it as just a process, more hoops to jump through. As far as preparation for the classroom for real life, no I don't think so.

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Frank: The induction program is an absolute waste of time and only makes the job more irritating more frustrating and makes me want to quit sooner. It is a regurgitation of the same thing you get in a credential program. It's redundant, it just scrapes the surface, the mentorship is a joke b/c there's nothing about it that involves really close collaboration, did I say it was a joke? It doesn't do anything to take the book learning that you get in a credential program and put into the context of what it looks like in the real world and the classroom. All the issues that actually come up when you're a SPED teacher are never discussed or addressed in the induction program. There might be something you can talk to your mentor about, but there's all the busywork that they give you for the induction program that just makes you crazier as opposed to finding trainings or furthering your education or doing what the induction program was designed for in creating supports for retention to keep you in the job therefore the induction program is a waste of time in their current implementation or design.

Beyonce: I think BTSA is a good program in that it provides the beginning teacher a specific person they can connect to that they feel comfortable enough with to ask them for help. I think the meetings are somewhat beneficial but it depends on the BTSA student and their level of knowledge because sometimes I think it's not always the most productive time spent. I think just the connection of a person that two people together is the most valuable part of it. I think it's important that a new teacher has a person that they can go to and not feel guilty that they're asking for help or not feeling that they're being a problem because otherwise burnout can happen faster. So I do think there's value to it.



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Rihanna: For pre-school SPED it was really hard going to BTSA because I felt it was catered towards general education and definitely not pre-school. A lot of things didn't really relate or they would just talk about how to transition students for example. Like how they should be sitting at their desks, and quiet doing their work, so it's like well my students can't do any of that. It's kind of hard to see how you could alter what they're doing to make it fit what you're doing. Which it shouldn't be because I'm already adapting as a SPED teacher so I shouldn't have to adapt an induction program to what I'm doing. I've had friends or colleagues that did their induction programs at the college where they went so it's related more to SPED but I guess it's hard when you're all in a group and it's not really focused on you. In a way it's nice to meet other teachers and share experience. The most useful part was meeting other teachers and sharing experience but the assignments kind of felt like school all over again.

Andy: (laughter for 30 seconds or so) I'm just going to laugh at this one for a quick moment, because BTSA has no relevance in what we do. It's geared toward Gen ed let's just cut straight to the point. We had to modify it for ourselves to make it fit their criteria. I find it so odd that they put more work on us when we're new teachers. I understand that they're trying to get us to look at things differently or focus on EL learners, but we're new teachers, no need to put more work on us when we're trying to figure out our job at the same time trying to figure out our students and what we have to work with. So yeah, I'm not a big fan of BTSA.

Lily emphatically did not feel that the two-year induction program was helpful to her as a SPED teacher. She mentioned how it felt as if there were no focus on classroom management or

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behavior management. It was her strongest reaction to a question throughout this interview process. Frank also felt strongly about the ineffectiveness of the two-year induction and likened it to an extension of the teacher credential program. He also felt that it was very redundant and had no real-life connection or practicality. He added at the end of his response that it was currently not useful for SPED teachers in its current state which implied to the researcher that he felt that changes could be made to mitigate that. Beyonce had a more positive experience with BTSA. She felt that the BTSA mentor bond was a great support, but also admitted that the induction program could benefit from some changes. Overall, she was more positive about the induction program. Rihanna felt that the induction program was not useful for her, as it did not relate to her classroom or students. She was frustrated that she had to work extra to adapt the assignments that were given to her through the induction program. She also mentioned that it felt more like going to “school” again but that one positive aspect of the program was being able to meet and socialize with other new teachers. Andy had strong negative feelings toward the induction program. He felt that it had no relevance for SPED teachers and that the expectations were primarily designed for general education teachers. Andy did not like the extra amount of work given through the induction program and felt that beginning teachers already had enough to manage in terms of class management and IEP paperwork.

## **Teachers Perceptions of administrator’s effectiveness**

What are your perceptions of the effectiveness of an administrator who takes on a mentorship role with SPED teachers?

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Lily: I think that's a fabulous thing for admin to take on that mentorship role with SPED teachers. Hearing it that way, my last admin, he—I could look at him like that. He did take on that kind of mentorship with me. I taught middle school ED, he knew the age group, he must have had a special place in his heart for my class b/c it was probably very similar to what he taught many years ago. He also visited us and made an effort to connect with me and my staff and students. He was an admin too with suspensions and detentions, sometimes kids would see him as the bad guy. As hard as it may have been for him, even if he wouldn't admit it. At least like in terms of me and including my staff, it felt special to have that kind of attention and to know that he had the best intentions for my classroom and I definitely miss that for sure.

Frank: I think that should be an automatic. I think it's essential. I think, as I alluded to earlier, one of the reasons why SPED teachers get burnt out or frustrated are because of the lack of ongoing support in a meaningful way. I think that an administrator could fulfill that role or a more senior SPED teacher. If it were in a capacity of an administrator being a mentor I think it would make more sense provided the mentor was allocating really instructively dedicated time and energies to mentoring. So not just walking into the classroom sitting there for 30 mins writing some notes and discussion but actually maybe coming in and if they're not equipped to teach or write an IEP or conducting a meeting finding someone who is. Finding support for the teacher in an area of need actually guiding them in processes that they're not familiar or comfortable with. Really expanding their expertise finding ways to make their job easier more confident and I think it could look like a lot of things and it would be great.

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Beyonce: Does that happen? I think it could be a good thing if it could happen I've not seen it specifically but I think if you have the right administrator and they're willing to support and guide a beginning teacher I think that would be fantastic. Because typically they would have a different timeframe for when they could help them. I mean obviously it wouldn't be good if the admin wasn't good. But I think it could be a good thing.

Rihanna: I would like that, I'd hope that that's kind of what's going on anyway because my administrator is supposed to be kind of like a mentor to us teachers in general. How they're guiding us and kind of giving support is kind of what a mentor is. That's what I think it's like with how we have a program manager, I kind of look at that as having a mentor in a way. To ask questions about things. Or like the mentor have resources for us to try and things like that.

Andy: As an admin, I think it would be great. I have a mentor, but she's a high school teacher and she's done wonders because she's been in the class and given me great advice, and I think if admin were to do it, the relationship between the admin and the teacher would be stronger and they'd work together on figuring out solutions with students and curriculum and work and I think it'd be a lot stronger for the program if admin took a mentorship to some of the teachers.

Lily was greatly affected by this question, and truly seemed to enjoy reminiscing about the administrator that she had in her first year of teaching. She mentioned how supportive he was of her and how she felt special to have that kind of attention and support from her administrator. It was interesting to note how one of the key traits that she mentioned in her strong like of this

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administrator was his past career as a SPED teacher. This fits with her overall belief and answers earlier on how being well-versed in the world of SPED can make for more effective types of administrative support and administration overall. Frank enjoyed the idea of an administrator as a mentor, but also mentioned that a senior SPED teacher would be effective as well. He also had concrete ideas on what that mentorship would look like, and focused a lot on building up a SPED teacher's confidence and expertise. Beyonce was confused about this question and did not think that this type of mentorship was possible. She did state however that it would be great if such a mentorship did exist as long as the administrator was proficient. Rihanna liked the idea of a mentorship as well and hoped that it would already be a given for most new teachers to have this type of support. Andy also supported this idea and felt that it would build rapport between the administrator and teacher. He felt that the stronger relationship created from this type of mentorship would help increase collaboration and help solve challenges in the classroom.

## Themes

The findings show that there are several major themes that SPED teachers experience and advocate for when discussing administrative support. The first major theme is one of communication. SPED teachers all desire increased communication with their administrators as well as more transparency and honesty. Another major theme that was discussed was a desire for emotional support. Several examples of emotional support discussed were: being available, support for challenging IEP meetings or parent conflicts, honest feedback, creating a sense of value and appreciation for SPED teachers. The third and last major theme discussed about administrative support was the need for help in IEP/Administrative duties. The participants all

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desired more support in reducing the amount of administrative duties such as paperwork, IEP meetings, and parent conflict.

When discussing the shortage of SPED teachers, participants focused on several key factors. One key factor was teacher burnout due to feeling overwhelmed with the workload and the emotionally-taxing nature of working with students with special needs. Another key factor that participants discussed were a lack of emotional support and not feeling valued. The teacher induction program was also widely disliked by the majority of participants and overall not helpful.

Participants were positive discussing administrators as mentors and felt overall that this type of mentorship would only support and benefit SPED teachers. It would build rapport and help teachers and administrators work together to solve challenges and issues inside and outside the classroom. However, the participants did not necessarily know what this type of mentorship would look like or how it would be implemented.

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### Chapter 5 Discussion /Analysis

#### **Summary of Major Findings**

Participants interviewed all agreed that administrative support would be helpful and appreciative for SPED teachers. There was no consensus on one clear definition of administrative support. When asked to list the three most important types of administrative support the majority of participants stated that they desired better communication, more support with materials and curriculum, and increased support with IEP paperwork and meetings. The participants had several common responses for the retention interview question. Common themes and responses related to teacher burnout involved an increased workload for SPED teachers, emotionally-taxing situations specific to their students with special needs, and not feeling supported by administrators and/or families. All participants except for one had a negative view of the required induction program for all beginning teachers in California. The participants with a negative viewpoints had several commonalities with the induction program. They stated in a variety of responses that the induction program was an extension of the teacher credential program, time-consuming, and not relevant to their teaching practice. The one participant with a positive outlook of the induction program felt that it had a positive effect in terms of forming a positive mentorship with a veteran teacher and a beginning teacher. All participants felt that a mentorship between an administrator and a SPED teacher would be beneficial by providing increased support, building rapport, and fostering improved communication.

Additionally, the overall findings supported the theoretical rationale of Maslow (1943) and his theory of motivation in regards to his three basic needs of: 1) love, 2) esteem, and 3) self-

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actualization. In terms of love, the findings discussed how SPED teachers all desired increased support from administrators. For esteem, participants in the study discussed how they desired a need to feel appreciated and how they wanted to feel as if their administrators “cared for” and supported them as teachers and human beings. Lastly, for self-actualization, the research participants all expressed a desire for more professional development opportunities from administrators.

### **Comparison of Findings to the Literature**

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Researchers Bettini, Cheyney, Wang and Leko (2015) discussed how SPED teachers could be supported through social support, autonomy, and feedback as part of their research study. The researcher’s findings indicated that participants also agreed and stated that feedback, independence, and social support through professional development opportunities were important forms of administrative support. Billingsley and Cross (1992) discussed how lower levels of role conflict could help increase support and job satisfaction in SPED teachers. Several participants in the study discussed how additional administrative duties were a burden and not necessarily deemed “fair.” This compares to the levels of role conflict in that administrators could better support SPED teachers through reducing the additional administrative duties placed upon them and separating those duties by role and responsibilities. Steinbrecher, Fix, Mahal, and McKeown (2015) also discussed how role ambiguity was a negative factor for SPED teachers and how increased knowledge of administrators in SPED training could improve their support.



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Otto and Arnold (2005) discussed how perceptions of administrative support between veteran SPED teachers and beginning SPED teachers differed. The main findings were that veteran SPED teachers felt supported by their administration whereas beginning SPED teachers did not. In comparison to the research findings, all participants agreed that administrative support could be improved and increased in various methods. One factor discussed in the literature review but not as focused upon by the participants was the participants desire for increased, straightforward communication between SPED teachers and administrators. Another factor that was also discussed in the literature review but more of a need for participants interviewed was their desire for emotional support from their administrators. Overall, the literature review seemed to provide a general basis for what defines administrative support, but did not provide the concrete responses nor specified types of administrative support desired by the participants.

### *Shortage of SPED teachers*

Albrecht, Johns, Mounstevan, and Olorunda (2009) conducted a study that found that a lack of administrative support was a factor in SPED teacher decision-making when deciding to leave or stay at their respective teaching positions. All participants indicated that a lack of administrative support could lead to decreased teacher retention. Brunsting, Sreckovic and Lane (2014) discussed how administrative support was a factor in SPED teacher retention as well. The literature review findings seemed to agree on the importance of the role that administrative support had on the retention of SPED teachers. The findings of the study compared similarly to the research, with participants all desiring increased administrative support and stating how a lack of administrative support could lead to decreased rates in SPED teacher retention. Kennedy and Burstein (2004) did a study on the California induction program BTSA and concluded that it

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had an overall positive effect on teacher retention. In comparison, the majority of the participants found BTSA to be a negative experience with no relevance to their teaching position and completely unnecessary. Nance and Calabrese (2009) conducted a study on how the additional legal requirements of SPED teachers could lead to a decrease in teacher retention. A participant in the study made a direct comparison to this study, and other participants also discussed the negative effects of the increased legal requirement through extra paperwork and IEP legalities. Overall, many factors in the literature review that contributed to decreased SPED teacher retention compared directly to the findings of the study.

### *Administrators as Mentors*

All participants felt that an administrator and SPED teacher mentorship was a positive and desired such a relationship. The research in the literature review also compared favorably to the findings of this research study. For example, White and Mson (2006) discussed how mentorship for beginning SPED teachers were considered meaningful and helpful for all participants. Cancio, Albrecht and Johns (2014) conducted a study on how direct support from the principal could help retain SPED teachers who worked in more challenging and specific sub-categories of special education. Correa and Wagner (2011) found in their literature review that principals played an important and positive role for beginning SPED teachers by promoting a positive school environment. Madigan and Scroth-Cavataio (2012) discussed high-quality mentorship roles, which compared to the research findings in that a response discussed how a mentorship could only benefit SPED teachers if the administrator was capable.

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### **Limitations/Gaps in the Research**

The limitations of the research are that data were collected from only one school district. The sample size was small as well. The data did not include all SPED teachers, and did not consider SPED teachers' responsibility in terms of job duties. Of the five participants interviewed, only one teacher had more than ten years of experience. This could affect the data results as veteran teachers may have different thought processes and ideas compared to those of beginning teachers. Another limitation could also be the interview questions in that they were possibly too specific which may have caused some confusion in responses.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The findings of this study and comparisons to the literature all indicate how important it is to continue to focus on how administrators can best support SPED teachers. It may be beneficial to conduct research on forming universal guidelines and tenets for administrators to follow on how to best support SPED teachers and their diverse and specific needs. It would also be beneficial to conduct research that broadened administrative support to general education teachers for a comparison on their needs vs. the needs of SPED teachers.

The findings of this study also indicate that further research on mentorship programs between administrators and beginning SPED teachers could be beneficial and positive. It is also clear that further research on ways to integrate SPED curriculum and support into the BTSA program would be highly beneficial to beginning SPED teachers, as the findings of this study indicate that BTSA is primarily considered to be negative.

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### **Overall Significance of the Study**

This study provides helpful information for administrators, as well as special education teachers. The findings can help guide mentorship programs and provide guidelines for determining specific supports that SPED teachers need from their administration. This study can also help SPED teachers feel that their “voices” are being heard, which could improve their sense of self and overall job satisfaction. Implementing the findings of this research study could possibly help increase SPED teacher retention as well through increased job satisfaction and overall support for SPED teachers.

### **About the Author**

The author is a recent entry into the teaching profession. He enjoys being with his wife, going on hikes with his dog, and intellectual pursuits such as video games and comic books. He is currently a high school special day class teacher for students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD), and overall enjoys and derives great satisfaction from his job thanks to wonderful young adults and amazing co-workers. He strongly believes in traveling as a great equalizer and believes that everyone should do so at one point in their lives. Lastly, he feels that everyone should try to eat a shrimp and steak burrito at one point in their lives because they're great.

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