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## Mixed Methods Study of Special Education Training in Educational Leadership Preparation Programs in Rural Georgia

Robert Lewis-Vice

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A MIXED METHODS STUDY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TRAINING  
IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PREPARATION PROGRAMS  
IN RURAL GEORGIA

by Robert Lewis-Vice

This dissertation has been read and approved as fulfilling the partial requirement for the  
Degree of Doctor of Education in Curriculum and Leadership.

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IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PREPARATION PROGRAMS  
IN RURAL GEORGIA

By

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Columbus State University  
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Columbus, GA

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this journey to myself from high school drop out to doctoral degree!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my husband, Josef Vice, who started on this journey with me in 2015. Our journey of parenthood and life partners continues to grow hand in hand. I could not have completed this milestone without you. You have encouraged me along away and picked me up when I was down. You have taught me so much and have made me a better person and writer.

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## ABSTRACT

This research study addressed the problem that school leaders may not be adequately prepared to address the needs of an increasing population of students with special needs. The purpose of the study was to examine the difference between beliefs and perceptions of middle and high school leaders and special education teachers about the knowledge and skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively. The conceptual framework of this study focused on the preparation of principals and assistant principals at the university level through certification programs and district level programs. For this causal-comparative research design study, the quantitative and qualitative data were collected using a Demographics Survey, Knowledge and Skills in Special Education Survey, and Qualitative Questionnaire, which was sent to 78 school leaders and 209 special education teachers from middle and high schools in five rural areas of Georgia. Valid responses were collected from 59 participants. The quantitative data were analyzed using a series of one-way ANOVAs. The qualitative data were analyzed using color coding and theme analysis. While no statistically significant differences between the groups were found, school leaders perceived that special education law, accommodations, behavior management, and instructional strategies were four key areas that preparation programs needed, and special education teachers perceived that special education law, behavior management, co-teaching, and assessment should be addressed in educational leadership preparation programs. Future research is needed to further examine the topics presented during university-level and district-level programs. These findings support the need to provide additional, ongoing professional development on the current trends in special education for school leaders.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background of the Problem

Jones (2011), Keenoy (2012), and Burton (2008) confirmed that university leadership programs have not adequately prepared school leaders for the demands of the growing special education population in public schools. These researchers indicated that this lack of adequate preparation may be the result of inadequate focus on special education law in the preparatory curriculum that school leaders complete. As a result, school leaders may not be prepared for the realities and challenges of ensuring that students with special needs have their individual educational needs met.

Denisco (2013) reported that U.S. school districts spend approximately 90 million dollars annually on grievances that involve students with special needs. The state of Georgia had 70 due process hearing in 2013, 15 due process hearings in 2018, and 13 due process hearings in 2017 (Georgia Department of Education, 2019a). If training of school leaders could be improved, lawsuits, due process hearings, and non-compliance issues could possibly be reduced. Table 1 displays the number of formal complaints, complaints that were denied or insufficient, complaints that were withdrawn before resolution, and complaints that involved non-compliance from the Georgia Department of Education (2019b). Formal complaints filed have more than doubled from FY 2011-2012 to FY 2018-2019 (Georgia Department of Education, 2019b). Specifically, the number of formal complaints filed increased from 95 in FY 2011-2012 to 204 in FY 2018-2019

(Georgia Department of Education, 2019b). While many complaints were denied or withdrawn before resolution, the number of complaints that resulted in a demonstrated non-compliance finding also increased. In FY 2011-2012, 35 of the 95 formal complaints filed were deemed to have at least one non-compliance issue. In FY 2018-2019, 55 of the 204 formal complaints were judged to have issues with non-compliance (Georgia Department of Education, 2019b).

Table 1

*Georgia Department of Education: 2012-2019 Data for Special Education Formal Complaint Process*

Fiscal Year	Formal Complaints	Complaints that were Denied or Insufficient	Complaints Withdrawn Before Resolution	Complaints with At Least One Non-compliance Finding
July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2019	204	32	72	55
July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2018	170	36	66	37
July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017	127	0	34	43
July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016	128	0	33	43
July 1, 2014 – June 30, 201	120	0	32	30
July 1, 2013 – June 30, 2014	101	0	25	31
July 1, 2012 – June 30, 2013	120	0	47	32
July 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012	95	0	23	35

*Note.* The data source was Georgia Department of Education (2019b).

The rationale of this study was to evaluate the possibility of reducing lawsuits, improving instruction, and promoting the need for more training of school leaders. The right to a free appropriate public education established by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has impacted how students with special needs are

served in the public and private school sector. However, these laws may not be consistently and effectively applied and interpreted by local and state school systems. The results of the study, however, could help in the identification of specific gaps in the knowledge of special education law. This change could affect how school leaders are trained at the district level or university level. The study results could help reduce the number of lawsuits that create a financial burden on school districts across the nation.

The researcher investigated whether educational leadership preparatory programs adequately provided future school leaders with relevant special education knowledge and skills to implement special education programs effectively. The investigation also examined how school leadership addressed the growing special needs population and how they responded to the question of how to best meet the needs not only of these students but also the teachers who work with these students. These problems can include a non-compliance issue or failure of teachers or school leaders to follow an individualized education plan (IEP).

#### Statement of the Problem

A problem exists in U.S. public school system with implementing effective special education programs. That problem, specifically, is that school leaders are not adequately implement special education programs effectively in their schools. Educational leadership preparation programs lack adequate focus on federal, state, and local laws that affect the special education population in U.S. schools. Many factors contribute to this problem, including the growing special education population now mainstreamed into the general population, as well as the inadequate attention given to special education during educational leadership preparation at the district level and



university level. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge leading to a greater understanding of the relationship between educational leadership program preparation and school leaders' ability to implement special education programs effectively for the growing populations of students defined as having special needs.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the difference between beliefs and perceptions of middle and high school leaders and special education teachers about the knowledge and skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively using a concurrent triangulation mixed methods research design. In this quantitative component, survey items were used to collect data on knowledge and skills related to special education programming. The qualitative component included a short-answer questionnaire that compared the perceptions of implementing an effective special education program between middle and high school leaders and special education teachers. The reason for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data was to compare responses on Likert-type items with the open-ended items between school leaders and special education teachers.

#### Research Questions and Hypotheses

The purpose of the study was to examine the difference between beliefs and perceptions of middle and high school leaders and special education teachers about the knowledge and skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively. The following research questions were answered:

1. Quantitative: What is the difference between middle and high school leaders' beliefs and special education teachers' beliefs about the knowledge necessary to implement special education programs effectively?

$H_0$ : There is not a statistically significant difference between middle and high school leaders' beliefs and special education teachers' beliefs about the knowledge necessary to implement special education programs effectively.

$H_a$ : There is a statistically significant difference between middle and high school leaders' beliefs and special education teachers' beliefs about the knowledge necessary to implement special education programs effectively.

2. Quantitative: What is the difference between middle and high school leaders' beliefs and special education teachers' beliefs about the skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively?

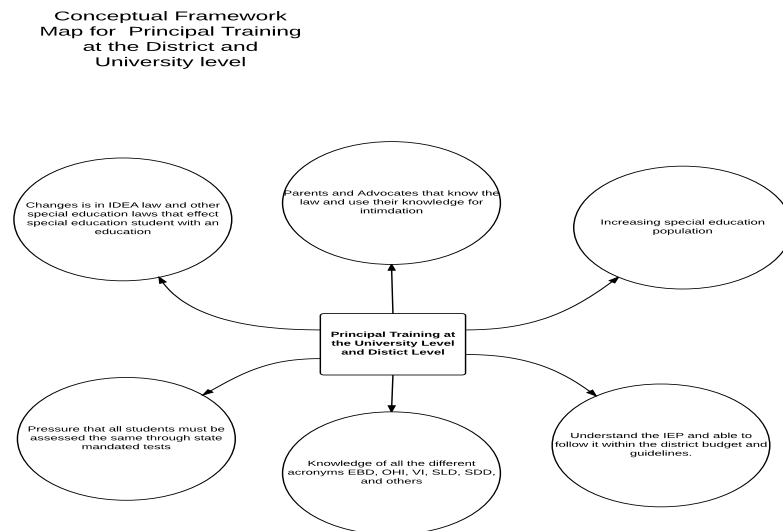
$H_0$ : There is not a statistically significant difference between middle and high school leaders' beliefs and special education teachers' beliefs about the skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively.

$H_a$ : There is a statistically significant difference between middle and high school leaders' beliefs and special education teachers' beliefs about the skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively.

3. Qualitative: How do perceptions of preparedness for implementing special education programs effectively compare between middle and high school leaders and special education teachers?

## Conceptual Framework

Imenda (2014) explained that the purpose of a conceptual framework is to help the researcher understand the main concepts in the study and guide the researcher in the interpretation of the data. The conceptual framework also integrates the literature review, which focused on the preparation of principals and assistant principals at the university level through certification programs and district-level leadership programs that are provided by the school district. The six components identified in Figure 1, The Conceptual Framework Map, have an effect on preparing principals and assistant principals for issues that could lead to non-compliance issues in educating students with special needs.



*Figure 1.* Conceptual Framework Map for Principal Training at the District and University level created by the researcher based on Lynn (2015), Landry (2011), and Keenoy (2012) on the deficits of educational leadership preparation.

One component is the current changes in the special education law. Principals and assistant principals need to be aware of the changes and updates to the current laws and procedures in special education. Another component is that principals and assistant principals need to be aware of all the recent changes regarding special education so that parents and advocates do not negatively influence them. Another component is, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016), an increase of students with special needs, including students with autism, with a specific learning disability, or with an intellectual disabilities. This increase of students with special needs has had a significant impact on the educational system by necessitating the hiring of more special education teachers and paraprofessionals. Testing is another component, as every principal and assistant principal wants to increase College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) scores. Each year, a school is evaluated and is given a CCRPI score. Within that score is an area of academic growth from students who have been identified with special needs. Many of the students who have special needs do not perform well on the state mandated tests, and their scores are incorporated into the school's CCRPI score. Therefore, principals and assistant principals should be aware of the testing accommodations and how to improve their schools' CCRPI score. The use of acronyms in special education is another variable, which can be frustrating and are always changing. Principals and assistant principals should be aware of and understand the difference between specific learning disabled, which is represented with the acronym SLD, and significant developmental delayed, which is represented with the acronym SDD. The last component is understanding that the IEP is a legal document and must be followed even though, at times, the budget does not allow for the hiring of another

teacher or paraprofessional. Principals and assistant principals should become advocates for those students and educate others in the district office on what is best for students with special needs.

### Methodology Overview

Creswell (2009) explained that, through a concurrent triangulation strategy of a mixed methods research design, qualitative and quantitative data can be collected at the same time, such as administering a survey and short-answer questionnaire together. Both data sources are needed to triangulate the findings (Creswell, 2009). For the quantitative phase, the causal-comparative research design was the appropriate model that aligned with the research questions because, as Tuckman and Harper (2012) noted, this research design helps “generate hypotheses about the causes of a specific state or condition (p. 201). Schenker and Rumrill (2004) further explained the value of causal-comparative research design exploring the differences between an outcome of two groups or dependent variables. Another important aspect of causal-comparative research design is that it provides a “structure for examining group differences when causal inference is not the primary purpose of the study” (Schenker & Rumrill, 2004, p. 118). The literature review indicated a need for a revision in how school leaders are trained, but the literature did not indicate the specific curriculum revisions needed to better prepare a school leader for addressing the challenges that arise as a result of the growing population of students with special needs. Tuckman and Harper (2012) further explained that the purpose of causal-comparative research is to help researcher identify potential causes that often can be tested more directly by manipulation of the qualitative and quantitative data.

The qualitative phase of the current study included short-answer items on the perceptions of implementing a special program effectively. Baxter and Jack (2008) indicated that a descriptive case study explains an intervention or phenomenon in a real-life context in which it occurred. Baxter and Jack continued to explain that case study research enables the researcher to answer “how” and “why” questions. Baxter and Jack further explained that embedded units enable the researcher to analyze data across different sources and explore the global impact of problems.

The participants of the study included current principals, assistant principals, and special education teachers who were employed in five rural middle and high school districts. Demographic Survey (Appendix A), Knowledge and Skills in Special Education (KSSE) Survey (Appendix B), and short-answer qualitative questionnaire (Appendix C) were administered electronically through Qualtrics. As an incentive, participants who completed the surveys were entered into a random drawing for a \$10 Starbuck’s gift card. The participant whose name was randomly selected was emailed an electronic gift card two weeks after the close of the survey. Quantitative data from the survey were entered into SPSS version 24 program, and a series of one-way ANOVA was conducted. Qualitative data from the short-answer items were analyzed through color coding and concurrent themes. The quantitative and qualitative data were merged and presented in a table for comparison (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013).

#### Limitations

This study utilized data that were collected from special education teachers, assistant principals, and principals at the middle and high school levels in the rural area of Georgia. One limitation was that the researcher may have a professional relationship with

some of the participants who were selected for the survey. The researcher has worked in the area for over 17 years and has been involved in the local educational system as a parent and as a teacher. Another limitation was that the sample was confined to areas in rural Georgia, which may affect generalizability. The third limitation was the number of participants who agreed to complete the survey and answer the questions without bias. Participants may not have wanted to complete the survey due to time restrictions. Some participants may also have felt that their loyalty to their school district or university that they attended was far more important than identifying weaknesses in their program of study, and they, therefore, might not have been willing to answer the questions with honesty.

#### Assumptions

Non-compliance issues are complex, as Wright and Wright (2007) noted. Various factors can be contributed to non-compliance issues beyond the preparation received during an educational leadership program. IDEA itself stipulates that individual state departments of education are responsible for defining expectations, supervising their multiple school districts, and fulfilling IDEA mandates for making sure students with special needs have those needs met. Individual state, county, and city budgets also have an effect on non-compliance, as budgets may not provide for adequate continual training and professional development that ensures that not only school leaders but also teachers are up to date on changes to special education laws and how to best implement them. Training of special education teachers and paraprofessionals also can contribute to non-compliance issues. Individual perceptions of what is an appropriate education, as well as potential conflicts and biases among rulings by judges who are tasked with interpreting

special education law can also complicate this ever-changing issue. Levels of parental involvement and advocacy can impact this issue as well, but equally problematic, according to The National Council on Disability (2018), may be the process for defining who is eligible for an IEP, the process, and economic challenges involved in filing complaints and challenging decisions. Finally, complicating this issue is the growing demands created by an increase in the population of students defined as having special needs and the overall challenges of defining equal opportunity.

#### Definition of Terms

The following terms are consistent throughout the dissertation.

1. *Assistant principal*, also known as the vice principal, is an entry level position in educational administration who helps the principal in the overall running of the school (Room 241, 2017).
2. *Free appropriate public education* consists of educational instruction designed to meet the unique needs of a student with disabilities, supported by such services that permit the student to benefit from instruction (Lusk, 2015).
3. *Inclusion* is defined by students who are in the general education setting for 80% of the school day (Kurth, Toews, McCabe, McQueston, & Johnston, 2019).
4. *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA)* replaced The Education for All Handicapped Children Act. It protects children and infants with disabilities and ensures special education services to students who are eligible to receive those services (Keogh, 2007).
5. *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004)* was a revision of the Individuals with Disabilities Act and aligned with the No



Child Left Behind Act. The revisions included an emphasis on educational goals and highly qualified special education teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

6. *Least restrictive environment* is a term that was defined in IDEA. If a student has a disability, he or she has the right to be educated among his or her peers in a general education classroom (Demitchell & Kearns, 1997).
7. *Knowledge* is a fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).
8. *Knowledge gap* refers to either areas of knowledge missing in order to comprehend a given subject fully, or, as Guskey (2009) noted, the difference between beliefs and perceptions and actual information or information demonstrated by research, evidence, and facts.
9. *No Child Left Behind Act* was an update to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The Act is responsible for the federal government holding schools responsible for student achievement (Dee & Jacobs, 2011).
10. *Principal* has many roles and responsibilities for a school and its performance. A principal is the supervisor of all employees including teachers, maintenance workers, administrative staff workers, and any other employee of the school (Principal Career Guide, 2019).
11. *School leader* is principal, assistant principal, or other individual who is an employee or officer of an elementary school, secondary school, or local educational agency. He or she is responsible for daily instructional leadership and

managerial operations in an elementary or secondary school (National Association of Elementary Principals, 2019).

12. *Skills* are the application of knowledge to complete a given task. Skills are the "performance" of knowledge, as well as being the "foundation for acquiring new knowledge" (Mumford, Peterson, & Childs, 1999, p. 50).
13. *Special education teacher* includes any teacher who works with students who have learning, mental, emotional, or physical disabilities. They adapt general education lessons and teach various subjects to students (Sokanu Interactive Inc, 2019).
14. *Students with disabilities*, as defined by IDEA, refers to a child with mental retardation, hearing impairment, speech and language impairment, visual impairment, serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, and/or specific learning disabilities; or a child who needs special education services (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

#### Significance of the Study

The significance of the study lies in the possibility of reducing lawsuits, improving instruction, and promoting the need for more training of school leaders. IDEA, which guarantees a free appropriate public education, has impacted how students with special needs who are served in the public and private school sector. However, these laws may not be consistently and effectively applied and interpreted by local and state school systems. The results of the study, however, could help lead to a change in the course requirements for educational leadership certification. This change could affect how

school leaders are trained at the district level or university level. The study results could help reduce the number of lawsuits that create a financial burden on school districts across the United States.

### Summary

Understanding the legal guidelines and establishing a plan for inclusion will help school leaders and school districts more effectively meet the needs of all students and improve how school districts and universities prepare these school leaders to reduce the number of appeals and lawsuits in the public educational system (Conrad & Whitaker, 1997). This training should occur at the university level and district level to support the needs of students with special needs in the classroom. This support includes testing accommodations, IEP compliance issues, basic knowledge of the various acronyms that identify students with disabilities, and the understanding of the IDEA Law. Research by Jones (2011), Keenoy (2012), and Burton (2008) indicated that more courses need to be designed to prepare school leaders to meet the needs of students with special needs and to address the legal problems that might otherwise occur due to lack of training and preparation. The purpose of this concurrent triangulation mixed methods research study was to examine the difference between beliefs and perceptions of middle and high school leaders and special education teachers about the knowledge and skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides an historical and legislative overview of relevant changes in the U.S. educational system that have had an impact on special education. It further examines relevant research that focuses on current preparatory programs for school leaders. The chapter also analyzes the impact knowledge of special education law may have on school leader effectiveness as well as how limited knowledge of special education law can impact school districts. The chapter finally reviews solutions to this problem that have been proposed by other researchers.

#### An Overview of Historical and Legislative Cases

In this dissertation, the following cases were explored, and the ramifications of these cases were discussed and why they are important in the training of school leaders. History has a problem of repeating itself; however, when school leaders understand the history and relevance of these cases and their impact on the learning process of and the legal rights of students with special needs, future lawsuits may be avoided. The cases being discussed either have changed policy or have changed expectations and requirements for how the needs of students who are served by special education should be met in public education.

#### Segregation

*Brown v. Board of Education* was argued December 9, 1952 in the U.S. Supreme Court in Topeka, Kansas. This case had a dramatic effect on IDEA by shedding light on

how students with special needs were being educated in the United States. Herzig (2015) explained, “Although Brown challenged the practice of school segregation based on race, the principle of equal educational opportunity in Brown laid the foundation for two subsequent cases, PARC and Mills” (p. 955). Fedders (2018) identified the relevance of Brown v. Board on special education by explaining how students with disabilities were educated during this time period. Just as African American students were segregated, students with disabilities were often not allowed to be included with general education students in public education and were often taught in boiler rooms, basements, and institutions (Fedders, 2018, p. 882).

#### Educational Services

In this case, Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children sued the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania on October of 1971 for discrimination of students who were denied a free appropriate public education due to their intellectual age, inability to self-care, and their challenges with transitioning to a general educational setting (*PARC v. Commonwealth*, 1972). The ARC of Pennsylvania is an organization that is affiliated with the national organization, The ARC of the United States, which is a non-profit advocacy group that assists families and children who are intellectually disabled. This organization’s primary goal 68 years ago was to fight against society’s expectations that children with disabilities should be institutionalized (*The ARC of Pa.*, 2018). Thirteen families along with the Pennsylvania for Retarded Children argued that the students would benefit from a public education. The courts found that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s practices were unconstitutional and denied an appropriate education to students who were intellectually disabled (*PARC v. Commonwealth*, 1972).

In *Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia*, a civil action lawsuit was brought against the District of Columbia in August of 1972. The case involved seven children who were denied an education because of their behavior problems or problems associated with their limited intellectual abilities, as well as issues with the students being defined as emotionally disturbed or hyperactive (*Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia*, 1972). The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that students who are identified as disabled could not be denied a free appropriate public education (*Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia*, 1972). The U.S. Supreme Court also concluded that the students were also denied an education without due process, which was a factor in this case where the courts outlined the due process requirements that involved students with disabilities.

Both cases, *Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia* and *PARC v. Commonwealth*, played a significant role in the creation of today's IDEA. Both cases dealt with the denial of educational services due to the students' disability, whether they were mentally challenged or faced behavioral challenges. The courts held and supported that all children, regardless of their disability, are entitled to a public education, but the courts also explained that a district's limited financial resources could not be a reason to deny services for any student with special needs (Koseki, 2017, p. 802). These legal cases are important because negative student behavior and limited resources are factors that could have impact on how a school leader resolves a particular problem in their building, which could result in a lawsuit.

## Congressional Acts

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was a bill passed by Congress and sponsored by Representative John Brademas. This bill extended civil rights to individuals with disabilities. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is responsible for the Section 504 plan that protects students and employees from being discriminated in the workplace or schools. In the case of a student who has been diagnosed with a disability, but does not require an IEP, a 504 plan can be written by a team including counselors, parents, teachers, and school leaders. A 504 plan is a written plan that addresses how the student's disability impacts the learning environment (Woodworth, 2016, p. 56). The main difference between an IEP and a 504 plan is that an IEP has specific goals that have to be addressed and measured every year. A 504 plan does not have specific goals but strategies that have to be followed either by a nurse or general education teacher. A student with a 504 plan may receive testing accommodations due to their disability, including students who have been diagnosed with attention-deficit disorder or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (Rehabilitation Act of 1973). This act also covers medical needs for students who have diabetes or life-threatening allergies. A school leader should know the difference between a 504 plan and an IEP plan and that they are followed through with fidelity. A school leader may be asked to review or be invited to a 504 plan or an IEP meeting. Testing accommodations are also important so that a student receives the correct testing accommodation according to the IEP and 504 plans.

The Development Disabilities Act and Bill of Rights Act of 1975 was introduced to the House of Representatives in February of 1975 by the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce and was passed in Congress on June 2, 1975. This bill

extended the definition of the term *developmental disability* to include specific conditions, such as mental retardation, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism, and dyslexia. This bill also allowed and provided funding for university centers, organizations, and advocacy programs. Many of these programs created jobs and centers for the disabled to go to after they have completed a public education. The question of what constituted appropriate education for students with a disability was left for the courts to decide, and many educators questioned the idea of inclusion and its educational worth (Borson, 2017, p. 18). Each act or court case is a small step to how students with special needs are served today in the general education classroom.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act was the predecessor for IDEA. Keogh (2007) explained that the 1960s and 1970s were an optimistic time for special education, including for teachers and students, because a new focus was on improving the education of students with special needs (p. 66). President John F. Kennedy had an interest on mental retardation due to his older sister, Rosemary, who was intellectually disabled. Federal funding also supported early intervention programs, including Head Start. (Keogh, 2007, p. 66). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act was debated in the U.S. Congress from April to June of 1975. The consensus was not all children with disabilities are educated the same or equal. The Act required an education plan with specific learning goals for each student, which is referred to as an IEP (Keogh, 2007, p. 68).

#### Due Process

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the case *Goss v. Lopez* of 1975 mandated the need for due process if a student with disabilities is suspended from school from 1 to



10 days. The court specifically ruled that students must be given an oral or written explanation of the charges that were brought against them. If the student denies the charges, the authorities have an opportunity to explain the student's side in due process. Also called the Goss Rule, this decision protects students with disabilities of being suspended for more than 10 days without due process (Zirkel & Covelle, 2009). Vince (2017) concluded that *Goss v. Lopez* determined that public education is a property interest protected by the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which protects individuals from a government body, such as principal and other administrators in a public school (Vince, 2017, p. 260). Vince (2017) also explained that the case *Goss v. Lopez* is very important today due to students being reprimanded for using social media inappropriately, but Vince also noted that students with special needs are protected by this case by having a due process hearing and being able to explain their side of the story. Mott (2017) explained that since *Goss v. Lopez* ruling, educational due process has exploded in the federal court system. A school leader should understand the Goss rule because it serves as the main framework for education due process claims.

#### Testing and Qualifying for Services

In 1984, *Marshall v. Georgia* was a class action lawsuit filed on behalf of African American students in Georgia, alleging discrimination in assignment to special education programs in regular education tracking (Reschly & Kicklighter, 1985). The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and 35 individuals sued the state of Georgia and asked the court to end the discriminatory practices of grouping and placement into special education classes. The plaintiffs requested random assignment for general education students and learners with special needs. Judge Edenfield from the

Federal District Court in Savannah Georgia rejected all plaintiff complaints concerning discrimination, but, in his written opinion, he cited inadequacies in the monitoring procedures before a student qualifies for services in special education. This case is important because after the ruling of *Marshall v. Georgia*, Georgia focused on providing high quality research-based instruction, interventions, and data driven practices to help all students succeed (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). The ruling in *Marshall v. Georgia* is known for creating the response to intervention process, which is a four-tier system of progress monitoring of students who are having difficulties in the general education setting. Tier 1 includes all students; Tier 2 includes interventions that target a specific need or skill; Tier 3 is when the Student Support Team decides if the interventions are successful or not successful, while Tier 4 is the stage of educational testing for special education services.

The following important cases, *Diana v. California State Board of Education* (1970) and *Lorenzo P v. Riles* (1984), involve how students are tested and qualify for special education services. A school leader should understand how a student qualifies for special education because, if a parent disagrees with the outcome, a school leader should be able to explain the process. In 1970, Diana and seven other children, who were Mexican American students, were placed in a special education classroom after they scored low on an IQ test that was given in English (*Diana vs. State Board of Education*, 1970). This case was never contested in the court system but was resolved in the appeals process. After the IQ test was given in the students' native language, the results showed that the students did not qualify for special education services, and the students were returned to the general education setting. The court ruled that non-English proficient

children cannot be placed in a special education setting on the basis of an IQ test that was not given in the student's native language (*Diana vs. State Board of Education*, 1970).

Another case that involved psychological testing is *Lorenzo P v. Riles* (1984). Larry and five other African American students were the plaintiffs in the case *Larry P v. Riles* that was filed against the San Francisco Unified School District of California Department of Education in 1971 (Earnest, 2015). The plaintiffs argued that IQ tests were racially and culturally biased against specific racial groups, especially African Americans (Earnest, 2015). The court found that IQ tests could not be used to qualify African American students for special education even with parental consent in the state of California (Earnest, 2015). The case continued to appeal in the courts in 1979 and 1984 by African American parents who argued that they could not receive help for their children who were having difficulty learning in California state schools. Every year, the Georgia Department of Education and other states report on the disproportion number of African American males in special education, and some school districts are fined based on their increase of African American males who have qualified for services. The research concluded in 1994 that African Americans accounted for 16% of the U.S. public enrollment, but the special education for African Americans should be in the range of 1.6% and would be considered disproportionate outside the range of 14.4% to 17.6% (Beth & Mary, 1994, p. 602). The research also stated that the entire testing process is biased by virtue of placing at a disadvantage those students whose cultural and social experiences do not include the kinds of information and skills that are included on the psychological assessments (Beth & Mary, 1994, p. 610).

Severe and Profound Disabilities

Timothy W. was born two months prematurely and had a variety of physical and medical impairments. He was identified as severely retarded with multiple handicaps. The Rochester New Hampshire School District decided that Timothy W. was not eligible for special education services. The court decided that the district's actions were a violation of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act. Timothy's mother argued that he did respond to sensory stimuli and did qualify for an educational program. The courts supported this case and established the term "education for all", which was defined as all students having the right to an educational program, including students with severe and profound disabilities (*Timothy W., etc., v. Rochester, New Hampshire, School District*, 1989). DeMitchell and Kearns (1997) discussed the importance of the Timothy Case by confirming that a school district does not have the authority of withholding an education to a student with special needs, especially if he or she is not capable of benefiting from an education (p. 162). This case is significant to school leaders because it established a relationship with the parents of children who were severely disabled and their understanding of their rights for an education.

#### Discipline

Honig v. Doe (1988) was a case in San Francisco, California, that involved a student who was suspended indefinitely for violent and disruptive conduct related to his disability. The stay-put provision allows students to remain in their current placement if the dangerous behavior is related to their disability (Powell, 1987). The court stated that a suspension for more than 10 days constituted as a change of placement, which was in violation of the IDEA's protection (Powell, 1987). Honig v. Doe protects students from being suspended for more than 10 days based on their disability. Scholars, including

Taylor and Baker (2001), support *Honig v. Doe* by reminding school leaders and IEP teams to develop behavior intervention plans to support the school wide discipline plan by correcting the negative behavior (Taylor & Baker, 2001, p. 29). Rock and Bateman (2009) supported Zirkel (2006), also cautioning education professionals of the need to decrease the number of due process hearings and encouraging school personnel to broaden their knowledge of special education law (Rock & Bateman, 2009, p. 61). School leaders should understand the “stay put” rule and the 10-day suspension rule in order for students with disabilities to be protected under the law.

In 1994, Lauren Light was a middle school student at Parkway Middle School where she demonstrated violent behaviors, including biting and hitting students and disrupting lessons. The parents recommended a least restrictive environment in a general setting with two assistants. Lauren bit a student, resulting in her receiving a 10-day suspension, which the parents responded with a stay-put provision, resulting from the previous *Honig v. Doe* case (*Light v. Parkway C-2 School District*, 1994). In the hearing, Parkway Middle School had to prove a two-part test. The first part was that the school system proved in court that the current placement showed that the student was likely to injury herself or others. The second part was that Parkway Middle School had done all that it was required to do to protect the child from hurting herself and others. The court system agreed with Parkway Middle School, based on the evidence that the student was not in the correct placement and was requested to attend another school that would best fit the needs of the student (*Light v. Parkway C-2 School District*, 1994). The court ruled in favor for the Parkway School District because it had followed IDEA. Etscheidt (2006) stated that a student who exhibits violent tendencies should receive behavioral

intervention services designed to address the behavior or violation and that schools can ensure school safety and provide an appropriate education for students with special needs (Etscheidt, 2006, p. 83).

#### Private Schools

In 2002, the parents of a student with an emotional and behavioral disorder argued that the Bismarck School District was in violation of a free appropriate public education when they did not provide support for an IEP when the student attended a private program. This case extended the definition of appropriateness to include private school placement for students with disabilities (Monahan & Torres, 2010). The courts in this case expanded the understanding of what is appropriate by considering two factors: 1) the restrictiveness of the educational placement and the ability of the school district to provide activities with nondisabled peers and 2) the amount of academic, not just behavioral, progress the child makes (Monahan & Torres, 2010). The courts agreed with the Bismarck School District and did not find that they were in violation of free appropriate public education. The parents were also requesting a financial reimbursement due to travel cost and housing expenses based on the change of the educational setting, which the court denied.

#### Least Restrictive Environment

In this case, a Maryland federal court agreed that a public school provided a student with learning disabilities with a fundamental life skills course of study. The court also ruled that her parents were not entitled to tuition reimbursement for an out-of-state program (Education, 2001). Another example where the parents disagreed with the program that was provided by a public school system and requested for the district to pay

for a private school setting. The court system agreed with the school system and did not find this case in violation of a free appropriate public education. This case also clarified the definition of a least restrictive environment in a private school setting (Tissot, 2011).

Figure 2 displays the concept chart for an overview of historical and legislative cases.

Case/Year	City, State	Participants	Argument	Final Decision
Brown v. Board of Education (1954)	Topeka, Kansas	Oliver Brown v. Topeka Board of Education	Segregation was a violation of the 14th amendment of equal protection clause.	The court ruled for the integration of public schools.
Diana V. California State Board of Education (1970)	San Francisco, California	California State Board of Education v. Diana (nine other students)	Non-speaking English students were being administered psychological testing in English when English was not their primarily language.	The court ruled for Diana and an I.Q. tests could not be used to determine if a student was uneducable or identified as a student with disabilities if English was not their home language.
Marshall v. Georgia (1984)	Savannah, Georgia	Ollie Marshall et al. v. Georgia	The NAACP and 35 African American students sued the state of Georgia asking the court to disagree to the discriminating practices of grouping and placement into special education classes.	The court ruled for the state of Georgia. The opinion of court recommended a procedure to be implemented to qualify or not to qualify students into special education. The student support team and the tiered response to intervention system was created and implemented.
Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia (1972)	Washington, DC	Peter Mills et al. v. Board of Education of District of Columbia	Students were being denied an education due to behavioral issues.	The court claimed that the District of Columbia board of education had an obligation to provide education for all students,

Case/Year	City, State	Participants	Argument	Final Decision
				regardless of their disability.
PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1972)	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	Nancy Beth Bowman et al. v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, David H. Kurtzman	The parents argued that an individual was denied a public education who had reached the age of eight but had not reached the mental age of five.	Judge Masterson ruled that the law was unconstitutional restricting students from age 6 to 21.
Goss v. Lopez (1975)	Washington, DC	Norval Goss (Columbus Ohio Public School System) v. Dwight Lopez (nine other students)	Ten students were denied due process to a hearing prior to suspension.	The court ruled that Columbus Public School administrative code was unconstitutional.
Lorenzo P v. Riles (1984)	San Francisco, California	Lorenzo (five other students) v. Wilson Riles San Francisco Unified School District	The argument was that the I.Q. test were racially biased against African Americans.	The court ruled that I.Q. tests were a violation of the Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, and the equal-protection clauses of both the state and federal constitutions.
Honig v. Doe (1988)	Washington, DC	John Doe v. Bill Honig (California Super Intendant of Public School Instruction)	John Doe argued that indefinite suspension was a violation of a free appropriate public education.	The court ruled in favor for the John Doe for failure of indefinite suspension for disruptive behavior, which was a violation of a free appropriate public education.
Timothy W v. Rochester New Hampshire School District (1989)	Concord, New Hampshire	Timothy W., Etc., Plaintiff, v. Rochester, New Hampshire, School District,	Timothy was denied a public education based on his disability, and the Rochester New	The court ordered the Rochester New Hampshire School District to provide an educational program based on



Case/Year	City, State	Participants	Argument	Final Decision
		Defendant, Appellee	Hampshire District found Timothy uneducable.	the student's educational needs.
Light v. Parkway (1994)	St. Louis, Missouri	Martin, Diane, and Lauren Light v. C-2 Parkway Central Middle School	The parents filed an appeal to change the placement of a student that was allegedly violent that was placed by the school district.	The U.S. Court of Appeals of the 8th circuit stated that accommodations were made to meet the needs of the student. The court ordered that Lauren Light be removed from her current placement.
Steinberg v. Weast (2001)	Baltimore, Maryland	Cassie Steinberg et al., Plaintiffs, v. Jerry D. Weast et al., Defendants.	Cassie's parent brought a claim against IDEA for refusal to pay for private school that was located out of state.	The court upheld the appropriateness of district's proposed placement of the child in segregated public school rather than private residential school.
Reese v. Board of Education of Bismarck R-V School District (2002)	St. Louis, Missouri	Joel Spencer Reese, by his parents and next friends, Luann Reese and Joel Reese, Plaintiffs, v. Board of Education of Bismarck R-V School District, Defendant.	The parents of Joel Reese, a student with an emotional and behavioral disorder, argued that the Bismarck School District was in violation of a free appropriate public education when they did not provide support for an IEP when he attended a private program.	The court ruled that a reimbursement for the 1998-1999 school year was denied. The school board was directed to provide eight weeks of compensatory services in a self- contained setting with a therapeutic component within the district.

Figure 2. Concept Chart for An Overview of Historical and Legislative Cases.

## Federal Mandates

### Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004

In November of 2004, U.S. Congress passed the reauthorization of IDEA, which became known as IDEA 2004. This reauthorization brought several changes to the current IDEA law that included triennial reviews, summary of performance, an increase in age from 14 to 16 for a transition plan, new eligibility criteria for learning disabled, and parental right to request an evaluation even if the team disagrees. IDEA 2004 focused on providing the students with special needs with documentation that they can use in their adult life (Joseph & Stan, 2006).

### No Child Left Behind Act

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, was signed into law on January 8, 2002 by President George W. Bush. It was created to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so no child was left behind. The law was written for the public elementary and secondary schools and targeted low socio-economic areas. The law targeted students with special needs, non-English speaking students, and minority students. No Child Left Behind Act expanded the federal role in public education through further emphasis on annual testing, annual academic progress, report cards, and teacher qualifications, as well as significant changes in funding. It also allowed the states to develop their own standards and objectives for adequate yearly progress. This law influenced public education and the desire to improve education for low-socio economic areas. It helped increased school choice by increasing the numbers of charter schools. It also influenced President Barack Obama's Race to the Top program.

## Individualized Education Plans

In 1992, *Doe v. Withers* involved a high school student with special needs where the general education teacher refused to follow the student's IEP regarding testing accommodations. The Court held that the general education teacher should be held accountable for not following the IEP, and the parents received a settlement based on the teacher's actions. This case could lead to a new wave of litigation on behalf of students with disabilities whose IEPs are not being followed in the general education classrooms (Zirkel, 1994).

In 2015, *Phyllene W v. Huntsville City Board of Education* the 11th Circuit denied a free appropriate public education because there was a failure to conduct necessary evaluations, which included a hearing evaluation by the school system. The parents suspected that their child was hearing impaired and argued that the IEP was not meaningful or effective based on the evaluations (Bateman, 2011). In this case, the parents claimed that their child did not make progress and the IEP was not followed or written correctly. The final court decision was for the appellant Phyllene W.

The *Fry v. Napoleon Community School District* case set the precedent for allowing service animals to assist students with disabilities in a school setting. Elhena was a preschool student who had a one-on-one paraprofessional but also needed the assistance of a service to dog to assist with bathroom needs, picking up papers, and balancing. The school system refused to allow the student to bring the service animal to school, but the student's parents filed suit against the school system for failure to follow the IEP. The term that was significant in this case was the "exhaustion rule" pertaining to the IDEA law. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the service dog was covered.

*Amanda C v. Clark County School District* involved a student with autism. The student was in a private setting, and an IEP was never developed based on the student's needs. Another important fact is that the parents were not involved in the decision of the IEP (Wrightslaw, 2001). The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit ruled in favor of the student's family. The ruling stated that IDEA was violated and concluded that the student's school district had not disclosed all records to the student's family and, therefore, had denied the student her rights to a free appropriate public education.

#### School District

*J. P. v. School of Hanover City* case involved a student with autism where the parents disagreed with the IEP and proved in federal court that the IEP was inadequately written. The U.S. Court of Appeals ordered the Hanover City School System to pay for private school as a result (Wrightslaw, 2008).

*Winkelman v. Parma City School District* case involved a pre-kindergarten student with Autism Spectrum Disorder where the parents wanted their child to attend a private setting that specialized in autism. In this case, the parents wanted to represent themselves without an attorney. U.S. Supreme Court Justices Scalia and Kennedy found that the parents could represent themselves without an attorney to plead their case. The conclusion was that parents have a substantive right to a free appropriate public education under IDEA (Steiner, 2008).

In a 2009 case, *Forest Grove School District v. T. A.*, the U.S. Supreme Court held that IDEA authorizes parents to be reimbursed for private special education services (Blumberg, 2010). In 2003, Forest Grove School District evaluated a student, identified as T.A. The evaluation concluded that the student suffered from depression and attention-

deficit/hyperactivity disorder, as well as emotional and behavioral issues, but the evaluation concluded that these issues did not impact his educational performance (Kraft, 2010, pp.283-284). T.A.'s parents removed him from Forest Grove School District and enrolled him in a private educational facility because of T.A.'s issues with drug dependency. The private educational facility also treated T.A. for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and emotional behavioral disorders. The parents of T.A. then petitioned the Forest Grove School District, arguing that they should be reimbursed for T.A.'s treatment because the school failed to follow the regulations and guidelines for a free appropriate public education. Although the U.S. Supreme Court ultimately found in favor of the parents, Blumberg (2010) stated that the one Justice's dissent argued that the ruling would create a "perverse incentive for school districts" in cases involving failure to evaluate students and identify students for special education (p.165). Bloomberg further concluded that the decision in *Forest Grove School District v. T.A.* only affects the families who can afford to place their children in private schools based on economic status. Families who are struggling financially do not have this option when school districts deny special education services for students who are in need.

On September 29, 2016, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to review the case, *Endrew F v. Douglas County School District RE-1*. This case focused on the issue of whether public schools that receive public funds must offer a substantial effort or make a reasonable effort to educate children with special needs. The appeal from a lower court argued that, in this particular case, the IEP was inadequate because the student had not shown measurable progress on the educational goals, and there were no considerations of the student's increasing behavior problems. Joseph and Jennifer F, the parents of Endrew,

denied the fifth-grade IEP, withdrew him from the Douglas County District, and enrolled him into a private school that specialized in Autism Spectrum disorders. The parents requested tuition reimbursement under free appropriate public education due to inadequate educational services that were being provided by Douglas County Services. The parents were denied tuition reimbursement by Douglas County School District. The decision of the lower court stated, “Because the IDEA provides that reimbursement is due only where the school district has not made a FAPE [free appropriate public education] available to the child, we find the parents are not entitled to the compensation they seek” (Endrew F. v. Douglas County School System, 2017). The U.S. Supreme Court finalized their court decision in support of the parents. Figure 3 displays the concept chart for a continuation of historical and legislative cases that involve federal mandates.

Case/Year	City, State	Participants	Argument	Outcome
Doe v. Withers (1992)	Grafton, West Virginia	John and Jane Doe parents of their minor son D.D. v. Michael Withers, Greg Cartwright, Taylor County Schools	This case was a civil trial that involved a teacher who did not follow an IEP.	The court ruled in favor of the parents, and the parents were awarded a financial reward by the school district.
Amanda C v. Clark County School District (2001)	Washington, DC	Amanda J., a minor, by and through her guardian ad litem, Annette J., Plaintiff-Appellant v. Clark County School District, and Nevada State Department of Education, Defendants-Appelles	The parents argued that an IEP was never developed for their child that was in a private school setting.	The court ruled in favor for parents due to documents were not shared with the parents that involved evaluations that determined that the student was identified on the Autism Spectrum.
J. P. v. School of Hanover City (2006)	Washington, DC	J.P. a minor, et al. v. County School Board of Hanover County	The parents of J.P. enrolled their son in a private school that specializes in	The court ruled in favor of the parents with a total of \$348,707.49,

Case/Year	City, State	Participants	Argument	Outcome
			autism due to J.P. was not making progress in the public school setting. The parents petitioned for the Hanover School Board to pay for the tuition.	which included litigation and attorney fees.
Winkleman v. Parma City School District (2007)	Washington, DC	Jacob Winkelman, a minor, by and through his parents and legal guardians, Jeff and Sandee Winkelman, et al. v. Parma City School District	Jeff and Sandee Winkleman argued that the Parma City School District did not follow IDEA and provide a free appropriate public education for their son, Jacob. The parents removed Jacob from Parma City School District, placed him in a private school and petitioned for Parma City Schools to pay for the tuition.	The court ruled in favor for Parma City School District for providing a free appropriate public education.
Fry v. Napoleon Community School District, (2015)	Washington, DC	Stacy Fry and Brent Fry, as next friends of minor E.F. v. Napoleon Community Schools; Pamela Barnes; Jackson County Intermediate School District	Jackson County Immediate School District denied student access to service dog.	The court ruled in favor of the parent. The student was able to have access to a service dog in school.
Phyllene W v. Huntsville City Board of Education (2015)	Atlanta, GA	Phyllene W., individually and as mother and next friend of M.W., a minor, Plaintiff, v. Huntsville City Board of Education, Defendant	The parents of M.W. argued that, due to a hearing impairment, a free appropriate public education was not considered due to a lack of academic growth.	The court concluded that the plaintiff had failed to prove that the Huntsville City Board of Education denied a free appropriate public education.

Case/Year	City, State	Participants	Argument	Outcome
Forest Grove School District v. T. A.	Washington, DC	Parents of T.A v. Forest Grove School District	The parents requested reimbursement for private school for failure to provide a free appropriate public education with the understanding that T.A. did not receive special education services.	Justice Stevens concluded that IDEA provides private school reimbursement when the school district fails to provide a free appropriate public education.
Endrew v. Douglas County School District (2017)	Washington, DC	Endrew, Parents and friend v. Douglas County School District RE-1	The parents of Endrew argued that their son who was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder was not making enough progress on his annual IEP. They withdrew him from Douglas County District schools and enrolled him in a private school setting and requested Douglas County School District to pay the tuition.	The court agreed that the IEP was in error, and the student should be challenged academically.

*Figure 3.* Concept Chart for an Overview of Historical and Legislative Cases

### Educational Leadership Preparation

Current research suggests that knowledge of special education legal issues should be an important component of any school leader's background (Cooner, Tochtermann, & Garrison-Wade, 2002). According to Reynolds (2008), training and internship programs with an emphasis on special education prepare school leaders to communicate effectively when parental concerns regarding student support services and IEPs. Yell, Conroy, Katsiyannis, and Conroy (2013) stated that ongoing training could keep school leaders



current on recent legal cases, which allows them to allocate district resources effectively. Backor and Gordon (2015) reported that many educational leadership preparation programs deemphasize teaching and learning and focus on administrative competencies. Bean and Lillenstein (2012) confirmed that emphasis should instead be placed on skills related to the establishment of trust, assertive communication, active listening, and problem solving.

Reynolds (2008) suggested that effective training can also build a foundation of trust and reduce confrontation and lawsuits that are often the result of anxiety of parents of students with special needs. Above all, district personnel should be available to school building level leaders, not only to increase the comfort level of school leaders regarding special education issues, but also to ensure that federal mandates are being met (Angelle & Bilton, 2009). District personnel have knowledge and expertise in special education law and should be appointed to schools that have a high percentage of students with disabilities. If a school leader is trained efficiently, he or she can assist when situations arise, as well as build the trust between student, parent, teacher, and school leader (Angelle & Bilton, 2009). Chandler (2015) concluded that school leaders should be held accountable for meeting federal mandates and helping all students achieve academic success.

Davidson and Algozzine (2003) indicated that problems occur because school leaders may have different interpretations of the meaning and application of special education law (p. 48), especially as Mestry and Pillay (2013) explained, when school leaders may otherwise resolve challenging situations in schools based on their individual values. Kotler (2014) stated that expectations of parents of students with special needs

and the educational establishment may be different. These differences result from the child's needs and the school's capacity and willingness to meet those needs; however, the differences do not have to lead to confrontation and disagreement. Lynch (2012) stated that, because different interpretations of special education law lead to problems, the school leader's role in following these laws precisely is all the more important. As Lynch concluded, "the principal's role as instructional leader is crucial to the academic performance of all students, especially students with a disability" (p. 41).

A Nation at Risk, The National Policy Board for Educational Administration, and No Child Left Behind Act have all played an important role in the reform of university educational leadership preparation programs. Throughout the years, the role of a principal has evolved. Perilla (2014) explained how the role of the principal has changed from the one-room school house model where the principal and teachers' roles were homogenous. When schools increased in size to accommodate the post-World War II baby boom population growth, the role of the principal evolved to a more managerial position and focused on the operations of a school (Perilla, 2014, p. 63). A principal was viewed as a disciplinarian and had an active role in the community, and it was also considered a male-dominated field. Today's principal is an instructional leader who focuses on student achievement and teacher effectiveness (Perilla, 2014).

In 1983, President Ronald Reagan formed the National Commission on Excellence in Education. This committee completed a report entitled *A Nation at Risk*. This detailed report outlined the deficits of our educational system and compared the U.S. educational system to other countries, including Japan and the United Kingdom. Educational reform was a consistent theme throughout the report. "We believe this

movement must be broadened and directed toward reform and excellence throughout education” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p.13). Many scholars disputed the legitimacy of the report, including Hewitt (2008) and Endacott and Goering (2014). Hewitt (2008) explained that the role of *A Nation at Risk* was to keep the federal government involved in the U.S. educational system. Prior to *A Nation at Risk*, Reagan’s platform was to eliminate the U.S. Department of Education (Hewitt, 2008, p. 576). Endacott and Goering (2014) confirmed the discredited and the exaggeration of plight of U.S. schools (p. 1). Scholars may disagree with the findings and the political motive of the report, *A Nation at Risk*, but it did change and define the role of a principal in U.S. schools. This role was a paradigm shift from a managerial position to more of an emphasis on student achievement, research-based teaching, and professional development.

Taylor and Parker (2016) explained that the reformation of university educational leadership preparation programs began in the early 2000s when The National Policy Board of Educational Administration adopted the Educational Leadership Constituent Council standards and guideline for certification (p. 17). The new guidelines and standards would emphasize the value of collaboration between universities and a school districts, so field experiences and internships were more successful. The new standards included vision and mission, student achievement, and school improvement, which was a complete shift in philosophy from university classes that focused on managerial tasks. In 2016, the Wallace Foundation reported indicators for effective university effective educational leadership preparation programs, which included a) explicit selection process, b) 300 or more hours of a mentor program, c) university and school district

partnership, and d) program oversight by the state for review (Taylor & Parker, 2016, p. 20).

Educational leadership preparation programs have evolved, but they need to be updated and reformed again to meet the current needs and responsibilities of a school leader. A school leader's responsibility is to have the knowledge of special education law, including a free appropriate public education. Understanding the legal guidelines and establishing a plan for inclusion will help the school leaders and school meet the needs of all students in an effective manner (Conrad & Whitaker, 1997). How school districts and universities prepare school leaders could reduce the number of appeals and lawsuits in the public educational system. With the rising costs of public education in the United States, a lawsuit can bring a substantial economic burden to the system, resulting in spending cuts in salaries and the demise of early intervention programs. School leaders play a critical role in transforming schools as they become effective and inclusive (McLeskey & Waldron, 2015). Educational leadership preparation programs that involve internships in schools where effective inclusion models exist are important in the preparation of principals and assistant principals because they can observe issues regarding legal guidelines. Training and internship programs with an emphasis on special education could prepare the school leader to communicate effectively when parental concerns regarding student support services and IEPs arise. The aggressive nature of some parents of children with disabilities can lead to confrontation when their advocacy reaches the principal's office (Reynolds, 2008). Preparing a school leader with effective conflict and resolution skills can reduce the anxiety of the parent of a student with special needs and, in turn, reduce the need for an appeal or lawsuit.

### Current Research in Educational Leadership Preparation

The dissertations reviewed included qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research designs. The dissertations presented results from studies of large groups as well as small participant groups. Some studies had small samples with 10 participants, while other students had larger samples with 181 participants.

The purpose of Burton's (2008) research was to examine principals' perception of their preparation in special education. The research design was a quantitative design that utilized a 35-question survey with a Likert-type scale. The survey was developed by Harlin-Fischer (1998) and focused on the knowledge and skills of special education. The researcher implemented a demographic questionnaire and a six-question open-ended questionnaire. The participants were 181 principals in two counties located in Pennsylvania. Burton (2008) used descriptive statistics to analyze the data, which included the standard deviation and mean of the data. Burton concluded that the participants believed that they were inadequately prepared for the challenges that they faced with students with special education classification. The data supported more course work in special education law to prepare principals for the job. An implication in the study was that principals responding to the demographic survey reported being underprepared for special education situations due to the lack of coursework. The open-ended items contradicted their experience, especially with veteran school leaders who discussed their knowledge was based on their past experiences. The limitations to the study included very little focus on examining the formal special education knowledge, special education training or basic knowledge of special education law, and practices of school principals. Burton confirmed that very limited research on the state of

Pennsylvania and principal preparedness in special education had been conducted. Burton recommended further investigation as to how principals contribute to the lack of development of special education knowledge and skills through their over-reliance on administrative authority when addressing special education problems. Burton's research confirmed that more research was needed in educational leadership preparation programs.

Jones (2011) concluded that educational leadership preparation programs at the university level did not prepare school leaders for the demands of the position in general and needed to be reevaluated. The purpose of this study was to investigate principals' perceptions of how their preparation programs helped them develop the skills necessary to be successful in addressing key administrative roles identified by the South Regional Education Board (SREB) 13 Critical Success Factors. This quantitative study was conducted using an internet-based five-point Likert-type survey modified from the SREB's Survey of Principal Internship Programs. The participants for this study were 1,257 public school principals from nine of the southeastern states in the SREB region, including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data. Other methods of statistical analysis included analysis of variance, multiple linear regression analysis, and Tukey HSD post hoc test. The results of this study indicated that the vast majority of principals completed a university-based traditional program, and a consensus among this group showed that their university-based traditional program did not prepare them for the job as a principal.

Jones's (2011) study concluded that most principals do not feel that their preparation programs adequately prepared them to serve as instructional leaders. For this

study, the district-coached preparation program received the highest satisfaction rating from the principals followed by independent/third-party preparation programs and university-district partnership programs. On average, principals indicated that their preparation program included knowledgeable and instructionally competent faculty who prepared them to communicate effectively in an effort to keep everyone informed and focused on student achievement.

The results reported by Jones (2011) had several practical implications for educational leadership preparation programs. First, the researcher recognized the urgency for preparation programs to prepare aspiring leaders to promote student achievement. After the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, principals in this study indicated that they were least prepared by their preparation program to recognize and support good teaching that increased student achievement, used innovative approaches to meet the goals of school improvement, and used data to make instructional decisions.

The first limitation concerns the sample used for Jones's (2011) study. The sample was representative of the target population, but this study did not address the segment of school leaders who did not participate in a preparation program. Many long-serving principals learned on the job and by taking advantage of professional development opportunities. Additionally, the survey did not include an option for principals to select if they did not participate in a preparation program. Another limitation of this study was the low response rate (Jones, 2011).

Jones (2011) discussed that future research should be conducted to investigate the perceptions of veteran principals who learned on the job and through participation in professional development. Jones suggested that future research should be conducted to

provide insight on the perceptions of school leaders who completed online educational leadership preparation programs. Jones's research was important because it examined data across nine states.

Garrand (2014) explored perceptions in his dissertation, *Perceptions of Leadership through the Lens of Special education Administrators and Principals*; the researcher investigated leadership perceptions of 30 leaders of special education, including 10 administrators of special education, 10 principals, and 10 assistant principals. Garrand used a mixed method approach and collected data for this study via Q-sort, which were subject to factor analysis using SPSS v. 21. Initial analysis revealed a correlation matrix between participant sorts. A qualitative method was used when comparing responses and reviewing trends from the responses from the participants.

Limitations of the study included the non-random selection of participants, limited participant types, and sort items. Results of this study revealed leadership profiles of the Factor A and B groups that can be described as instructional and multi-faceted, respectively. The instructional leadership profile includes member perceptions where instructional leadership actions were most important. Instructional profile members perceived that their role responsibilities drive their identification of most important leadership items/actions and that their primary responsibilities were to develop a set of shared beliefs and expectations, to create and communicate an organizational mission, and to influence instruction. Garrand (2014) suggested that more research was needed to explore how perceptions play an important role and influence different types of leadership styles.



Keenoy's (2012) study suggested that elementary school principals were not prepared to handle issues related to special education. The research design for the study utilized mixed methods, incorporating both a qualitative and a quantitative analysis. The study investigated Missouri's elementary principals' knowledge of evidence-based practices regarding special education leadership and principals' perceptions about preparation to implement the requirements for their position as a school leader. The participants for this study were elementary principals employed in public schools within the state of Missouri. An electronic survey was sent to 1,301 elementary school principals in Missouri public schools representing the entire population of public elementary school leaders in Missouri the 2010-2011 school year. Keenoy received 301 surveys, which were started by the participants with a response rate of 23%; 246 participants provided sufficient information for analysis. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Data were also collected through the use of an interview protocol. Ten participants were interviewed. Frequencies and percentages were used to analyze where principals primarily learned about different aspects of special issues. A repeated measures ANOVA, with the 15 knowledge items and the 15 preparation items, was completed to determine whether participants' responses differed from groups. Item by item pairwise comparisons were completed using the Bonferroni method. The study included specific evidence-based practices, but the practices were not inclusive of all items a school leader should know in order to lead a special education program. The study was limited to principals in the state of Missouri and did not examine specific graduate programs to determine if one program offered better preparation than another. The researcher recommended that future research should be divided into three areas of future study suggestions based upon the

results of this study. The three areas for future research were special education leadership knowledge, skills and dispositions, and the impact of working with special education cooperatives. Keenoy's research related to the current study's research question on the preparation of school leaders in the area of special education.

Landry (2011) explored the extent to which Georgia university K-12 educational leadership preparation programs successfully prepared school leaders to govern over special education populations and what knowledge and skills school leaders believed to be extremely important in special education. The purpose of the study also asked what should be addressed in the program curriculums of university K-12 educational leadership programs. Landry used a mixed methods research design to interview and survey 30 assistant principals and principals. Landry suggested that the study should be replicated with a larger population. Once responses were received, the survey items were summarized using frequencies and descriptive statistics. The quantitative results, which involved ANOVA and chi square analyses, failed to reveal any statistically significant relationships between the variables of courses taken related to special education and sense of preparedness. Qualitative results provided themes revealing the participants' perceptions of the importance of the school leader having sound knowledge of special education laws and competencies, such as the critical importance of preparation programs in addressing the knowledge of the legal aspects of special education and the No Child Left Behind Act, the rights of the child, the IEP process, and diversity training, particularly as it related to learning styles. The results of this study indicated a need for more courses that were specifically designed to address special education and special education law in particular. The implications of these findings suggested the need for

reevaluating program offerings within the Georgia K-12 educational leadership preparation programs. Several limitations were noted. The methodology and instrument(s) employed by this study were limitations. The study's data were collected from current and past K-12 principals and assistant principals and were assumed to be genuine based on the participants' personal experience while enrolled in a university K-12 educational leadership preparation program of study. Second, the study was limited by the length of time spent in a research setting. Landry concluded that a reevaluation of the program in Georgia was needed due to principals and assistant principals not feeling prepared for the position.

Lynn's (2015) research study explored the practices of principals who were perceived by school staff as being effective in leading special education programs in their school. A qualitative design was used in which the researcher interviewed elementary school principals and special education teachers within two school systems in the southeast region of the United States. The pool of participants consisted of 20 principals and special education teachers. Data were collected by conducting semi-structured principal interviews and special education teachers. In the literature review, Lynn confirmed that preparation programs were lacking training in special education and a revision was needed in university educational leadership programs. One limitation was a participant kept getting off topic and did not answer the interview questions. Both Landry's (2011) and Lynn's (2015) dissertations confirmed that K-12 educational leadership preparation programs should be reviewed and reformed to meet the needs of new school leaders.

The purpose of Schulze's (2014) mixed methods research study was to discover if the special education background of the participants affected how they approached leadership when they became principals. The study involved two clusters of participants who ranked the Q-sort statements differently and similarly, which have been referred to as Factor A and Factor B. Of the 15 principals with special education background who participated in this study, eight were members of Factor A, and seven were members of Factor B. These principals were asked how their special education backgrounds had affected how the data were sorted from the Q-sorts. The members of both factors answered similarly that, in most cases, their background had impacted their leadership. A limitation to the study was the participants were not randomly selected. Only principals who responded to emails and phone calls participated in the study. Schulze concluded that his study did not resolve the question of whether special education background had an impact on principal leadership. A recurring theme in his literature review was the threat of litigation due to poorly trained or inexperienced school leaders, which was comparable to the current study's literature review.

The purpose of Cale's (2017) study was to explore factors that had the greatest influence on the leadership practices of successful principal practitioners and develop an understanding of how they learned to implement their craft. Cale's study was exploratory in nature and focused on the participants' subjective views of lived experiences regarding growth, learning, and developmental procedures, which influenced the craft of successful principals. Qualitative research design was used for this dissertation. The participants included 10 principals (i.e., seven elementary, one middle school, and two high school). Data for this study were collected by conducting multiple interviews and observations of

each principal in their individual schools. The implications of this study related to the experience-learning relationship depicted by socially constructed adult learning theory. Cale concluded that learning continued after a principal received his or her principal training through the university system. This research study did not focus on special education but instead on how principals were trained once they were in their administration positions. The research supported a relationship between principal professional development and training and current trends in education.

Hofreiter's (2017) qualitative inquiry study explored the attitudes of principals in K-12 settings in nine Southern California school districts, Data were collected from each site primarily through 60- to 90-minute interviews with 18 principals. Hofreiter confirmed that principals were not trained efficiently in the demands of special education. Hofreiter also concluded that principals who had a background in special education created an inclusive culture within their school.

The purpose of Parker's (2016) qualitative phenomenological study was to explore whether training programs adequately prepared principals for the demands of special education. Parker interviewed 10 principals and focused on lived experiences. There were some limitations in conducting this study. One limitation was finding principals who were willing to share their experiences and take time away from their jobs and school. The findings in this study were similar to the other dissertations, such as Hofreiter (2017) and Landry (2011) who focused on principals' pre-service training before taking on their leadership role. Landry concluded in her study that school leaders reported "feelings of being unprepared and receiving most of their knowledge from on the job training rather than a University leadership program" (Landry, 2011, p. 78).

Hofreiter's (2017) study confirmed "that principals are not initially prepared in Special Education" (p. 129).

Additionally, previous research, including Cale's study (2017), suggested that principals who had extensive pre-service training experience had a higher likelihood of success for the students and their overall program. Cale's results "indicated a need to reassess the current approach to principal preparation" (p. 157). The principals interviewed in Parker's (2016) study shared their suggestions for more efficient pre-service training in the area of special education based on their lived experiences, which also confirmed the literature review.

In summary, the 10 selected dissertations allowed the researcher to review current data and examine similar dissertations that focused on educational leadership preparation before or after a school leader came to his or her position. The dissertations concluded that more research was needed in this area of training special education school leaders. The research concluded that a lack of training in educational leadership preparation programs was a problem in education across the United States and not just in Georgia. Figure 4 presents the common themes among the dissertations, where more research was needed, and the results of each study.

Authors	Participants	Research Design	Findings	Data Collection	Future Recommendations
Burton (2008)	74 out of 118 principals in Chester and Delaware counties in Pennsylvania . Elementary, Middle and High School principal	Quantitative, descriptive design	Burton discovered that there was limited training in special education for school leaders.	A demographic survey and KSSE Survey were administered.	Burton suggested more research on the impact of educational leadership on the outcomes of students with special needs.

Authors	Participants	Research Design	Findings	Data Collection	Future Recommendations
	completed the survey.				
Cale (2017)	Three elementary school principals that were selected from a final list of 10. The elementary principals were all from the same district and similar populations and size of the school.	Qualitative, phenomenology	Cale discovered that building relationships and having high expectations were important factors in school leaders	A lived study that included an investigative inquiry. The researcher used coding, field notes, and themes.	Cale suggested more research is needed in educational leadership preparation and inclusion training for school leaders.
Garrand (2014)	30 special education leaders from Massachusetts schools.	Mixed methods	Garrand discovered a disconnect between educational leadership programs and the knowledge that was needed to do their job effectively.	Q-sort included 50 statements. The post interview was video recorded and voice recorded. Qualitative data included identifying themes.	Garrand suggested that more research was needed on the perceptions of school leaders.
Hofreiter (2017)	18 principals who were recommended by the Special Education Local Plan Area in California.	Qualitative, interpretive research	Hofreiter discovered the lack of preparation in special education at the University level programs.	Qualitative method was used which concluded 60 to 90-minute interviews, using triangulation process and	Hofreiter suggested that more research was needed and recommended different research questions that pertained to the

Authors	Participants	Research Design	Findings	Data Collection	Future Recommendations
				coding and themes.	California system.
Jones (2011)	1,257 public school principals from nine of the southeastern states, including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas.	Quantitative, descriptive survey method	Jones discovered that many preparation programs are focusing on the managerial aspect of the job and not the instructional aspect.	A self-administered internet-based survey using a probability list-based sampling frame and using a five-point Likert system. SPSS was used to analyze the data.	Jones recommended further research focusing on veteran principals who learned on the job.
Keenoy (2012)	246 elementary principals from Missouri.	Mixed methods	Keenoy's results included school leaders who had a background of special education had were better prepared than others that had no experience.	246 elementary principals answered a 15-question survey. ANOVA, Post-hoc Bonferroni, comparison, <i>t</i> -test were used to analyze the data. Qualitative data were collected through 10 phone interviews using the constant-comparative method and coding.	The three areas that were recommended research included special education leadership knowledge, skills and dispositions, the impact of working with special education cooperatives, and educational leadership preparation programs.
Landry (2011)	17 principals from the state of Georgia who completed a	Mixed Methods	Landry's results indicated that qualitative results provided	Qualitative data were concluded from responses from an open-ended survey. A	Landry recommended the study be duplicated with a larger sample population.



Authors	Participants	Research Design	Findings	Data Collection	Future Recommendations
	leadership program.		themes revealing the participants' perceptions of the importance of the principal having sound knowledge of special education law.	computer program was used for data analysis for coding and a three-step process, which included data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing verification. Quantitative data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics from a Likert scale survey.	
Lynn (2015)	Seven principals and four special education teachers from Athens City Schools and Limestone County Schools	Qualitative, Interviews and open-ended questionnaire	Lynn's interview data suggested that there was a discrepancy among principals' perceived importance of and effectiveness in providing leadership of special education programs.	Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted. Themes and coding were the qualitative processes in collecting data from open-ended questions.	Lynn recommended replicating the study with a different population. and a study on how would parents of students with special needs define an "effective" instructional leader.
Parker (2016)	A variety of 10 principals from various schools and grades.	Qualitative, phenomenological approach with open-ended interviews	Parker's results included preparation programs needed to be created for future leaders.	Seven open-ended interview questions using emotional coding through lived experiences. Color coding and themes was also used for data collection.	Parker recommended more research in special education training for school leaders.

Authors	Participants	Research Design	Findings	Data Collection	Future Recommendations
Schulze (2014)	30 principals, which included 15 with a special education background and 15 without a special education background.	Mixed Methods, Interview and survey	Schulze's study did not resolve the question of whether special education background has an impact on principal leadership.	Q-sort data collection model was used to collect data. The SPSS program to analyze the data that followed up with qualitative data interview.	Schulze recommended more research on search committees on the hiring practices of principals.

*Figure 4.* Current Dissertations on Educational Leadership Preparation Programs.

#### Lack of Special Education Training

The following literature review confirms that many school leaders receive little to no training in laws specific to special education during their university, leadership, and training experiences. Murphy (2006), Dean Emeritus of Harvard School of Education, discussed the current status of education leadership program and compares them to dancing elephants. Murphy referred to the report by the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration that stated that 60% of the programs should be closed. Murphy also cited The Broad and Fordham Institute, which recommended giving up on schools of education and deregulating the field.

Bays and Crockett's (2007) qualitative study investigated instructional leadership in special education and confirmed that principals were often involved in legal compliance issues and immersed in procedural matters more than instructional concerns. One principal in the study stated, "First of all you have to be very cognizant of the law and be sure that what you're doing is what you are supposed to be doing" (Bays & Crockett, 2007, p. 152). The data collection included interviews of 39 participants who

included elementary school principals, general education teachers, special education teachers, and district personnel from the southeastern United States. The observations were conducted over a five-month period of time, and the data were coded using grounded theory to discover trends. The participants identified concerns with leadership's lack of systematic monitoring of instruction and use of research-based practices. The study also concluded that special education teachers tended to turn to and rely on each other, rather than administration to solve problems. The limitations were the researchers did not include data on student's outcomes or extend the study to larger schools. Recommendations included more research with special education administration and leadership.

Crockett, Becker, and Quinn (2009) completed a content analysis study of 474 dissertation abstracts between 1970 and 2009 to see what the trends were in special education administrative leadership. They discovered that law and policy, personnel, and learning environment were the most frequent themes in the abstracts. Crockett and colleagues concluded that special education administrators were viewed by colleagues and parents as experts in school policy. Crockett et al. also suggested that more research needed to be conducted on special education administrators and their preparation, recruitment, induction, and retention into the field.

Cruzeiro and Morgan's (2006) research confirmed that school leaders played a deciding role in making special education programs succeed or fail. In their research, they studied 255 principals in the rural areas of Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming and made a comparison to urban principals. Cruzeiro and Morgan's quantitative component included a survey with principals. The data were analyzed using descriptive

statistics. The results of the study indicated that 21% of their time was committed to special education concerns by principals. Cruzeiro and Morgan discovered that rural principals of special education programs were more concerned with resistance to change, economic challenges, and geographic challenges. Because principals are responsible for all educational activities in their buildings, Cruzeiro and Morgan concluded that school leaders should understand their role in leading special education programs.

Recommendations from the research included further research on the perceptions of principals in the area of special education.

Keeler's (2002) qualitative research examined three focus groups, which included principals and interns from Idaho, in an investigation of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards. The focus groups met over six sessions, and each lasted about an hour. The data (answers) were recorded on flip charts, organized into themes, then categorized. Keeler concluded that special education law and laws governing the schools and school programs were not emphasized in the standards, which was a critical area in the preparation of school leaders. Keeler suggested that this lack of preparation could lead in legal proceedings against the district or school leader. Keeler recommended an ethnographic study or a quantitative study that included a scaled survey would increase the validity of her study.

Praisner (2003) surveyed 408 elementary school principals from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Praisner's qualitative study was on inclusion and whether principals were trained on inclusion as a part of their preparation programs. The results of the survey concluded that 83.6% of principals stated that special education law was covered in their preparation programs. Praisner concluded that not enough training or

professional development prepared principals to implement a quality inclusion program. Praisner suggested that school leaders needed to increase the number of positive interactions with students with disabilities and to observe and model teacher behaviors in successful inclusion settings. Praisner recommended that future research could include an in-depth exploration of principal's specific perception of each disability group.

Larsky and Karge (2006) surveyed 205 principals in various districts in California. The purpose of their quantitative study was to confirm that more training was needed in the area of special education. The surveys were collected, and a statistical analysis program was used to interpret the data. Larsky and Karge observed a group of 152 principals, 75% of whom stated that they were spending more time on special education situation than in previous years. The study did not reference the need for special education law training but the need for an overall need for training in special education training. The survey referenced IEP meetings and integration as key factors of important knowledge that was required of a school leader. High school principals stated that they gave the tasks of special education concerns to the assistant principal. The data of the study confirmed the need for increased training of special education for principals. Larsky and Karge recommended the need for uniform standards in educational leadership.

Bellamy, Crockett, and Nordengren (2014) further concluded that principals spent 75% more time on special education tasks without receiving formal instruction in special education. Bellamy et al. confirmed that some evidence existed that providing aspiring leaders with training in special education law helped leaders feel more confident in their administrative roles. Bellamy et al. recommended an emphasis on preparation programs

be linked to a professional practice. This report was produced by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs.

#### Literature that Supports a Solution to Educational Leadership Preparation

Boscardin (2005) claimed that the role of special education administrators was shifting with more challenges in curriculum decisions, assessment with appropriate accommodations and modifications, and the promotion of positive relationships between general and special education teachers. Boscardin also supported the nine principles of teaming by Smith and Stodden (2005). The nine principles of training focused on the need for having a shared vision for students with special needs in any school building, promoting empowerment of all members, sharing decision making, demonstrating synergistic energy, including diversity as a necessary part of creativity and collaboration, including all stakeholders, facilitating personal growth, operating within an ecological context, and assuming a dynamic and fluid quality (Boscardin, 2005, p. 29). Boscardin's (2005) study also supported the need for solutions for the school leader at the primary and secondary level, including strategies that can be used at both levels. Boscardin's solutions were research-based and were attainable for a school leader who was beginning his or her career or a school leader who had more experience.

Browne-Ferrigno (2003) focused her research on the importance of clinical practice in administration programs. Browne-Ferrigno suggested that after formal preparation at the university level, districts and universities needed to collaborate in mentoring programs to support new school leaders. Browne-Ferrigno suggested a 110-day job sharing program so that the mentees could experience administrative activities to prepare them for when they become a school leader.

Brooks, Havard, Tatum, and Patrick (2010) discussed the formation of a collaboration between local districts and Auburn University. The researchers discussed the disconnect between education leadership preparation programs and the current demands of the leader in today's schools. Brooks et al. suggested problem-based learning instructional strategies, which included writing memos, interviewing, and observational strategies. Brooks et al. also recommended the creation of a collaboration between local districts and Auburn University. This collaborative effort included the development of four committees, including curriculum, partnership, admission, and accountability and assessment. The researchers focused on the creation of the program and did not discuss the results of the program. The researchers also excluded pitfalls or problems that might have occurred in creating this collaboration.

Crockett's research (2002) concluded that special education law should be at the forefront of change in preparation programs for educational leaders. Crockett recommended the development of a leadership curriculum that contained five domains, including moral leadership, instructional leadership, organizational leadership, and collaborative leadership. Crockett further recommended a focus on five principles in developing school leaders with appropriate knowledge of special education law and changes, which included ethical practice, individual consideration, equity under the law, effective programming, and productive partnerships. These five core principles in special education administration preparation emphasize the importance of following IDEA with integrity, gaining exposure to special education law, and increasing preparation training for school leaders.

Ramalho, Byng, Garza, and Thompson (2010) conducted a case study on the improvement of leadership preparation programs in Texas. The researchers referred to Bravenec's (1998) study, which revealed Texas educational leadership preparation programs were not preparing principals in the delivery of specific programs, such as special education. Ramalho et al. (2010) also referred to another study conducted by Jackson and Kelley (2002), where they examined non-university programs that prepared principals through a cohort model where there was an emphasis between pedagogical approaches and problem-based learning.

Ramalho et al. (2010) examined how No Child Left Behind and A Nation at Risk influenced the changes in the certification process in Texas for principals. The Texas State Board for Educator Certificate was created and was responsible for the changes in policy in how principal became certified in Texas. The change in policies had more emphasis on principals becoming instructional leaders compared to a managerial leadership, which was a focus in the past. The change also revised the courses required for certification to include curriculum on instructional leadership, data management, and social justice. Another significant change was the traditional certification for life was replaced with a renewable certification process to ensure continual professional development in special education issues and laws. Field experiences was also a significant change in the certification process, and some universities required a 100-hour field experience. Ramalho et al. (2010) stated that principals were responsible for creating hope for children to become successful citizens in society. Figure 5 displays a concept analysis chart on educational leadership preparation programs where researchers discussed the current needs in preparation programs.



Researchers	Participants	Research Design	Data Collection	Results	Future Recommendations
Keeler (2002)	Six new building leaders, 10 old building leaders, 30 interns, and 25 practicing superintendents.	Qualitative, three focus groups	Three focus groups were interviewed. Interview questions were created based on their knowledge of the ISLLC standards. Focus groups met over six sessions. Participants' answers were organized into themes and then categorized.	Six themes were identified in the data. The results included more training in grant writing. Areas of need included student development, school climate, and addressing diversity. Another area of need was special education law, special programs, and technology.	Keeler recommended an ethnographic study or a quantitative approach to the data that included a scaled survey to increase validity of the study.
Browne-Ferrigno (2003)	60 students in three cohorts	Mixed Methods	Reflective writing prompts, pre/post surveys, and interview questions.	The results indicated that after a preparatory program for principalship individuals continued to feel unprepared for the position.	The researcher proposed on-the-job training program for 110 days to ensure job preparation.
Praisner (2003)	408 Elementary School Principal	Quantitative	Principal Inclusion Survey	The results indicated that 76% of the principals were uncertain on how they felt toward inclusion.	Recommendations included more training in educational leadership preparation involving special education.
Cruzeiro & Morgan (2006)	255 rural school principals in Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming	Quantitative	Survey	The results suggested that 21% of their time was spent on special	Cruzeiro and Morgan recommended included was to further the research on

Researchers	Participants	Research Design	Data Collection	Results	Future Recommendations
				education. The researchers also concluded that school leaders who perceived special education as an opportunity will have a higher rate of success in their administration.	principals' and other stakeholders' perceptions on special education.
Larsky & Karge (2006)	205 principals from a variety of school districts in California	Quantitative	Survey	The findings indicated a need for more training in special education in preparation programs.	Recommendations included creating uniform standards for leadership.
Bays & Crockett (2007)	Nine elementary schools within three school districts	Grounded theory, Qualitative data collection	Interviews and observations	The researchers did not observe systematic monitoring of instruction or research-based practices being utilized in the classroom.	Recommendations included more research in special education administrators and instructional leadership.
Crockett et al. (2009)	474 abstracts	Content analysis	Abstracts from 1970-1989 were coded and categorized by topic and theme.	The percentage of topics from abstracts included 16% law and policy, 19% personnel, 15% learning environment, and 13%	Crockett et al. recommended that more research in the area on how special education administrators received information from new research and how technology

Researchers	Participants	Research Design	Data Collection	Results	Future Recommendations
				student learning.	impacted their retrieval of this new information.
Ramalho et al. (2010)	71 principal preparation programs in Texas	Qualitative, case study design	The study included on the impact of the changes that were made to the Board of Education and Certification standards on principal preparation programs.	The researchers concluded that the changes that were made to the State Board Education and Certification were going in the right direction. These changes were enhanced field experiences, inclusion courses, data management, instructional leadership, and social justice.	More research was needed in online programs and their effectiveness in the area of educational leadership preparation.

Figure 5. A concept chart analysis chart on educational leadership preparation.

### Summary

This chapter provided an overview of significant legislative cases and federal mandates and their impact on the growing special education population. These legislative cases and federal mandates have affected not only the rights of students with special needs but also have helped changed the role of the school leader. This review of literature identified the importance of a stronger understanding of special education law and its impact on both the student and the school leader and their understanding of these laws and mandates. Federal mandates, including IDEA and No Child Left Behind, are consistently being criticized in the research. Zimmer (2018) stated that the IDEA has

been interpreted out of existence (p. 1016). Vitello (2007) stated that IDEA 2004 explains that school districts are less accountable and parents will have a difficult time to question school districts decisions (p. 67). Meyer (2013) explained that No Child Left Behind created disenfranchised teachers and a population of students who were left behind with the economic poor (p. 3).

The chapter also addressed educational leadership preparation and current research in the gaps of educational leadership preparation. Keenoy (2012) and Jones (2011) suggested that elementary school principals were not prepared to handle issues related to special education. Larsky and Karge (2006) surveyed 205 principals in various districts in California. The purpose of their study was to confirm that more training was needed in the area of special education. Crockett's research (2012) concluded that special education should take the lead in the change of preparation programs for school leaders. Burton (2008) discovered that 40% of the school leaders had not taken a special education class during their educational leadership preparation programs (p. 167).

The purpose of this mixed methods research study was to examine the difference between beliefs and perceptions of rural middle and high school leaders and special education teachers about the knowledge and skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively. Most of the research that was discussed in this chapter was conducted at the elementary level and in urban areas (e.g., Bays & Crockett, 2007; Cale, 2017; Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006; Jones, 2011; Keenoy, 2012; Lynn, 2015; Praisner, 2003). This study attempted to fill those gaps by using a sample of school leaders from the middle and high school levels in rural areas of Georgia. In addition, the mixed

methods research design bridged a gap in the literature by combining quantitative and qualitative data to examine and explore the problem.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

According to the Georgia Department of Education (2019b), formal complaints involving non-compliance issues for students with special needs have increased in the last 5 years. While 120 formal complaints were filed with the Georgia Department of Education in AY 2014-2015, non-compliance complaints in the July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019 period increased to 204. The researcher wanted to know how principals were prepared to handle the demands of a growing population of students with special needs and their parents' concerns and needs. The purpose of the study was to examine the difference between beliefs and perceptions of middle and high school leaders and special education teachers about the knowledge and skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively.

#### Research Design

The concurrent triangulation mixed methods research design model was utilized in this study. The quantitative and qualitative data were collected with the KSSE survey, which was sent to special education teachers, assistant principals, and principals at middle and high schools in rural Georgia. This study determined where the gaps exist in educational leadership preparation programs, specifically related to implementing special education programs effectively. The following research questions were answered:

1. Quantitative: What is the difference between middle and high school leaders' beliefs and special education teachers' beliefs about the knowledge necessary to implement special education programs effectively?

*H<sub>0</sub>*: There is not a statistically significant difference between middle and high school leaders' beliefs and special education teachers' beliefs about the knowledge necessary to implement special education programs effectively.

*H<sub>a</sub>*: There is a statistically significant difference between middle and high school leaders' beliefs and special education teachers' beliefs about the knowledge necessary to implement special education programs effectively.

2. Quantitative: What is the difference between middle and high school leaders' beliefs and special education teachers' beliefs about the skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively?

*H<sub>0</sub>*: There is not a statistically significant difference between middle and high school leaders' beliefs and special education teachers' beliefs about the skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively.

*H<sub>a</sub>*: There is a statistically significant difference between middle and high school leaders' beliefs and special education teachers' beliefs about the skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively.

3. Qualitative: How do perceptions of preparedness for implementing special education programs effectively compare between middle and high school leaders and special education teachers?

A mixed methods research design was an appropriate design model for this study. Caruth (2013) explained that a mixed method research design offers a richer insight into

the phenomenon being studied (p. 112). Caruth also concluded that a mixed methods research design captures information that might be missed by utilizing only one research design (p. 112). A quantitative research design or qualitative design would suggest a partial answer to the problem of school leader preparation. By utilizing a mixed methods approach, the researcher was able to compare data from both research design models. Also, Caruth suggested that using a mixed methods approach generates more questions for future studies (p. 112).

Fetters et al. (2013) stated that the integration of mixed methods involved four approaches, which include connecting, building, merging, and embedding. For the purpose of this study, the researcher used connecting and merging to integrate the quantitative and qualitative data. *Connecting* is when one data base is linked to another through sampling. The sample for this study included middle and high school leaders and special education teachers from five different rural counties. *Merging* is when two databases are brought together for comparison (Fetter et al., 2013, p. 2140). The researcher merged the data from the KSSE survey and the short-answer questions into tables for comparison.

#### Role of the Researcher

This investigation examined how school leadership addresses the growing special needs population and how they respond to the question of how to best meet the needs not only of these students but also the teachers who work with these students.

Professionalism and impartiality were important in this research study to ensure that the findings were trustworthy, unbiased, and free of personal assumptions. The background of the problem was also related to a personal situation with the researcher's son who has



special needs and who was struggling during his first year in middle school. The principal, a first-year principal, and the researcher disagreed on everything from curriculum to discipline. The researcher eventually filed a grievance with Georgia's Department of Education. The researcher, then, discovered that he was not alone in his conflict. Many parents of children with special needs across Georgia and the United States are unhappy with the education of their children. This experience inspired the researcher to become certified in special education, become an educational leader, and to pursue a terminal degree. The researcher holds a master's degree of education from University of North Florida, a bachelor's degree from University of Florida in theater production, and an educational leadership certificate from the University of Georgia.

The researcher has been a special education teacher for 6 years and has 15 years of experience as a general education teacher, primarily teaching kindergarten, which totals 21 years of teaching experience at the elementary level. The researcher has also been an assistant principal for summer programs working with students with disabilities and English as a second language learners. The researcher also had a particular interest in educational law and the history and impact that they have had on our educational system.

### Participants

The participants for the current study included school leaders and special education teachers from five rural counties in Georgia, which included County A, County B, County C, County D, and County E. The information from the charts was obtained from The Governor's Office of Student Achievement Georgia School Grades Reports (n.d.). Table 2 displays all five counties and the number of middle and high school

leaders and special education teachers. In addition, Table 2 presents the demographics from each subgroup, including the number of students with disabilities, as well as the number of economically disadvantaged students and English language learners within the five counties. One high school in these five counties did not share the information on the individual school's website; therefore, that school's data were not calculated into the total numbers and percentages.

Table 2

*Demographics Chart of Five Rural School Districts*

Districts	Population	#Middle Schools	# High Schools	# School Leaders In Middle and High Schools	# of Spec. Ed. Teachers In Middle and High Schools	Students with Disabilities	Economic Disadvantaged	English Language Learners
County A	16,340	4	3	29	96	1,789 (11%)	6,505 (40%)	1,138 (7%)
County B	7,887	2	1	15	37	834 (11%)	7,493 (95%)	499 (7%)
County C	2,601	1	1	5	17	294 (11.3%)	2,497 (96%)	116 (4.4%)
County D	9,653	1	3	19	50	1,381 (14.3%)	6,564 68%	342 (3.5%)
County E	3,586	4	4	10	9	432 (12%)	3,141 (87.6%)	178 (4.9%)

Table 3 provides a visual representation of the diversity of the five rural counties. County D has a less diverse student population compared to the other counties. Table 4 presents the number of school leaders and special education teachers in the middle and high schools in County A. Table 5 focuses on a smaller rural county with one high school and two middle schools and identifies the number of school leaders and special education teachers in middle and high schools in County B. Table 6 addresses another

small rural county with one high school and one middle school and identifies the number of school leaders and special education teachers from County C. Table 7 focuses on a larger rural county with four middle and four high schools and identifies the number of school leaders and special education teachers from County D. Table 8 identifies the number of school leaders and special education teachers from County E. 1ha's website had not been updated with the number of special education teachers and their individual email addresses.

Table 3

*Race and Ethnicity Charts from County A, County B, County C, County D, and County E*

	Asian/Pacific Islander	American Indian/Alaska	Hispanic	Multi- racial	Black	White
County A	2%	0%	15%	3%	67%	13%
County B	1%	0%	19%	2%	35%	42%
County C	1%	0%	14%	4%	46%	36%
County D	1%	0%	10%	4%	7%	78%
County E	1%	0%	15%	3%	51%	30%

Table 4

*Number of School Leaders and Special Education Teachers from County A Middle and High Schools*

School	School Leaders	Special Education Teachers
School 1ha	5	19
School 2ha	5	17
School 3ha	4	13
School 4ma	4	11
School 5ma	4	12

School	School Leaders	Special Education Teachers
School 6ma	3	13
School 7ma	4	11

Table 5

*Number of School Leaders and Special Education Teachers from County B Middle and High Schools*

School	School Leaders	Special Education Teachers
School 1bm	5	9
School 2bm	4	8
School 3bh	6	20

Table 6

*Number of School Leaders and Special Education Teachers from County C Middle and High Schools*

School	School Leaders	Special Education Teachers
School 1ch	2	9
School 2cm	3	8

Table 7

*Number of School Leaders and Special Education Teachers from County D Middle and High Schools*

School	School Leaders	Special Education Teachers
School 1ha	3	8
School 2ha	3	5
School 3ha	3	7
School 4ha	3	7
School 5ma	2	4
School 6ma	1	4

School	School Leaders	Special Education Teachers
School 7ma	2	8
School 8ma	2	7

Table 8

*Number of School Leaders and Special Education Teachers from County E Middle and High Schools*

School	School Leaders	Special Education Teachers
School 1ha	4	Not reported
School 2ma	2	3
School 3ma	4	6

#### Instrumentation

##### Demographics Survey

The Demographic Survey (Appendix A) was based on questions created by Dr. Michele Landry (2011) for her dissertation research. The survey was designed to collect data of a descriptive nature that was relevant to the current dissertation research questions. In particular, the demographic questions were created to gather knowledge about the participants' number of years in principal or leadership positions, their experience with special education, and their teaching experience. The questions were also created to identify participants' specific leadership and educational preparation in a formal school setting, as well as relevant information about the participants' schools. The questions were also designed to identify the participants' specific perceptions about their formal preparation programs and how effective they believed these programs were in assisting them in addressing issues and problems faced by their students with special needs. The researcher contacted Dr. Michele Landry for permission to use her

demographic survey. This permission letter that was sent via email is located in Appendix D. The researcher modified Question 1 to obtain the current assignment for the targeted sample (i.e., middle and high school assistant principals, principals, and special education teachers). For Question 2, the researcher created three separate items to obtain the years of experience in the participants' current role (i.e., principal, assistant principal, and special education teacher).

#### Knowledge and Skills in Special Education Survey

This current study also utilized the KSSE Survey from the Harlin-Fischer (1998), which is located in Appendix E. Dr. Jennifer Brown was able to locate Dr. Gayle Harlin-Fischer on the researcher's behalf to gain permission to use the survey through one of her dissertation committee members. A copy of this email is included as Appendix E to confirm the permission to use the survey.

In Section II of Harlin-Fischer's (1998) study of the KSSE, she investigated the perceptions of elementary principals, elementary general education teachers, and elementary special education teachers regarding the knowledge and skills necessary for principals to implement special education programs effectively in an urban setting. In Burton's study (2008), the researcher also implemented Harlin-Fischer's (1998) KSSE and surveyed 74 out of 118 principals in elementary, middle, and high school in three districts in Pennsylvania. In the current study, the researcher used Section II of the KSSE, and the researcher surveyed middle and high school leaders and special education teachers in five rural counties in Georgia. The responses were rated on a four-point Likert-type scale with A indicating *Not at All Necessary* and D indicating *Extremely Necessary*. Harlin-Fischer's study included statements in this section of the KSSE that

were identical for the three participant groups and were chosen from the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Common Core of Knowledge and Skills (CEC, 1995), which were representative of special education competencies needed for principals, as indicated within the current literature.

Validity of the surveys was determined in two ways. Content validity of the KSSE survey question was established by searching the literature for competencies needed by principals in the area of special education. Harlin-Fischer (1998) also researched the Common Core Standards from the CEC and compared the standards to the survey questions. Harlin-Fischer also asked two university professors, three principals, three special education teachers, and three general education teachers to examine the survey items and provide suggestions. The KSSE survey items were then revised and updated to incorporate the educators' suggestions.

The internal reliability of the KSSE surveys was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The survey was found to have an alpha coefficient above .70, which was deemed acceptable by Henderson, Morris, and Fitz-Gibbon (1987). The researcher conducted reliability analyses after the data were collected. The alpha coefficients ranged from .83 to .92. The scales were deemed to be internally reliable. Table 9 displays the alpha coefficients for the Knowledge Scale and Skills Scale by group.

Table 9

*Alpha Coefficients for the Scales by Group*

Scale	School Leaders	Special Education Teachers
Knowledge	.92	.91
Skills	.83	.88

## Qualitative Questionnaire

The qualitative component included a short-answer questionnaire to compare the perceptions of implementing a special education program effectively between middle and high school leaders and special education teachers. The six open-ended questions for teachers and school leaders can be found in Appendix C. The six short-answer questions were created by the researcher based on the review of literature. Question 1 on the special education teacher survey was different compared to the school leader's survey. The special education teacher and school leader short-answer questions were specific to their individual knowledge and skills in performing their responsibilities with working with a special education population. The questionnaire allowed the participants to give a more in-depth answer to the third research question. Reja, Manfreda, Hlebec, and Vehovar (2003, p. 159) explained that open-ended items produce a diverse set of answers compared to close-ended questions. Table 10 displays the six short-answer questions for school leaders with the supporting research, and Table 11 presents the one replacement question for special education teachers.

Table 10

### *Short-Answer Questions for School Leaders Aligned with Research*

Question	Research
1. How well do you believe that your K-12 educational leadership preparation program prepared you to work with special education population in your school?	Keenoy's (2012) research related to the current study's research question on the preparation of school leaders in the area of special education.
2. Discuss any educational training or experiences that have prepared you to work with a special education population.	Jones' (2011) research was related to district-coached preparation programs that provided support to new school leaders.
3. List four areas in special education topics that K-12 educational leadership preparation.	Crockett et al. (2009) completed a content analysis research on the special education topics of law and policy. They discovered



Question	Research
programs should address. Why do you believe these areas are important?	that law and policy, personnel, and learning environment were the most frequent themes in the abstracts.
4. How important do you believe that knowledge of special education laws and competencies are to the role of a school leader?	Garrand (2014) explored how perceptions play an important and influence different types of leadership styles.
5. How could K-12 educational leadership preparation programs to meet the needs of the special education population?	Lynn's (2015) research confirmed that preparation programs were lacking training in special education.
6. What factors do you believe contribute to non-compliance issues in your school or schools in general?	Bay and Crockett's (2007) study investigated instructional leadership in special education and confirmed that principals were often involved in legal compliance issues.

Table 11

*Short-Answer Question for Special Education Teachers Aligned with Research*

Question	Research
1. How well are your school leaders prepared to work with the special education population in your building?	Hofreiter's (2017) research confirmed the lack of preparation in special education at the university-level programs.

*Note.* Questions 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 were the same items for school leaders and special education teachers.

### Data Collection

The first step in the data collection for the current study involved creating the surveys using Qualtrics. The survey included 12 demographic questions (Appendix A), 34 KSSE survey questions (Appendix B), and six short-answer questions (Appendix C), which were created using the Qualtrics system. Qualtrics is an online survey tool that is available through the researcher's home institution. The second step was to obtain the participants' email addresses from the individual school websites, which were available to the general public. The researcher obtained 287 email addresses for special education teachers and school leaders (i.e., assistant principals and principals) from each county's

website. One school did not have the email addresses for special education teachers on the school's website. The researcher created an Excel spreadsheet with six sheets to store the email addresses. Each county had two sheets (i.e., one for school leaders and one for special education teachers). Each sheet contained five columns (i.e., school name, middle or high school, principal or assistant, participant name, and school email address).

The researcher initially identified three rural Georgia counties to request permission for conducting the study. The researcher received institutional review board (IRB) approval from Columbus State University on May 7, 2020, to conduct the research study with these three counties. The approval email is located in Appendix F. The first set of recruitment emails with permission to conduct research letters (see Appendix G) was sent to these three rural counties. While two of these counties did not approve the research, one county, County A, approved the research request (Appendix H). In order to increase the sample size, the researcher identified two other rural counties in Georgia. The researcher then submitted an IRB modification form (see Appendix I) on June 2, 2020, and, upon IRB approval, the researcher emailed the superintendents of these two counties to seek permission to conduct the study with their middle and high school principals and assistant principals as well as their special education teachers. The researcher received approval from these counties, County B (see Appendix J) and County C (Appendix K). Because County B and County C had only one high school and one middle school each, the researcher identified two other counties, County D and County E, to increase the sample size. The researcher applied for a second IRB modification (see Appendix L) on June 9, 2020, and, upon receiving IRB approval from Columbus State University, the researcher contacted the superintendents of County D and County E to

seek approval to conduct research. The research approval from County D is located in Appendix M, while the research approval from County E is located in Appendix N. After receiving approval from these five counties, the researcher emailed the required CITI certificates for the researcher and his EdD Dissertation Committee Chair to the superintendents of the five rural districts.

After receiving permission to conduct research from the superintendents of the five rural Georgia school counties, the researcher contacted 287 school leaders and special education teachers from the middle and high schools in five rural areas of Georgia, requesting that they complete the KSSE survey and answer six short answer questions. The researcher sent 78 emails to school leaders in middle and high schools in five rural counties in Georgia, while 209 emails were sent to special education teachers in the same five rural Georgia counties. The initial recruitment email (see Appendix O) with the survey link was sent to special education teachers and school leaders in County A, County B, and County C on June 2, 2020. The researcher sent the same initial recruitment email to the special education teachers and leaders in County D and County E on June 9, 2020. The initial recruitment email identified the researcher and his affiliation with Columbus State University, defined the scope and goal of the study, and assured potential participants that their identities would remain anonymous. The initial recruitment letter also identified the process and timeline for participating in the study. The second recruitment email (See Appendix P) was sent to County A, County B, and County C on June 9, 2020, and to County D and County E on June 16, 2020 to request the special education teachers and school leaders to participate in the survey. The third recruitment email (See Appendix Q) was sent to County A, County B, and County C on

June 16, 2020 and County D and County E on June 23, 2020. This third recruitment email served as a final reminder and request to complete the survey.

One week after the third recruitment email was sent to all five school districts, the survey was closed. A \$10 gift card for Starbucks served as an incentive to complete the survey. Hustedt, Franklin, and Tate (2019) stated that communicating a monetary incentive can help increase the participation rate (p. 12). At the end of the short-answer questions, the participants had the opportunity to enter a random drawing, which served as an incentive to increase participation. One name was randomly selected to receive a \$10 gift card for Starbucks. The winner of this gift card was notified after the survey had closed. This notification email can be found in Appendix R. The researcher then downloaded the data into a SPSS file for data analysis.

## Data Analysis

### Quantitative

The quantitative data were collected with the KSSE Survey, which was sent electronically using the Qualtrics platform to special education teachers, assistant principals, and principals in middle and high schools in rural Georgia. The survey tool consisted of 46 multiple-choice questions. The Demographic Survey, found in Appendix A, consisted of 12 multiple choice questions. Found in Appendix B, 27 of the 34 additional multiple-choice questions addressed the special education knowledge a school leader needed to have. The remaining seven multiple-choice questions in Appendix B addressed skills that school leader needed to implement a special program effectively.

In Section II of Harlin-Fischer's study of the KSSE, the responses were rated on a Likert-type scale from A to D, with A indicating *Not at All Necessary* and D indicating

the highest degree each knowledge/skill was perceived *Extremely Necessary*. The descriptive scale used in the Harlin-Fischer (1998) study included four descriptive categories. The *Not at All Necessary* category had a range of 1.00 to 1.50, while the *Somewhat Necessary* category had a range of 1.51 to 2.50. The range for the *Necessary* category was 2.51 to 3.49, while the *Extremely Necessary* category had a range of 3.50 to 4.00 (Harlin-Fischer, 1998, p. 74).

After the data were downloaded, the data were cleaned to remove cases with insufficient data. Data cleansing is the process of removing errors and inconsistencies from data to improve the quality of the data (Rahm & Do, 2000, p. 3). The researcher also utilized dummy coding to represent the data from the survey questions. Dummy coding continues to be the dominant practice among quantitative researchers because of its effects on a variety of outcomes (Mayhew & Simonoff, 2015, p. 174). This process of dummy coding allows the researcher to place a numerical figure on a letter response from the survey questions. Table 12 displays the coding, letter option, and response for each of the letter options from the KSSE Survey.

Table 12

*Dummy Coding for the KSSE Survey*

Coding	Letter Option	Response
1	A	Not at All Necessary
2	B	Somewhat Necessary
3	C	Necessary
4	D	Extremely Necessary.

The frequencies and percentages were calculated for each of the 34 knowledge and skills items. The researcher then averaged the responses to create a scaled score from

the 27 knowledge items and the seven skills items. Descriptive statistics were conducted to calculate the mean and standard deviation for each group, which summarized the data. The quantitative data were analyzed using a series of one-way ANOVAs to examine the difference between school leaders' and special education teachers' beliefs about the knowledge and the skills related to implementing a special education program effectively. To answer Research Question #1, a one-way ANOVA was conducted using the knowledge scale mean for school leaders and special education teachers at the middle and high school levels. To answer Research Question #2, another one-way ANOVA was conducted using the skills scale mean for school leaders and special education teachers at the middle and high school levels.

#### Qualitative

The qualitative data from the questionnaire (Appendix C) were analyzed using coding to compare the perceptions of preparedness between middle school and high school leaders and special education teachers to answer Research Question #3. The participants of the study included current principals, assistant principals, and special education teachers who were employed in five rural middle and high school districts. The demographic information, surveys, and short-answer questionnaire were delivered electronically through Qualtrics. Qualitative data from the short-answer questions were analyzed using color coding and theme analysis.

Shenton (2004) suggested that trustworthiness can be addressed in a qualitative study by ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (p. 73). Credibility in the current study included the background and qualifications of the researcher, which included 21 years in education and leadership experience. Credibility

in the current study was established by examining and replicating the use of qualitative and quantitative previous research processes, such as the studies by Landry (2011) and Burton (2008). Shenton (2004) explained that transferability can occur when the findings of one study can be applied to other similar studies. Transferability in this study included the boundaries of the study when the researcher was investigating the perceptions and beliefs of middle and high school principals, assistant principals and special education teachers in five rural school districts in Georgia.

Shenton (2004) concluded that dependability is addressed by describing what was planned and executed on a strategic level, an explanation of how data were gathered, and a reflective section of the project (p. 72). Data collection and data analysis procedures were outlined using specific details so that another researcher would be able to replicate the study. Confirmability was addressed by conducting an audit trail throughout the process of data collection. An audit trail was conducted by using checklists and a methodologist reviewing the data.

Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, and Snelgrove (2016) suggested four stages for thematic analysis, including initialization, construction, rectification, and finalization (p. 103). After the data were collected during the first stage, initialization, the researcher classified and compared the data between the school leaders and special education teachers. During the construction stage, the researcher labeled, defined, and described the data, using charts and summarizations. In the rectification stage, the researcher related themes to established knowledge areas identified in the literature review. In the final stage, finalization, the researcher developed a story line, which was a summary of the data and the process that occurred.

## Integration

The data from the short-answer questions and the data from the KSSE surveys were collected by utilizing a concurrent triangulation research design, analyzed separately through quantitative methods and qualitative methods, then integrated. Fetters et al. (2013) explained that integration can occur through the concurrent design method where quantitative and qualitative data are collected at the same timeframe (p. 2137). *Connecting* is applied when the same participants are completing both instruments at the same time period, which in the current study included the Demographics Survey, KSSE Survey, and the short-answer questionnaire. Fetters et al. explained *merging* is when two databases are brought together for analysis (p. 2140). The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and a series of one-way ANOVAs, and the qualitative data were analyzed using coding and theme analysis. After separate analyses, the data were merged together and presented in two tables.

## Summary

The concurrent triangulation mixed methods research design was utilized in this study. The quantitative and qualitative data were collected using the Demographic Survey (Landry, 2011) and the KSSE Survey (Harlin-Fischer, 1998) along with a qualitative questionnaire, which was sent to 209 special education teachers and 78 assistant principals and principals at middle and high schools in five rural Georgia counties, identified in this study as County A, County B, County C, County D, and County E. The researcher used the Qualtrics platform to create and distribute the surveys. The quantitative data were analyzed using a series of one-way ANOVAs to examine the difference between the beliefs of school leaders and special education teachers, and the



qualitative data were analyzed using coding to compare the perception of school leaders and special education teachers related to implementing a special education program effectively. The researcher integrated the qualitative and quantitative data to compare the findings. Chapter IV will present the findings.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

Jones (2011), Keenoy (2012), and Burton (2008) confirmed that university educational leadership programs have not adequately prepared school leaders for the demands of the growing special education population in public schools. These researchers indicated that this lack of adequate preparation may be the result of inadequate focus on special education law in the preparatory curriculum that school leaders complete. As a result, school leaders may not be prepared for the realities and challenges of ensuring that the educational needs of students with special needs are met.

#### Research Questions and Hypotheses

The purpose of the study was to examine the difference between beliefs and perceptions of middle and high school leaders and special education teachers about the knowledge and skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively using a concurrent triangulation mixed methods research design. The following research questions were answered:

1. Quantitative: What is the difference between middle and high school leaders' beliefs and special education teachers' beliefs about the knowledge necessary to implement special education programs effectively?

*H<sub>0</sub>*: There is not a statistically significant difference between middle and high school leaders' beliefs and special education teachers' beliefs about the knowledge necessary to implement special education programs effectively.

$H_a$ : There is a statistically significant difference between middle and high school leaders' beliefs and special education teachers' beliefs about the knowledge necessary to implement special education programs effectively.

2. Quantitative: What is the difference between middle and high school leaders' beliefs and special education teachers' beliefs about the skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively?

$H_o$ : There is not a statistically significant difference between middle and high school leaders' beliefs and special education teachers' beliefs about the skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively.

$H_a$ : There is a statistically significant difference between middle and high school leaders' beliefs and special education teachers' beliefs about the skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively.

3. Qualitative: How do perceptions of preparedness for implementing special education programs effectively compare between middle and high school leaders and special education teachers?

### Research Design

A concurrent triangulation mixed methods research design model was utilized in the current study. The quantitative and qualitative data were collected with the KSSE survey, which was administered via Qualtrics to special education teachers, assistant principals, and principals at middle and high schools in rural Georgia. The researcher utilized a causal-comparative research design for the quantitative component. A series of one-way ANOVAs was conducted to analyze the quantitative findings. The researcher used a descriptive case study to analyze qualitative data from the questionnaire using

color coding and theme analysis. This study sought to examine the difference between beliefs and perceptions of middle and high school leaders and special education teachers about the knowledge and skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively.

### Participants

The researcher contacted 78 school leaders and 209 special education teachers from five middle and high schools in rural areas of Georgia, requesting that they complete the KSSE survey and answer six short-answer questions. The researcher sent 78 emails to school leaders in middle and high schools in five rural counties in Georgia, while 209 emails were sent to special education teachers in the same five rural Georgia counties. Of those recruitment emails, 26 emails were returned with errors, indicating that the individuals' email addresses no longer existed. The researcher concluded that the email addresses were no longer available due to attrition or the recipients were no longer working for the individual school districts. Because the emails were delivered after the school year had ended, if the individual was no longer an employee of the district, his or her email address would be invalid. Additionally, one email response indicated that the individual had retired. Only 261 email recipients received the link for the Demographic Survey, KSSE survey, and six short-answer questions. Of those 261, 67 participants responded, which yielded a 25.7% response rate; however, 59 of these responses were considered valid. Of these valid responses, the participants included 43 special education teachers and 16 school leaders (i.e., assistant principals and principals).

Table 13 provides frequencies and percentages for the question, "What is your assignment?" Of the total responses, 23 participants responded that they were middle

school special education teachers, which represented 41.1% of the participants. Additionally, six participants responded that they were high school assistant principals, which represented 10.2 % of the participant population. Of the 23 participants, seven identified as middle school assistant principals, which represented 11.9 % of this group, while three responded that their assignment was middle school principal, which was 5.1% of the participants. The researcher had zero participants who identified themselves as high school principals; the lack of responses from high school principals could create a limitation for the study results.

Table 13

*Frequency and Percentages for Current Assignment*

Response	<i>n</i>	%
Middle School Principal	3	5.1
Middle School Assistant Principal	7	11.9
High School Assistant Principal	6	10.2
Middle School Special Education Teacher	23	41.1
High School Special Education Teacher	20	33.9

The question, “How many years have you spent in your career as a principal?,” was answered by three middle school principals. Two middle school principals indicated that they had 1 to 5 years of experience, representing 66.7% of the middle school principals. One middle school principal had 11 to 15 years of experience, which was 33.3%. Based on the responses for this demographic question, the findings could be limited by the years of experience of the middle school principals.

Table 14 presents the frequencies and percentages for the demographic survey question, “How many years have you spent in your career as an assistant principal?” For this question, 13 middle school and high school assistant principals provided responses to this question. Of 13 responses, 10 middle school and high school assistant principals answered 1 to 5 years, which represented 76.9% of the responses. Additionally, two middle school principals and high school assistant principals responded that they had spent 6 to 10 years of their career as an assistant principal, which represented 15.4% of the responses, while one middle and high school assistant principal responded with 21 to 25 years, which was 7.7% of the total responses to this demographics question.

Table 14

*Frequency and Percentages for Number of Years Spent as an Assistant Principal*

Response	<i>n</i>	%
1 to 5	10	76.9
6 to 10	2	15.4
21 to 25	1	7.7

Table 15 presents the frequencies and percentages for the demographics question, “How many years did you work as a classroom teacher prior to becoming a principal or assistant principal?” For this question, 15 principals and assistant principals provided responses to the question. Six assistant principals and principals responded that they worked in the classroom for 6 to 10 years prior to becoming a principal or assistant principal, which represented 40%. Additionally, five assistant principals and principals responded that they had worked in a classroom for 11 to 15 years prior to assuming a leadership role, which represented 33.3% of the responses to this question. Finally, two

assistant principals and principals responded with 16 to 20 years, which was 13.3% of the total responses to this question.

Table 15

*Frequency and Percentages for Number of Years as a Classroom Teacher*

Response	<i>n</i>	%
1 to 5	1	6.7
6 to 10	6	40.0
11 to 15	5	33.3
16 to 20	2	13.3
21 or more	1	6.7

Table 16 presents the frequencies and percentages for the demographic survey question, “Where did you obtain most of your knowledge about special education populations?” For this question, 16 assistant principals and principals provided responses. A majority of the responses ( $n = 13$ ) indicated that these school leaders obtained most of their knowledge about special education population through direct experience. The response of service programs was noted by two assistant principals and principals, which represented 12.5% of the responses, while one assistant principal or principal responded that most of their knowledge was received through university educational leadership programs, which represented 6.3% of the total responses to this question. According to these data, a majority of assistant principals and principals developed their knowledge of special education law through direct experience.

Table 16

*Frequency and Percentages for Source of Knowledge about Special Education Populations*

Response	<i>n</i>	%
University educational leadership programs	1	6.3
In service programs	2	12.5
Direct experience	13	81.3

Table 17 presents the frequencies and percentages for the 16 assistant principals and principals who responded to the question, “What extent do you feel that the university education leadership preparation program prepared you to address special education issues in your school?” A majority of the responses, nine assistant principals and principals, indicated that they felt somewhat prepared, which represented 56.3% of responses to this question. Additionally, five assistant principals and principals indicated that they thought their university education leadership preparation programs left them unprepared for addressing special education issues, which represented 31.3% of the responses, while one assistant principal or principal responded that he or she felt prepared by a university education leadership preparation program, which represented 6.3% of the responses to this question.

Table 17

*Frequencies and Percentages for Level of Preparedness*

Responses	<i>n</i>	%
Unprepared	5	31.3
Somewhat prepared	9	56.3
Prepared	1	6.3
Well prepared	1	6.3



Table 18 presents the frequencies and percentages by group for the demographics question, “What is the student population of your school?” This question received 16 responses from assistant principals and principals. Eight of the school leaders responded that the population of their school population was 1000 or more students, which represented 50% of the responses. An additional three assistant principals or principals responded that there were 800 to 1000 students in their schools, which represented 18.8% of the total responses to this question, while two responses, or 12.5%, indicated a student population of between 401 and 500. Two responses, or 12.5 %, indicated a student population of between 701 and 800. Finally, for this demographic question, one assistant principal or principal indicated a school population of between 301 and 400, which represented 6.3% of the school leader responses. Of the 42 total responses from special education teachers, 23 participants indicated that the student population of their schools was 1000 or more, which was 54.8% of the responses. Additionally, eight special education teachers responded 800 to 1000 students, which represented 19% of the responses to this question. Responses from three special education teachers indicated a student population of 501 to 600, and another three special education teachers responded 701 to 800 students, which represented 7.1% of the responses. Also, two special education teachers responded 301 to 400 students, or 4.8% of the participants.

Table 18

*Frequencies and Percentages for Student Population by Group*

Responses	School Leaders		Special Education Teachers	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
200 to 300	0	0.0	1	2.4
301 to 400	1	6.3	2	4.8

Responses	School Leaders		Special Education Teachers	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
401 to 500	2	12.5	1	2.4
501 to 600	0	0.0	3	7.1
601 to 700	0	0.0	1	2.4
701 to 800	2	12.5	3	7.1
800 to 1000	3	18.8	8	19.0
1000 or more	8	50.0	23	54.8

Table 19 presents the frequencies and percentages by group for the demographic survey question, “How many students are served in special education with this student population?” This question received responses from 15 assistant principals and principals. Of these 15 responses, five assistant principals and principals responded that 101 to 150 of their students were served in special education, which represented 33.3% of the total responses from school leaders. Additionally, four assistant principals and principals responded 51 to 100 students, which represented 26.7%, while three assistant principals and principals responded 0 to 50 students, which represented 20% of the school leader responses. Finally, two assistant principals or principals responded 200 or more, which was 13.3% of the total responses. Of the 43 responses by special education teachers, 14 participants indicated that 200 or more of their students were served in special education, which represented 32.6% of the responses. Additionally, 12 special education teachers responded 51 to 100 students, which represented 27.9% of the responses. Of the 43 responses, eight special education teachers responded 101 to 150 students, which represented 18.6% of the teacher responses. Finally, five special education teachers responded 151 to 200 students, which was 11.6% of the responses, and four special education teachers responded 0 to 50 students, which represented 9.3%

of the responses. When asked if these students who were served by special education were educated within an inclusion environment, 100% of the school leaders and special education teachers responded *yes*.

Table 19

*Frequencies and Percentages for Number of Students Served by Special Education by Group*

Responses	School Leaders		Special Education Teachers	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
0 to 50	3	20.0	4	9.3
51 to 100	4	26.7	12	27.9
101 to 150	5	33.3	8	18.6
151 to 200	1	6.7	5	11.6
200 or more	2	13.3	14	32.6

Table 20 presents the frequencies and percentages by group for the demographics question, “Describe your current/previous school setting.” For this question, 16 assistant principals and principals provided responses. Of these 16 participants, nine assistant principals and principals described their school setting as rural, which was 56.3% of the school leader responses. In addition, four assistant principals and principals indicated that their school setting was suburban, representing 25% of the responses to this question, while three school leaders responded with the choice of urban setting, which was 18.8% of the responses to this question. Of the 43 special education teachers responding to this question, 30 identified their school setting as rural, which represented 69.8% of the responses, while eight special education teachers responded suburban, which was 18.6% of the responses. Finally, five special education teachers responded urban, which

represented 11.6% of the teacher responses. This survey question illustrated another limitation to the study due to the perceptions and definition of rural area.

Table 20

*Frequencies and Percentages for Current School Setting by Group*

Responses	School Leaders		Special Education Teachers	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Urban	3	18.8	5	11.6
Suburban	4	25.0	8	18.6
Rural	9	56.3	30	69.8

The frequencies and percentages by group to the demographics question, “What is the highest degree you have obtained?,” are presented in Table 21. Of the 16 total responses to this question, nine assistant principals and principals responded that their highest degree obtained was a master’s degree + 30, which would be equivalent to a specialist’s degree. These responses represented 56.3% of the school leader responses to this question. Additionally, six school leaders responded that their highest degree was a doctoral degree, representing 37.5% of the total responses. Of the 43 responses by special education teachers, 21 participants indicated that their highest degree obtained was a master’s degree, which represented 48.8% of the teacher responses. Additionally, 11 special education teachers responded that their highest degree was a master’s degree +30. These 11 responses represented 25.5 % of the special education teacher responses, while two special education teachers responded with a doctoral degree, representing 4.6% of the responses.

Table 21

*Frequencies and Percentages for Highest Degree Obtained by Group*

Responses	School Leaders		Special Education Teachers	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Master's	1	6.3	21	48.8
Master's +30 (specialist)	9	56.3	11	25.5
Doctoral	6	37.5	2	4.6
Other	0	0.0	9	20.9

## Findings

## Research Question 1

After cleaning the data, the knowledge items were dummy coded with 1 representing *Not at All Necessary*, 2 representing *Somewhat Necessary*, 3 representing *Necessary*, and 4 representing *Extremely Necessary*. The school leaders were coded as 1, which included the assistant principals and principals, and the special education teachers were coded as 2. The 27 knowledge items were averaged to create the Knowledge Scale. To assess the assumption of equal variance, Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances was conducted using the Knowledge Scale. The result was not statistically significant, meaning the assumption of equal variance was met,  $F(1,57) = 1.28; p = .26$ .

Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, and range, were conducted to summarize the data by group using SPSS. The mean for the school leader group was 3.35 for the Knowledge Scale with a standard deviation of 0.37 and ranged from 2.88 to 3.92. The mean for the special education teacher group was 3.44 with a standard deviation of 0.32 and ranged from 2.81 to 4.00.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted for the Knowledge Scale to determine if a significantly significant difference existed between the two groups. The one-way ANOVA result was not statistically significant because the  $p$ -value was greater than .05,  $F(1,57) = 0.81; p = .37$ . The null hypothesis is that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups. A statistically significant difference was not found between the groups, so the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. The results of the survey indicated that 46% of the school leaders who participated in the survey believed that special education law was most important in educational leadership preparation programs. For the same item, 40% of special education teachers believed that special education law was the most important knowledge set in preparation programs.

#### Research Question 2

The skill items were dummy coded with 1 representing *Not at All Necessary*, 2 representing *Somewhat Necessary*, 3 representing *Necessary*, and 4 representing *Extremely Necessary*. The seven skill items were averaged to create the Skills Scale. To assess the assumption of equal variance, Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances was conducted using the Skills Scale. The result was not statistically significant, meaning the assumption of equal variance was met,  $F(1,55) = 0.42; p = .52$ .

Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, and range, were conducted to summarize the data by group using SPSS. The mean for the school leader group was 3.48 for the Skills Scale with a standard deviation of 0.41 and ranged from 2.71 to 4.00. The mean for the special education teacher group was 3.43 with a standard deviation of 0.47 and ranged from 2.77 to 4.00.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted for the Skills Scale to determine if a significantly significant difference existed between the two groups. The one-way ANOVA result was not statistically significant because the  $p$ -value was greater than .05,  $F(1,55) = 0.18; p = .67$ . A statistically significant difference was not found between the groups, so the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Based on the findings, both school leaders and special education teachers believed that certain skills were necessary to implement special education programs effectively. For example, 68.8% of school leaders identified the ability to interpret data as being a necessary skill, while 65.9% of special education teachers believed that interpreting data was a necessary skill. Also, 62.5% of school leaders identified behavior management as a necessary skill, while 61% of special education teachers identified behavior management as a necessary skill. Furthermore, 75% of school leaders and 76.2% of special education teachers identified the ability to implement technology to assist in planning and managing the teaching and learning environment of students with disabilities as being *Necessary*.

Some differences in beliefs about the skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively were observed. For example, 18.8% of school leaders indicated that the ability to model appropriate behavior for students and teachers towards individuals with disabilities was a necessary skill, while 36.6% of special education teachers identified the ability to model appropriate behavior as a necessary skill. Also, 81.3% of school leaders identified the ability to demonstrate a commitment to developing the highest educational and quality of life potential for all students as being *Extremely Necessary*, but only 55.8% of special education teachers identified this same item as being *Extremely Necessary*.

### Research Question 3

School leaders. The researcher collected the qualitative data from six short-answer questions and downloaded the data into an Excel spreadsheet. One page or tab included the responses from the school leaders, and another page included the responses from the special education teachers. The researcher reviewed the data eight times for accuracy and then coded each response by color (i.e., blue, green, yellow, and orange). Blue represented the word or phrase that occurred the most frequent, green represented the word or phrase that occurred the second most frequent, yellow represented the third most frequent, and orange represented the least frequent response. See Table 22. Color coding was counted and presented using frequencies and percentages.

Table 22

#### *Color Code Chart*

Color	Responses
Blue	The word or phrase that most frequently occurred in the responses.
Green	The second most frequent word or phrase that occurred in the responses.
Yellow	The third most frequent word or phrase that occurred in the responses.
Orange	The least most frequent word or phrase that occurred in the responses.

Fifteen school leaders responded to Question 1, “How well do you believe that your K-12 educational leadership preparation program prepared you to work with special education population in your school?” The most frequent response to this question was that six school leaders had a positive experience with the special education preparation with their educational leadership program, which was coded in blue, representing 40% of the total responses to this question. The second most frequent answer, from five of the



participants, was that these school leaders perceived that they were not prepared by their educational leadership programs to work effectively with students served by special education, which was 33.3% of the total responses to this question. The third most frequent answer to this question was that three school leaders received on-the-job experience for working with a special education population, which was 20% of the total responses. Finally, one school leader responded that she or he needed to learn more about special education to be more effective as a school leader, representing a 6.7% response rate.

Question 2, “Discuss any educational training or experiences that have prepared you to work with a special education population,” elicited responses from 14 school leaders. The most frequent response ( $n = 5$ ) was that professional development prepared them as school leaders to work with a special education population. These responses were coded in blue, with a 35.7% response rate. The second most frequent response ( $n = 4$ ) was that these school leaders’ previous experience as special education teachers prepared them to work with a special education population. These responses were color coded in green, representing 28.6% of the total responses to this question. The third most frequent response, from two participants, was that a regional educational service agency (RESA) helped prepare them to work with a special education population. RESAs are organizations that provide professional development within various regions in the state of Georgia (Georgia Department of Education, 2020). These responses were coded in yellow, representing a 14.3% response rate. The least frequent response to the second question ( $n = 1$ ) was that they attended IEP meetings. This response was coded in orange, with a 7.1% response rate.

Question 3 in the survey was “List four areas in special education topics that K-12 educational leadership preparation programs should address. Why do you believe these areas are important?” This question received responses from 13 school leaders. Responses to Question 3 were color coded based on the most frequent and common responses. Special education law were coded in blue, representing 46.2% of the total responses to this question. Accommodations were color coded in green, a 23.1% response rate. Behavior management was color coded in yellow, also representing 23.1% of the total responses, while instructional strategies were color coded in orange, also representing a 23.1% response rate. Their answers varied on the importance of these areas for educational leadership preparation. Specifically, one school leader participant stated that these topics were “the driving force behind special education in the building in which decisions are made for students.” Another school leader participant stated, “It is extremely difficult to balance the needs of this student with the needs of other students around him.” Another school leader commented, “I do not think [my educational leadership preparation program] prepared me very well to deal with behavioral issues with students” and noted that more knowledge of “laws regarding discipline for students with disabilities” would be important topics for preparation programs. While most participants only listed four areas needing to be addressed in preparation programs, the statements above from school leaders supported the perceptions that school leaders need additional preparation to handle special education issues.

Question 4, “How important do you believe that knowledge of special education laws and competencies are to the role of a school leader?,” received responses from 12 school leaders. These responses were categorized according to key words participants

used to describe how important they perceived the knowledge of special education laws and competencies was for educational leadership. These responses included seven responses that indicated that this knowledge was very important. This response was coded in blue, which was 58.3%. Three responses indicated that this knowledge was extremely important, which were coded in green and had a 25% response rate. Extremely necessary was identified by one school leader and was color coded in yellow, representing 8.3% of the total responses. Fairly important was identified by one school leader and was color coded in orange, which was also an 8.3% response rate. One school leader participant noted, “Knowing the laws and competencies certainly helps in having an understanding of how to discuss situations with students as well as parents.”

Question 5 on the survey, “How could K-12 educational leadership preparation programs to meet the needs of the special education population?,” received responses from 10 school leaders. The answers to this question varied, which made it challenging to determine a color code. Of the total responses, two participants indicated that basics knowledge of laws would help them meet the needs of the special education population. These responses were coded in blue, which was 20% of the total responses to this question. In addition, one response stated that educational leadership preparation would better meet school leaders’ needs by allowing them to shadow special education leaders. These responses were coded in yellow, which represented 10% of the responses. Also, one response stated that K-12 educational leadership preparation programs should provide real world experiences, which was coded in orange with a 10% response rate.

Question 6 on the survey, “What factors do you believe contribute to non-compliance issues in your school or schools in general?,” received responses from 13

school leaders. Seven school leaders responded that a lack of knowledge of what specifically contributed to non-compliance issues. These responses represented 53.8% of the total responses and color coded in blue. One response indicated that a lack of understanding contributed to non-compliance issues, which was coded in green and was 7.7% of the total responses, while one response referred to a lack of training being the source of non-compliance issues. This response was coded in yellow, which was also a 7.7% response rate. A lack of communication was coded in orange and was 7.7% of the total responses. Table 23 displays the frequencies and percentages for the school leader codes for each question.

Table 23

*Frequencies and Percentages for School Leader Codes by Question*

Question	<i>n</i> (%)	Blue	Green	Yellow	Orange
1. How well do you believe that your K-12 educational leadership preparation program prepared you to work with special education population in your school?	15 (93.8%)	Positive experience with their leadership program 6 (40.0%)	Not being prepared by their leadership program 5 (33.3%)	On-the-job experience 3 (20.0%)	There still much more I need to learn to be more effective 1 (6.7%)
2. Discuss any educational training or experiences that have prepared you to work with a special education population.	14 (87.5%)	Professional development 5 (35.7%)	Previous special education teachers or inclusion teachers 4 (28.6%)	RESA 2 (14.3%)	Attended IEP meetings 1 (7.1%)
3. List four areas in special education topics that K-12 educational leadership preparation programs should	13 (81.3%)	Special education law 6 (46.2%)	Accommodations 3 (23.1%)	Behavior management 3 (23.1%)	Instructional strategies 3 (23.1%)

Question	<i>n</i> (%)	Blue	Green	Yellow	Orange
address. Why do you believe these areas are important?					
4. How important do you believe that knowledge of special education laws and competencies are to the role of a school leader?	12 (75.0%)	Very Important 7 (58.3%)	Extremely Important 3 (25.0%)	Extremely Necessary 1 (8.3%)	Fairly Important 1 (8.3%)
5. How could K-12 educational leadership preparation programs to meet the needs of the special education population?	10 (62.5%)	Basic knowledge of laws 2 (20.0%)	Course review 1 (10.0%)	Shadow special education leaders 1 (10.0%)	Provide real world experiences 1 (10.0%)
6. What factors do you believe contribute to non-compliance issues in your school or schools in general?	13 (81.3%)	Lack of knowledge 7 (53.8%)	Lack of understanding 1 (7.7%)	Lack of training 1 (7.7%)	Lack of communication 1 (7.7%)

*Note.* Some items had responses that did not align with other responses, so the frequencies and percentages did not equal the total number of responses.

Special education teachers. The researcher collected the qualitative data from the short-answer questions and downloaded the data into an Excel spreadsheet. The researcher reviewed and read the data eight times and continued to review the data during the drafting process of this chapter for errors and inconsistencies. The researcher color coded each response using blue, green, yellow, and orange. Blue represented the word or phrase that occurred the most frequent, green represented the word or phrase that occurred the second most frequent, yellow represented the third most frequent, and orange represented the least frequent response. Color coding was counted and presented using frequencies and percentages.

Question 1, “How well are your school leaders prepared to work with the special education population in your building?,” received responses from 33 special education teachers. Of the responses, 22 participants indicated that school leaders were well prepared, which was color coded in blue and was 66.7% of the total responses to this question. Three participants responded that school leaders were not prepared, which was color coded in green and had a 9.1% response rate. Another three responses indicated that their school leaders were former special education teachers, which was 9.1% of the total responses. Well supported was identified by two participants and was color coded in orange, which was 6.1% of the total responses.

Question 2 in the survey, “Discuss any educational training or experiences that have prepared you to work with a special education population,” received 32 responses from special education teachers. The most frequent response was on-the-job training, which was color coded in blue with a 43.8% response rate by 14 participants. The second most frequent response was that their years of experience prepared the participants to work with a special education population, and these 10 responses by special education teachers were coded in green and had a 31.3% response rate. The third most frequent response provided by nine special education teachers referred to their master’s degree program as preparing them for working with the special education population. These responses were coded in yellow with a 28.1% response rate. The fourth most frequent response from six special education teachers was that RESA workshops prepared them for working with a special education population. These responses were color coded as orange with an 18.8% response rate.

For Question 3, “List four areas in special education topics that K-12 educational leadership preparation programs should address. Why do you believe these areas are important?,” 33 special education teachers responses were recorded. The most frequent response ( $n = 14$ ) indicated that special education law should be addressed in educational leadership preparation programs. These responses accounted for the most frequent answer, which was coded in blue with a 42.4% response rate. One special teacher stated, “Special education law is an important area because a school leader cannot comply with the law in instances of the least restrictive environment, for example, if they are not aware of the law.” Behavior management was the second most frequent response to the third question. These responses by 11 special education teachers were color coded in green, representing 33.3% of the total responses to this question. One special education teacher noted, “Autism spectrum, Emotional and Behavioral Disabilities, Traumatic Brain injury, and Mild Intellectual Disabilities ...seem to have a pronounced rise in existence or manifestation in recent years. Relatively few strategies in these areas, that actually work in the classroom setting, are taught in SPED College or Graduate Programs.” The third most frequent response to Question 3, with five responses, was co-teaching, which was coded in yellow with a 15.2% response rate. Assessment was mentioned by two participants as being a topic that K-12 educational leadership programs should address. These two responses were color coded in orange with a 6.1% response rate.

Question 4, “How important do you believe that knowledge of special education laws and competencies are to the role of a school leader?,” received 37 responses from special education teachers. The written responses were categorized according to

frequency of key words participants used to define the importance of special education laws and competencies. The most frequent answer to Question 4 was that the participants perceived that this knowledge was extremely important. One special education teacher stated,

I think it is extremely important that a school leader is cognizant of the special education laws and competencies. Leaders should be able to roll up their sleeves and perform every role in their building if necessary. Just because leaders do not perform certain duties every day, it doesn't excuse them from executing policies and procedures.

Of the total responses, 14 teachers provided this response, which was color coded in blue with a 37.8% response rate. The second most frequent answer was very important. Of the total responses by special education teachers, nine participants provided this answer, and their responses were color coded in green and had a response rate of 24.3%. Four participants responded very, which was color coded in yellow with a 10.8% response rate. One participant answered fairly important, which was color coded in orange with a 2.7% response rate.

Question 5 on the survey, "How could K-12 educational leadership preparation programs to meet the needs of the special education population?," received responses from 28 special education teachers, including five responses that indicated the special education teachers did not understand the question; these responses were color coded in blue with a 17.9% response rate. In addition, three special education teachers responded that knowledge of special education law would help school leaders meet the needs of the special education population. These responses were color coded in green, which was



10.7%. One response was that hands-on experience should be part of educational leadership preparation programs. This response was color coded in yellow, which was 3.6%. One response stated more student experiences with special education training, which was color coded in orange with a 3.6% response rate.

For Question 6, “What factors do you believe contribute to non-compliance issues in your school or schools in general?,” 33 teachers responded. This question had a variety of answers, which made it difficult to color code. Of the total responses, eight special education teachers responded that a lack of knowledge of special education law was a contributing factor to non-compliance. These responses were color coded in blue with a 24.2% response rate. The second most frequent response, which included three participants, was that a general lack of knowledge as to what contributed to non-compliance issues. These responses were color coded in green, which was 9.1% of the total responses to this question. In addition, two participants referred to paperwork as contributing to the issue of non-compliance, and their responses were color coded in yellow, which was 6.1% of the total responses. The responses that mentioned paperwork explained that not completing the paperwork at all or failure to complete the paperwork correctly specifically would be a factor in non-compliance issues. One response was fear, which was color coded in orange with 3% response rate. Table 24 displays the frequencies for the special education teacher codes for each question.

Table 24

*Frequencies and Percentages for Special Education Teacher Codes by Question*

Question	<i>n</i> (%)	Blue	Green	Yellow	Orange
1. How well are your school leaders prepared to work with the special education population in your building?	33 (76.7%)	Well prepared 20 (60.6%)	Not prepared 3 (9.1%)	Former special education teachers 3 (9.1%)	Well supported 2 (6.1%)
2. Discuss any educational training or experiences that have prepared you to work with a special education population.	32 (74.4%)	On-the-job training 14 (43.8%)	Years of experience 10 (31.3%)	Master's degree 9 (28.1%)	RESA workshops 6 (18.8%)
3. List four areas in special education topics that K-12 educational leadership preparation programs should address. Why do you believe these areas are important?	35 (81.4%)	Special education law 14 (40.0%)	Behavior management 11 (31.4%)	Co-teaching 5 (14.3%)	Assessment 2 (5.7%)
4. How important do you believe that knowledge of special education laws and competencies are to the role of a school leader?	37 (86.0%)	Extremely important 14 (37.8%)	Very important 9 (24.3%)	Very 4 (10.8%)	Fairly important 1 (2.7%)
5. How could K-12 educational leadership preparation programs to meet the needs of the	28 (65.1%)	Did not understand the question 5 (17.9%)	Special education law 3 (10.7%)	Hands-on experiences 1 (3.6%)	More student teaching experiences 1 (3.6%)

Question	<i>n</i> (%)	Blue	Green	Yellow	Orange
special education population?					
6. What factors do you believe contribute to non-compliance issues in your school or schools in general?	33 (76.7%)	Lack of knowledge of special education law 8 (24.2%)	Lack of knowledge 3 (9.1%)	Paperwork 2 (6.1%)	Fear 1(3.0%)

*Note.* Some items had responses that did not align with other responses, so the frequencies and percentages did not equal the total number of responses.

Comparison. The short-answer questions received responses from 40 special education teachers who described their perceptions of whether their school leaders were prepared for the implementation of special education programs effectively in their building. Of the total responses, 22 special education teachers perceived that their school leaders were prepared for implementing special education programs effectively. One special education teacher stated, "Our admin over special education has a lot of knowledge and supports the teachers well." Additionally, two special education teachers responded that they did not feel supported by their school leaders. Another teacher stated, "It's like everyone loves the kids (so they say) but don't know how to support the teacher, student or parent."

These responses indicated a contrast to the perceptions of the school leaders who responded to this same question. Nearly one-third of the school leaders responded that they were not prepared to implement special education programs effectively in their schools, but the special education teachers themselves perceived their school leaders as prepared to address the needs of the special education population. One school leader stated, "I don't believe my K-12 leadership program prepared me for work with special education population in my school."

Additionally, special education teachers identified special education law, behavior management, co-teaching, and assessment as the four suggested areas that should be the focus in educational leadership preparation programs. One special education teacher responded, "Laws, IDEA, 504 and ADA all need to be understood by administration." As a comparison, the school leaders perceived special education law, accommodations, behavior management, and instructional strategies as the most important areas that should be focused on in educational leadership preparation programs. Additionally, 27 special education teachers responded that having knowledge of special education law was required for a school leader to be successful. These responses aligned to the school leaders' responses; all 12 school leader responses indicated that having knowledge of special education law was either very important (58.3%), extremely importantly (25%), extremely necessary (8.3%), or fairly important (8.3%).

The responses to Question 2, "Discuss any educational training or experiences that have prepared you to work with a special education population", demonstrated some similarities and differences in perceptions between school leaders and special education teachers. For example, a majority of school leaders and special education teachers identified two key experiences as being relevant to school leader success in working with the special education population. Specifically, 35.7% of school leaders perceived that professional development was a key experience, and 28.6% of school leaders perceived that the school leaders' previous experience as special education teachers or inclusion teachers was key, while special education teachers emphasized the importance of on-the-job training (43.8%) and years of experience (31.3%) as being valuable preparation for success.

Question 5 had the least amount of responses compared to the other questions. Five special education teachers indicated that they did not understand the question, including one response that noted, “It was an incomplete question.” Another response was “I don't understand this question,” which implied that there was a technical problem with the question. However, three of the responses from special education teachers indicated that knowledge of special education law should be covered in educational leadership preparation programs to help prepare school leaders to meet the needs of the special education population (10.7%). Hands-on-experience (3.6%) and more student teacher experiences (3.6%) were also identified as issues addressed in educational leadership preparation program. One special education teacher stated, “Leaders must be up to date on special education law, but they also must be mindful of team building and co-teaching strategies.” School leaders on the other hand, identified basic knowledge of laws (20% of participants), course review (10%), shadowing special education leaders (10%), and real world experiences (10%) as being issues that should be covered in educational leadership preparation programs. One school leader noted, “They need to make sure educational leaders have basic knowledge of the special education laws and specific student disabilities.”

### Integration

Preparedness. The quantitative and qualitative data were integrated and presented in table format. Table 25 presents the frequencies and percentages for level of preparedness based on the quantitative and qualitative data from the school leaders. Based on these findings, one-third of the school leaders perceived that they were unprepared to implement a special program effectively during their educational

leadership program. Of the school leader participants, 20% indicated that they gained their preparation with the special education population through on-the-job training.

Table 25

*Level of Preparedness for School Leaders*

Quantitative Response	<i>n</i>	%	Qualitative Response	<i>n</i>	%
Unprepared	5	31.3	Not being prepared by their leadership program	5	33.3
Somewhat prepared	9	56.3	There still much more I need to learn to be more effective	1	6.7
Prepared	1	6.3	On-the-job experience	3	20.0
Well prepared	1	6.3	Positive experience with their leadership program	6	40.0

The results of the qualitative data from the short-answer question survey from 33 special education teachers indicated that 20 of those special education teachers perceived that their school leaders were well prepared to implement special education programs effectively, which represented 60% of the total responses, while three special education teachers, or 9%, perceived that their school leaders were not prepared. Additionally, three other special education teachers perceived that their school leaders were prepared because their school leaders were former special education teachers. These three responses represented 9% of the total responses.

Topics. The quantitative data results aligned with the results of qualitative data, particularly with the results from Question 3, “List four areas in special education that K-12 education leadership preparation programs should address. Why do you believe these areas are important?” The responses from special education teachers indicated that special education law, co-teaching, behavior management, and assessment were the most important areas that should be focused on in educational leadership preparation programs.

As indicated in Table 26, these four areas specifically aligned to core knowledge and skills special education teachers believed were necessary for effective educational leadership. Quantitative data indicated that 88.4% of special education teachers, which compared to 81.3% of school leaders, believed that construct instruction and other professional activities that were consistent with the requirements of special education law, rules, and regulations are either *Extremely Necessary* or *Necessary*. Furthermore, 100% of special education teachers, which compared to 93.8% of school leaders, believed that following legal regulations, provision, and guidelines in student assessment were either *Extremely Necessary* or *Necessary*. In addition, a majority of participants expressed the belief that the school leaders need to demonstrate a variety of behavior management techniques appropriate to the needs of students with disabilities. Specifically, 90.7% of special education teachers, which compared to 87.5% of school leaders, responded that effective behavioral management strategies were either *Extremely Necessary* or *Necessary* to school success.

Table 26

*Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Data Regarding Topics*

Qualitative Question	Core Knowledge and Skills Identified in Quantitative Data		
List four areas in special education that K-12 education leadership preparation programs should address.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construct instruction and other professional activities consistent with the requirements of special education law, rules, and regulations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal regulations, provision, and guidelines in student assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behavior Management strategies</li> </ul>

School Leader Results			
• Special education law (46.2%)	• <i>Extremely Necessary</i> 43.8%	• <i>Extremely Necessary</i> 62.5%	• <i>Extremely Necessary</i> 37.5%
• Accommodations (23.1%)	• <i>Necessary</i> 37.5%	• <i>Necessary</i> 31.3%	• <i>Necessary</i> 50%
• Behavior management (23.1%)	• <i>Somewhat Necessary</i> 18.8%	• <i>Somewhat Necessary</i> 6.3%	• <i>Somewhat Necessary</i> 12.5%
• Instructional strategies (23.1%)			
Special Education Teacher Results			
• Special education law (40.0%)	• <i>Extremely Necessary</i> 44.2%	• <i>Extremely Necessary</i> 69.8%	• <i>Extremely Necessary</i> 37.2%
• Behavior management (31.4%)	• <i>Necessary</i> 44.2%	• <i>Necessary</i> 30.2%	• <i>Necessary</i> 53.5%
• Co-teaching (14.3%)	• <i>Somewhat Necessary</i> 7%	• <i>Somewhat Necessary</i> 0%	• <i>Somewhat Necessary</i> 4.7%
• Assessment (5.7%)			

### Summary

The purpose of the study was to examine the difference between beliefs and perceptions of middle and high school leaders and special education teachers about the knowledge and skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively using a concurrent triangulation mixed methods research design. For the quantitative component, no statistically significant differences in beliefs were found between school leaders and special education teachers, meaning both groups held similar beliefs about implementing special education programs effectively. A key finding from the qualitative analysis was that some school leaders perceived on-the-job training as better preparation to implement special education programs effectively. Another key finding was that school leaders identified special education law, accommodations, behavior management, and instructional strategies as the most important areas that should be focused on in educational leadership programs. Special education teachers, on the other hand, identified special education law, behavior management, co-teaching, and assessment as the four



suggested areas that should be the focus in educational leadership preparation programs.

Chapter V will analyze these findings and connect them with the literature presented in

Chapter II.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### Summary of the Study

A problem exists in the U.S. public school system with implementing effective special education programs. That problem, specifically, is that school leaders are not adequately prepared to implement special education programs effectively within their schools. Cooner et al. (2002) noted that knowledge of special education legal issues is central to any school leader's success in administering school programs and meeting the needs of students with special needs. Reynolds (2008) noted specifically that training and internship programs with an emphasis on special education and special education law are necessary to prepare school leaders to communicate effectively when parental concerns regarding student support services and IEPs arise. Yell et al. (2013) also noted that ongoing in-service training to assist with knowledge of special education law needed to be provided in order to allow school leaders to allocate district resources effectively. Backor and Gordon (2015), however, concluded that many educational leadership preparation programs deemphasize teaching and learning and focus on administrative competencies. Lack of training and emphasis on special education law can create a knowledge gap that may prevent school leaders from meeting the needs of their students with special needs.

Many other factors contribute to this problem, including the growing special education population who is now mainstreamed into the general population, as well as the

inadequate attention given to special education law during educational leadership preparation at the district level and university level. Jones (2011), Keenoy (2012), and Burton (2008) confirmed that university educational leadership programs have not adequately prepared school leaders for the demands of the growing special education population in public schools. These researchers indicated that this lack of adequate preparation may be the result of inadequate focus on special education law in the preparatory curriculum that school leaders complete. As a result, school leaders may not be prepared for the realities and challenges of ensuring that individual educational needs of students with special needs are met.

#### Analysis of the Findings

The purpose of the study was to examine the difference between beliefs and perceptions of middle and high school leaders and special education teachers about the knowledge and skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively using a concurrent triangulation mixed methods research design. The quantitative and qualitative data were collected with the KSSE survey and the qualitative questionnaire and then were analyzed, integrated, and presented in tables. The survey included 46 quantitative questions, including 12 demographic questions, 27 knowledge questions, and seven skills questions, as well as six qualitative short-answer questions. The participants included 59 middle and high school leaders and special education teachers in five rural counties in Georgia. Of the 59 total participants who responded, 16 participants self-identified as school leaders (i.e., assistant principals and principals) from the middle school level, while 43 participants identified their role as special education teachers at the middle school or high school levels.

In the quantitative component, survey items were used to collect data on the knowledge and skills needed to implement special education programming effectively using a causal-comparative research design. After summarizing the data using descriptive statistics, a series of one-way ANOVAs was conducted to answer the two quantitative research questions for the current study. For Research Question 1, the one-way ANOVA result was not statistically significant, and the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. For Research Question #2, the one-way ANOVA result was not statistically significant, and the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. Both of these analyses indicated that school leaders and special education teachers held similar beliefs about implementing special education programs effectively.

For the qualitative component, the researcher used a descriptive case study to analyze qualitative data using color coding and theme analysis. The qualitative data were imported into an Excel spreadsheet and color coded by repetition of the answer choices. One key qualitative finding from the survey results was that both groups perceived that knowledge of special education law and behavior management should be the focus for improvement in educational leadership preparation programs; however, special education teachers identified co-teaching and assessment as additional necessary components of educational leadership programs, while school leaders perceived that accommodations and instructional strategies should also be addressed in educational leadership preparation programs. Perhaps, this difference in perception arises from the desire of the special education teachers to ensure that their individual students are progressing to meet IEP expectations and are achieving academic growth within the classroom, while school leaders may be more focused on student performance as a whole. School leaders may, for

example, be more likely to evaluate their teachers and school success based on student behavior and how well students perform on state-mandated assessments, as student performance results are public and reported to the Georgia Department of Education. School leaders may also see improving instructional strategies as being more likely to address the needs of students served by special education in particular, as well improving the overall school ranking and overall student achievement scores.

Additionally, one key difference in the perceptions between special education teachers and school leaders arose from the question, “Discuss any educational training or experiences that have prepared you to work with a special education population.” While 35.7% of surveyed school leaders perceived that professional development was a key experience and 28.6% of school leaders perceived that their previous experience as special education teachers was key, special education teachers emphasized the importance of on-the-job training (43.8%) and years of experience (31.3%) as being valuable preparation for success. This difference in perception, although not statistically significant, may arise from the fact that special education teachers may perceive that they benefit from frequent, informal training directly related to situational problems that occur in their classes, while school leaders may perceive that formal, planned professional development may be more aligned with meeting a school’s improvement plan and fulfilling district mandates. Yell et al. (2013) noted that school leaders were particularly concerned with the need to allocate resources effectively. Based on the findings of this study, school leaders perceived that ongoing in-service training was one way to accomplish this goal. Both school leaders and special education teachers identified RESA

as an organization that provided them with valuable professional development to stay current in recent trends in special education, including instructional strategies.

The results of the current study also indicated that both school leaders and special education teachers believed that certain skills were necessary to implement special education programs effectively, but that certain knowledge gaps and weaknesses in preparatory programs may prevent school leaders from being as successful as they might otherwise be in meeting the needs of their students, particularly students with special needs. Browne-Ferrigno (2003) concluded that, even after completing programs designed to prepare principals for success, school leaders may continue to feel unprepared for addressing the problems that they face in their positions. Based on the findings from the current study, 60% of special education teachers perceived that their school leaders were well prepared to implement special education programs effectively, while 9% perceived that their school leaders were not prepared. These results contrast to the perceptions of school leaders, as 31% of school leaders perceived that they were not prepared by their educational leadership programs to implement special education programs effectively and 56% school leaders perceived that they were somewhat prepared.

Keeler (2002) interviewed school leaders and superintendents and concluded that more training in diversity and special education law was needed in educational leadership preparation programs in order for school leaders to meet the needs of students successfully. The findings in the current study supported Keeler's conclusions. A majority of the school leaders, 71%, believed that knowledge of special education laws and competencies was important to the role of a school leader, while 54% of school leaders perceived that lack of adequate knowledge of special education law contributed to

serious school problems, including non-compliance issues in their schools. These results compared to 24.2% of special education teachers who perceived that lack of knowledge of special education law contributed to non-compliance issues in their schools, while 9.1% perceived the lack of knowledge of what contributed to non-compliance as being a factor. Paperwork and fear were also noted by 9.1% of special education teachers as contributing to non-compliance issues.

Keeler's (2002) findings were further supported by research conducted by Larsky and Karge (2006), demonstrating that training and knowledge of special education law were necessary for successful school leadership. In addition, more training in special education law needed to be part of preparatory programs and as part of their ongoing professional development. Based on the results from the current study, many participants perceived that their ability to implement special education programs effectively was improved through in-service training and on-the-job experiences that go beyond the knowledge that they gained in their preparation programs. Furthermore, the participants indicated that special education law, accommodations, behavior management, and instructional strategies were the most important areas for educational leadership preparation programs. Based on the quantitative data analysis, 62.5% of school leaders identified behavior management as a necessary skill, while 61% of special education teachers identified behavior management as a necessary skill.

Furthermore, Cruzeiro and Morgan (2006) noted that the results of their quantitative survey indicated that the school leaders spent around 21% of their administrative time addressing issues related to special education, making it a significant part of their daily agenda. Cruzeiro and Morgan also noted that school leaders who

perceived special education as an opportunity will have a higher rate of success in administering their school programs successfully. Ramalho et al. (2010) concluded that changes in the curriculum of educational leadership preparation programs could impact a school leader's ability to implement special programs effectively and meet their students' needs. In the qualitative case study, the researchers concluded that changes made to State Board Education and Certification in 71 preparatory programs in Texas, to include not only field experiences, inclusion courses, and social justice, for example, better prepared school leaders for addressing student needs and problem solving. One interesting difference was found between the school leaders and special education teachers in this current study. The results indicated that 81.3% of school leaders and only 55.8% of special education teachers identified the ability to demonstrate a commitment to develop the highest educational and quality of life potential for all students as being *Extremely Necessary*. This difference may be the result of the school leaders' awareness of the challenges and constraints involved in meeting the needs of all students while at the same time addressing the individual needs of students with special needs, while special education teachers may be, as a result of often close relationships that they form with their students, focused on their individual students and their individual IEPs and may be more committed to the students who they teach within their classrooms.

The current study also supported the results of these prior study that changes to educational leadership preparation programs could have positive results in school leaders' ability to implement and administer their school programs effectively and better meet the needs of their students with special needs. The participants in the current study indicated that basic knowledge of special education law should be a priority in improving



educational leadership preparation programs. Some participants also indicated that developing a mentor program that allowed future leaders to shadow successful special education leaders could improve the preparation programs.

#### Limitations of the Study

The current researcher recognized possible limitations to the generalizability of these findings. First, the five Georgia counties that were selected for this study were assumed by the researcher to represent a mostly rural population based on county population demographics; however, only 56.3% of school leaders who completed the survey and 69.8% of special education teachers who completed the survey felt that their schools were in a rural setting, suggesting that the researcher's definition and perception of what constitutes a rural area may have been different than the perceptions of the participants. Second, this study focused on the perceptions of both current school leaders and special education teachers, and their perceptions of the quality of their training programs may not reflect the actual content in these programs. The participants may perceive their training programs as being effective or ineffective, when the opposite may be true. An additional limitation may be the years of educational leadership experience of the participants, as 66.7% of the middle school principals responded that they have been leaders for 1 to 5 years. These new leaders may not have developed an objective assessment of the training that they received, compared to a seasoned school leader who may be more capable of assessing the actual needs of school leaders and how preparation programs should be improved.

Third, the survey used to study the participants' perceptions may have been limited both in number and by circumstances. Only 59 school leaders and special

education teachers responded to the survey questions; therefore, the findings may not generalize to other samples given the small sample size. The survey was administered to the participants during the summer months and during the COVID-19 pandemic, which could have affected the response rate and may have also affected the responses. School leaders may have been busy with planning for the upcoming school year, dealing with budget and hiring issues, and decision making as to whether their districts would be returning to face-to-face learning or continuing as virtual. Furthermore, of the 59 leaders and special education teachers responding to the survey, zero participants identified themselves as high school principals. High school principals could have confirmed the current findings or provided different perceptions of their educational leadership programs and whether they were prepared to implement special education program effectively. Lastly, the fifth short-answer question had odd wording, which caused confusion for some special education teacher participants. This technical issue could limit the findings of this study.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this current study, the researcher recommends several options for future research. First, future research could include elementary, middle, and high school leaders and special education teachers from across the state of Georgia, which could increase the sample size. Landry (2011), who focused on principals' pre-service training before taking on their educational leadership role, recommended that a study should be duplicated with a larger sample population to obtain more valid results. Similarly, Cruzeiro and Morgan (2006) recommended to conduct further research on principals' and other stakeholders' perceptions of special education. In addition, future

research could gather the perceptions of special education teachers regarding support from their administration based on the school leader's preparation programs.

Lastly, the researcher recommends a study of the actual curricula in programs designed to prepare future school leaders, including the programs sponsored by various school systems as well as universities to determine the extent to which special education law is taught and to determine if gaps in knowledge of special education law that may currently exist could be bridged. Many school districts offer their own training programs that are designed to prepare their future school leaders, and the findings of a curricula study could possibly affect development and improvement these training programs, which could have a direct impact on students served by special education.

#### Plan for Disseminating Study Results

By January 2021, the findings of the current study will be concisely summarized and disseminated via a written report, which will be emailed to the superintendent's office, where the researcher is employed. Additionally, the researcher will recommend a review of the current curriculum of the district's educational leadership preparatory program be conducted, which would be shared with the district's leadership academic program director. The results of the current study will also be emailed to the superintendents of the five school districts that participated in the study, which was a contingency for their agreement to serve as a participating school district. Other dissemination plans include presenting the study results at professional conferences and publishing the study results in a peer-reviewed journal article.

## Implications of the Study

Throughout the current research study process, the literature has consistently noted that school leaders are not prepared in the areas of educating the special education population. Parents become frustrated during IEP meetings from the lack of student progress on IEP goals and failure to follow federal guidelines of providing a least restrictive environment. The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School System RE-1* (2015) found that schools must meet IDEA guidelines and provide students with disabilities with an appropriate public education that meets their needs. The ruling indicated, though, that parents of students with special needs must defer to the expertise of school authorities in determining what schools will provide in order for these students' needs to be met. If, however, the school leaders who are given this responsibility are not experts in special education law, their interpretation of this ruling and its expectations could become problematic, and disagreements between parents and the school system arise, often leading to lawsuit. In the state of Georgia, an increase of formal complaints has resulted from these disagreements between parents and school leaders. According to the data from Georgia Department of Education, formal complaints filed have more than doubled from FY 2011-2012 to FY 2018-2019. Specifically, the number of formal complaints filed increased from 95 in FY 2011-2012 to 204 in FY 2018-2019 (Georgia Department of Education, 2019b). While many complaints were denied or withdrawn before resolution, many complaints have resulted in a demonstrated non-compliance finding. In FY 2018-2019, 55 of the 204 formal complaints were deemed to have issues with non-compliance (Georgia Department of Education, 2019b).

Research also concluded that changes and updates to federal mandates, such as IDEA, have complicated the school leader's ability to interpret and implement special education law appropriately in order to implement a special program effectively. Zimmer (2018, p. 1016) stated that the IDEA has been interpreted out of existence. Vitello (2007) concluded that IDEA 2004 explains that school districts are less accountable and parents will have a difficult time when they question school district decisions (p. 67).

The current research also supported the argument that improvements in the preparation of school leaders could close the knowledge gap. Larsky and Karge (2006) found that 75% of principals stated that they were spending more time on special education situation than in previous years. Findings of the current study indicated that school leaders and special education teachers held similar beliefs regarding how to implement special education program effectively. In general, both special education teachers and school leaders who participated in this study perceived that knowledge of special education law was essential to school leader success and that gaps in knowledge of special education law can be resolved through changes in educational leadership preparation programs; however, the participants recognized that other factors outside of preparation program training itself, including ongoing professional development, contribute to a school leader's success in addressing the needs of students with special needs. RESA, for example, could provide additional, ongoing professional development on the current trends in special education. This professional development could bridge the knowledge and skills gap that many special education teachers and school leaders have identified as needing to be addressed in educational leadership preparation programs. Professional development resources through RESA, compared to educational

leadership preparation programs where the focus may be more on educational theory itself, could help current school leaders who may lack adequate knowledge of special education law to gain more awareness of its impact on both students and schools, which could help reduce conflict and non-compliance issues.

### Conclusion

The current study reviewed recent, relevant federal educational programs and court cases that have impacted the education of students with special needs and the need for more focus in school leader training regarding these programs and court cases. Teachers and school leaders are consistently looking for a band-aid to fix the problems with curriculum, discipline, positive work environment, and test scores. Today's school leader has to be a problem solver and an effective communicator, but he or she also should have the knowledge and expertise to handle the legal expectations of special education. The research from this dissertation explored the importance of bridging the knowledge gap, specifically the awareness of special education law and how to prepare school leaders for the increasing challenges that they face in meeting the needs and demands of students who are served by special education. The special education population has increased in the past decade with the influx of students with autism spectrum disorder. Today's parents of student of special needs are also educated on their rights and often bring advocates and attorneys to their child's IEP meetings, which also supports the need for school leaders to be trained on the legalities of special education. Bridging the knowledge gap by focusing on special education law through in-service training could improve school leaders' understanding of how to implement special education programs effectively and, thus, help them better meet the needs of students

with special needs, which could potentially reduce lawsuits that result from non-compliance issues.

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APPENDICES

## Appendix A

## Demographic Survey

**\*\*Please provide the following information by circling the letter next to the corresponding response as applicable to your current role.**

## Demographic Information

*1. What is your current assignment?*

- A) Middle School Principal
- B) High School Principal
- C) Middle School Assistant Principal
- D) High School Assistant Principal
- E) Middle School Special Education Teacher
- F) High School Special Education Teacher

*For Principals*

*2. How many years have you spent in your career as a principal?*

- A) 1-5
- B) 6-10
- C) 11-15
- D) 16-20
- E) 21-25

*Assistant Principals*

*2. How many years have you spent in your career as an assistant principal?*

- A) 1-5
- B) 6-10
- C) 11-15
- D) 16-20
- E) 21-25

*For Special Education Teachers*

*2. How many years have you spent in your career as a special education teacher?*

- A) 1-5
- B) 6-10
- C) 11-15
- D) 16-20
- E) 21-25

*3. What the student population of your school?*

- A) 200-300
- B) 301-400
- C) 401-500
- D) 501-600

- E) 601-700
- F) 701- 800
- G) 800-1000
- H) 1000 or more

4. *How many students are served in special education within this student population?*

- A) 0-50
- B) 51-100
- C) 101-150
- D) 151-200
- E) 200 or more

5. *Are/were students with special needs educated within an inclusion (mainstream) environment?*

- A) Yes
- B) No

6. *Describe your current/previous school setting.*

- A) Urban
- B) Suburban
- C) Rural

7. *What is the highest degree you have obtained?*

- A) Master's
- B) Master's+ 30 (Specialist)
- C) Doctoral
- D) Other

*For Assistant Principals and Principals*

8. *How many years did you work as a classroom teacher prior to becoming a principal or assistant principal?*

- A) 1-5
- B) 6-10
- C) 11-15
- D) 16-20
- E) 21 or more

*For Assistant Principals and Principals*

9. *Indicate the number of special education courses during your university educational leadership preparation program.*

- A) 0
- B) 1-2
- C) 3-4
- D) 5 or more

*For Assistant Principals and Principals*

10. *Indicate the number of special education courses in other educational programs.*



- A) 0
- B) 1-2
- C) 3-4
- D) 5 or more

*For Assistant Principals and Principals*

*11. Where did you obtain most of your knowledge about special education populations?*

- A) University principal preparation program
- B) In-service programs
- C) Direct experience
- D) Other

*For Assistant Principals and Principals*

*12. To what extent do you feel that the university educational leadership preparation program prepared you to address special education issues in your school?*

- A) Unprepared
- B) Somewhat Prepared
- C) Prepared
- D) Well- Prepared

## Appendix B

## Knowledge and Skills in Special Education Survey

*Please circle the designee (A-D) that you believe school leaders should be taught in K-12 educational leadership preparation programs in order for him/her to possess the skills necessary to manage/govern over special population programs and or students with disabilities effectively.*

*(A) Not at all Necessary (B) Somewhat Necessary (C) Necessary (D) Extremely Necessary*

KNOWLEDGE - How necessary is it that a school leader know:

1. Models, theories, and philosophies that provide the basis for special education practices.

- A) Not at all necessary
- B) Somewhat Necessary
- C) Necessary
- D) Extremely Necessary

2. Issues in definition and identification procedures for students with disabilities.

- A) Not at all necessary
- B) Somewhat Necessary
- C) Necessary
- D) Extremely Necessary

3. Due process rights related to assessments, eligibility and placement.

- A) Not at all necessary
- B) Somewhat Necessary
- C) Necessary
- D) Extremely Necessary

4. Rights and responsibilities of parents, students, teachers, and schools as they relate to special education.

- A) Not at all necessary
- B) Somewhat Necessary
- C) Necessary
- D) Extremely Necessary

5. Similarities and differences between the cognitive, physical, cultural, social, and emotional needs of typical and exceptional learners.

- A) Not at all necessary
- B) Somewhat Necessary
- C) Necessary
- D) Extremely Necessary

6. Characteristics and effects of the cultural and environmental milieu of the child
  - A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary
  - C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary
  
7. Effects of various medications on the environmental, cognitive, physical, social and emotional behavior of students with disabilities.
  - A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary
  - C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary
  
8. Basic terminology used in assessment.
  - A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary
  - C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary
  
9. Ethical concerns related to assessment.
  - A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary
  - C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary
  
10. Legal regulations, provisions, and guidelines regarding student assessment.
  - A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary
  - C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary
  
11. Typical procedures used for screening, pre-referral, referral, and classification.
  - A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary
  - C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary
  
12. Appropriate application and interpretation of scores.
  - A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary
  - C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary
  
13. The relationship between assessment and placement decisions.
  - A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary

- C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary
14. Methods of monitoring student progress
- A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary
  - C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary
15. Differing learning styles of students with disabilities and how to adapt teaching to these styles.
- A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary
  - C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary
16. Life skills instruction relevant to independence, community, and personal living employment of students with disabilities.
- A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary
  - C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary
17. Basic classroom management theories, methods, and techniques for students with disabilities.
- A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary
  - C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary
18. Research and best practice for effective management of teaching and learning environment of students with disabilities.
- A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary
  - C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary
19. Ways in which technology can assist with planning and managing the teaching and learning environment of students with disabilities.
- A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary
  - C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary
20. Applicable laws, rules and regulations, procedural safeguards regarding the management of special students' behaviors.

- A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary
  - C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary
21. Teacher attitudes and behaviors that positively or negatively influence the student behaviors.
- A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary
  - C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary
22. Strategies for crisis prevention/intervention.
- A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary
  - C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary
23. Strategies for preparing students to live harmoniously and productively in a multiclass, multiethnic, multicultural world.
- A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary
  - C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary
24. Typical concerns of parents of students with disabilities and appropriate strategies to help parents deal with these concerns.
- A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary
  - C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary
25. Roles of students, parents, teachers, and other school and community personnel in planning a student's individualized educational program.
- A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary
  - C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary
26. Ethical practices for confidential communication to others about students with disabilities.
- A) Not at all necessary
  - B) Somewhat Necessary
  - C) Necessary
  - D) Extremely Necessary

27. One's own cultural biases and differences that affect one's attitude toward students with disabilities.

- A) Not at all necessary
- B) Somewhat Necessary
- C) Necessary
- D) Extremely Necessary

SKILLS -How necessary is it that the school leader be able to:

28. Construct instruction and other professional activities consistent with the requirements of special education law, rules, and regulations.

- A) Not at all necessary
- B) Somewhat Necessary
- C) Necessary
- D) Extremely Necessary

29. Interpret assessment data for instructional planning.

- A) Not at all necessary
- B) Somewhat Necessary
- C) Necessary
- D) Extremely Necessary

30. Demonstrate a variety of behavior management techniques appropriate to the needs of students with disabilities.

- A) Not at all necessary
- B) Somewhat Necessary
- C) Necessary
- D) Extremely Necessary

31. Implement the least restrictive placement/intervention consistent with the needs of the students.

- A) Not at all necessary
- B) Somewhat Necessary
- C) Necessary
- D) Extremely Necessary

32. Use collaborative strategies in working with students, parents, and school and community personnel.

- A) Not at all necessary
- B) Somewhat Necessary
- C) Necessary
- D) Extremely Necessary

33. Demonstrate a commitment to developing the highest educational and quality of life potential for all students.

- A) Not at all necessary

- B) Somewhat Necessary
- C) Necessary
- D) Extremely Necessary

34. Model appropriate behavior for students and teachers toward individuals with disabilities.

- A) Not at all necessary
- B) Somewhat Necessary
- C) Necessary
- D) Extremely Necessary

Appendix C

Qualitative Questionnaire

IF YOU ARE AN ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL OR PRINCIPAL, please answer the following:

1. How well do you believe that your K-12 educational leadership preparation program prepared you to work with special education population in your school?

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2. Discuss any educational training or experiences that have prepared you to work with a special education population.

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3. List four areas in special education topics that K-12 educational leadership preparation programs should address. Why do you believe these areas are important?

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4. How important do you believe that knowledge of special education laws and competencies are to the role of a school leader?

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5. How could K-12 educational leadership preparation programs to meet the needs of the special education population?

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6. What factors do you believe contribute to non-compliance issues in your school or schools in general?

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If you would like to be entered into a random drawing for a \$10 Starbucks gift card, please enter your first and last name along with your email address.



First and Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

IF YOU ARE A SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER, please answer the following:

1. How well are your school leaders prepared to work with the special education population in your building?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Discuss any educational training or experiences that have prepared you to work with a special education population.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. List four areas in special education topics that K-12 educational leadership preparation programs should address. Why do you believe these areas are important?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. How important do you believe that knowledge of special education laws and competencies are to the role of a school leader?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. How could K-12 educational leadership preparation programs to meet the needs of the special education population?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. What factors do you believe contribute to non-compliance issues in your school or schools in general? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If you would like to be entered into a random drawing for a \$10 Starbucks gift card, please enter your first and last name along with your email address.

First and Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

## Permission to Utilize the Demographics Survey

From: Michelle Landry <[REDACTED]>  
Subject: Re: approval  
Date: March 26, 2020 at 1:05:14 PM EDT  
To: Robert Lewis <[REDACTED]>

Hello Robert,

I hope all is well with you during these times.

Yes, you may use my KSSE survey and demographic survey according to the specifics of your request.

Best Wishes,  
Dr. Landry

On Thu, Mar 26, 2020 at 1:02 PM Robert Lewis <[REDACTED]> wrote:  
Good morning, Dr. Landry,

My name is Robert Lewis-Vice. I am currently a Special Education teacher at [REDACTED] and an EdD candidate at Columbus State University. I am currently completing my dissertation that uses a concurrent mixed methods research process to examine the relationship between beliefs and perceptions of middle and high school leaders and special education teachers. The study examines the knowledge and skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively.

I'm writing to request permission to utilize your Demographics Survey from your dissertation, "Special Education and Principals: What Gets Taught in Georgia K12 Educational Leadership Preparation programs". Dr. Fischer has granted me permission to use the KSSE survey and your demographic survey and KSSE survey best fit the context of my dissertation.

Thank you in advance for your help and permission.  
Robert Lewis-Vice

--

*Michelle Landry-Salley, PhD*  
English Learners Educator  
[REDACTED]

## Appendix E

## Permission to Utilize the Knowledge and Skills in Special Education Survey

**From:** Gayle Fischer <[REDACTED]>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, November 6, 2019 11:31 AM  
**To:** [brown\\_jennifer2@columbusstate.edu](mailto:brown_jennifer2@columbusstate.edu)  
**Subject:** Re: request to use the KSSE measure

Jennifer- I would love for you to use my KSSE Instrument in your research. It's been a few years since anyone has asked, but I believe the elements of the instrument are relevant today. Let me know if you need a letter or something more formal from me. gf

*Gayle Fischer, PhD*  
Associate Professor: School of Teacher Education  
Interim Director for MS Curriculum and Instruction Program  
Mid-America Christian University  
3500 SW 119<sup>th</sup> Street, Oklahoma City, OK 73170  
[REDACTED]

On Tue, Nov 5, 2019 at 9:39 PM <[brown\\_jennifer2@columbusstate.edu](mailto:brown_jennifer2@columbusstate.edu)> wrote:  
Good evening, Dr. Fischer! I am Jennifer Brown, and I serve as the Chair for Robert Lewis-Vice, who is an EdD student at Columbus State University. The purpose of his concurrent mixed methods research study will be to examine the relationship between beliefs and perceptions of middle and high school leaders and special education teachers about the knowledge and skills necessary to implement special education programs effectively. Robert would like to utilize the Likert-type scale items from the Knowledge and Skills in Special Education (Fischer, 1998) measure during data collection. Please let me know if we have your permission to use the measure for his study.

Thank you in advance,  
Jennifer L. Brown

Jennifer L. Brown, PhD  
*Director, Doctoral Program in Education*  
*College of Education and Health Professions*  
4225 University Ave. • Columbus, GA 31907-5645

## Appendix F

## IRB Approval from Columbus State University

Columbus State University

Date: 05/07/2020

Protocol Number: 20-080

Protocol Title: A mixed methods study of special education training in educational leadership preparation programs in rural Georgia.

Principal Investigator: Robert Lewis

Co-Principal Investigator: Jennifer Brown

Dear Robert Lewis:

The Columbus State University Institutional Review Board or representative(s) has reviewed your research proposal identified above. It has been determined that the project is classified as exempt under 45 CFR 46.101(b) of the federal regulations and has been approved. You may begin your research project immediately.

Please note any changes to the protocol must be submitted in writing to the IRB before implementing the change(s). Any adverse events, unexpected problems, and/or incidents that involve risks to participants and/or others must be reported to the Institutional Review Board at [irb@columbusstate.edu](mailto:irb@columbusstate.edu) or (706) 507-8634.

If you have further questions, please feel free to contact the IRB.

Sincerely,



Institutional Review Board  
Columbus State University

## Appendix G

## Permission to Conduct Research Email

TO:  
FROM:  
DATE:  
SUBJECT: Permission to Conduct Research

My name is Robert Lewis, and I am a doctoral candidate at Columbus State University. My Ed.D. Dissertation Committee is chaired by Dr. Jennifer Brown. I am currently completing my dissertation on special education law. I am writing to request permission to ask your special education teachers, assistant principals, and principals to participate in an electronic survey after school hours. This study specifically addresses the preparation programs that school leaders complete as part of their training process. The goal of the study is to examine the content of these preparatory programs and how they support the implementation of effective special education programs from the perceptions of school leaders and special education teachers.

If you approve this request, I will be emailing your special education teachers, assistant principals, and principals to request their participation. The survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. The school leader and teacher data will not be linked. All data will be anonymous and will not include the name of the school district or individual school. I sincerely appreciate your willingness to consider my request.

Please contact me if you have any questions at all about the study.

Sincerely,  
Robert Lewis  
Special Education Teacher, DeKalb County, and Ed.D. candidate at Columbus State University

## Appendix H

## Research Approval from Rural County A

May 13, 2020

Mr. Robert Lewis-Vice  
4225 University Avenue  
Columbus, GA 31907

Dear Mr. Lewis-Vice:

I have reviewed your research proposal: "*A mixed methods study of special education training in educational leadership preparation programs in rural Georgia*".

I have approved it with the following conditions:

- All participation must be on a voluntary basis during *non-duty hours* only.
- All resources and/or supplies will be provided by the applicant. (District resources will not be used.)
- Written authorization is required from the principal before conducting surveys.
- No individual participant(s) or school(s) will be identifiable through the research project.
  - Due to the system's comprehensive academic program, research activities will be conducted during the following months unless special arrangements have been approved:  
September - November AND February-April

I wish you every success as you begin this very important project. I would appreciate a copy of the final report along with any recommendations that your research may offer [REDACTED].

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

## Appendix I

## IRB Modification Approval One from Columbus State University

DATE: June 3, 2020

The submitted modification requests for Protocol 20-080 have been approved by the IRB. Please note any further changes to the protocol must be submitted in writing to the IRB before implementing the change(s). Any adverse events, unexpected problems, and/or incidents that involve risks to participants and/or others must be reported to the Institutional Review Board at [irb@columbusstate.edu](mailto:irb@columbusstate.edu) or (706) 507-8634. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the IRB.

Sincerely,  
Institutional Review Board  
Columbus State University



Appendix J

Research Approval from Rural County B

Hi Mr. Lewis,

You are approved to do your survey with the special education teachers, assistant principals, and principals, in that you will be asking them to complete a survey. Please let me know how you would like to proceed with getting the needed participants.

Thanks

A large black rectangular redaction box covers the signature and name of the sender. The redaction is composed of several overlapping horizontal bars of varying lengths, completely obscuring any text that might have been present.

## Appendix K

## Research Approval from Rural County C

October 7, 2020

Mr. Robert Lewis,

Thank you for your application seeking approval to conduct research titled "*A mixed methods study of special education training in educational leadership preparation programs in rural Georgia*" in [REDACTED] School District. I wish to advise that your application has been approved.

This approval means that you can approach Principals of the schools in the [REDACTED] School District nominated in your application and invite them to participate in your research project. As detailed in the department's research guidelines:

- Principals have the right to decline participation if they consider that the research will cause undue disruption to educational programs in their schools.
- Principals have the right to monitor any research activities conducted in their facilities and can withdraw their support at any time.

This approval is conditionally granted on your compliance with the department's standard terms and conditions of approval to conduct research.

At the conclusion of your study, you are required to provide a summary of your research results and any published paper resulting from this study to this District Office and to participating Principals.

Please note that this letter constitutes approval to invite Principals to participate in the research project as outlined in your research application. This approval does not imply official departmental endorsement of any aspect of a research project or support for the general and/or commercial use of an intervention or curriculum program, software program or other enterprise being developed or evaluated as part of your research.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call. I can be reached at [REDACTED]. Should you require further information on the research application process, please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

## Appendix L

## IRB Modification Two from Columbus State University

DATE: June 11, 2020

The submitted modification requests for Protocol 20-080 have been approved by the IRB. Please note any further changes to the protocol must be submitted in writing to the IRB before implementing the change(s). Any adverse events, unexpected problems, and/or incidents that involve risks to participants and/or others must be reported to the Institutional Review Board at [irb@columbusstate.edu](mailto:irb@columbusstate.edu) or (706) 507-8634. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the IRB.

Sincerely,  
Institutional Review Board  
Columbus State University

## Appendix M

## Research Approval from Rural County D

June 5, 2020

Mr. Robert Lewis  
4225 University Avenue  
Columbus, GA 31907

Dear Mr. Lewis:

I have reviewed your research proposal: *"A mixed methods study of special education training in educational leadership preparation programs in rural Georgia."*

I have approved it with the following conditions:

- All participation must be on a voluntary basis.
- All resources and/or supplies will be provided by the applicant will not be responsible for resources.
- Written authorization is required from the district before conducting surveys.
- No individual participant(s) or school(s) will be identifiable through the research project.

I wish you every success as you begin this very important project. I would appreciate a copy of the final report along with any recommendations that your research may offer

Please let me know if you have any questions.

████████████████████

Appendix N

Research Approval from Rural County E

[Redacted]

terminate any research or project and may revoke its consent and permission for Research Applicant to continue research within the School District.

In addition, I understand that any data, datasets or outputs that I, or any authorized representative, may generate from data collection efforts throughout the duration of the research study are confidential and the data are to be protected. I will not distribute to any unauthorized person any data or reports that I have access to or may generate using confidential data. I also understand that students, schools, or the district may not be identified in the research report. Data with names or other identifiers (such as student numbers) will be made indecipherable and disposed of when their use is complete.

I understand that acceptance of this request for approval of a research project in no way obligates the [Redacted] participate in the research. I also understand that approval does not constitute commitment of resources or endorsement of the study or its findings by the school system or by the Board of Education. I further agree to immediately terminate said research project immediately if the School District revokes its permission for me to conduct the research study.

If the research project is approved, I agree to abide by standards of professional conduct while working in the schools. I understand that failure to do so could result in termination of the research study.

I agree to send a complete copy of the study results to the Department of Academics, Director for School Improvement, after completion of the study for any future use to the [Redacted]. I understand that the study is not complete until this report has been provided to [Redacted].

Robert Lewis-Vice Research Applicant Signature	_____	5/27/20 Date
Signature of Your Administrator Sponsor (i.e., Your Principal)	_____	_____ Date
Signature of Sponsoring Agency (i.e., College Professor)	_____	_____ Date

Barbara Anice [Redacted] [Redacted]	_____	6/9/2020 Date
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## Appendix O

## Initial Recruitment Email

TO:  
FROM:  
DATE:  
SUBJECT: Please participate in an important research study

I am writing to ask for your participation in an important study addressing teacher and administrative preparation programs and how they affect students in the Georgia classroom. This study is part of an effort to better understand the special education knowledge gaps that may exist in these programs and how these gaps contribute to out of compliance issues for students with special needs, as well as how these knowledge gaps may contribute to lawsuits and teacher turnover rates.

[survey link]

Results from this survey will help us to gain a better understanding of how principal and leadership preparation programs prepare administrators to address the specific needs of students with special needs. It will also help give us a greater understanding of how and why out-of-compliance issues may be the result of any knowledge gaps in special education law in particular, as well as helping us understand how revising these preparation programs may in the future reduce the out of compliance issues, and the resulting problems with lawsuits and turnover that may also result.

Your response to this survey is completely anonymous. Your individual responses will not be identified by name and will be published only as part of a general summary. Your name and identify will not be provided or published in any part of the study itself, and once you have completed your questionnaire, your name will be deleted from the mailing list to help ensure anonymity.

Even though your participation is voluntary, your knowledge and experience in the classroom can help us learn more about how leadership preparation affects the classroom and how the needs of students with special needs are being met, to help ensure our students receive the best education possible.

Please remember that if you complete the survey, you can opt to have your name entered into a random drawing for a \$10 Starbuck's gift card. I hope you will take just a few minutes to complete this important survey and ensure that your voice is heard.

If you have any questions at all about this study, please feel free to email me at any time.

Sincerely

Robert Lewis

Dekalb County Special Education Teacher and Ed.D. Candidate at Columbus State University

## Appendix P

## Second Recruitment Email

TO:  
FROM:  
DATE:  
SUBJECT: Please participate in an important research study

I am writing to follow up on the email I sent you a couple of days ago asking for your participation in an important study addressing teacher and administrative preparation programs and how they affect students in the Georgia classroom. This study is part of an effort to better understand the special education knowledge gaps that may exist in these programs and how these gaps contribute to out of compliance issues for students with special needs, as well as how these knowledge gaps may contribute to lawsuits and teacher turnover rates.

[survey link]

Results from this survey will help us to gain a better understanding of how principal and leadership preparation programs prepare administrators to address the specific needs of students with special needs. It will also help give us a greater understanding of how and why out-of-compliance issues may be the result of any knowledge gaps in special education law in particular, as well as helping us understand how revising these preparation programs may in the future reduce the out of compliance issues, and the resulting problems with lawsuits and turnover that may also result.

Your response to this survey is completely anonymous. Your individual responses will not be identified by name and will be published only as part of a general summary. Your name and identify will not be provided or published in any part of the study itself, and once you have completed your questionnaire, your name will be deleted from the mailing list to help ensure anonymity.

Even though your participation is voluntary, your knowledge and experience in the classroom can help us learn more about how leadership preparation affects the classroom and how the needs of students with special needs are being met, to help ensure our students receive the best education possible.

If you complete the survey, you can opt to have your name entered into a random drawing for a \$10 Starbucks gift card. I hope you will take just a few minutes to complete this important survey and ensure that your voice is heard.

If you have any questions at all about this study, please feel free to email me at any time.

Sincerely  
Robert Lewis  
DeKalb County Special Education Teacher and Ed.D. Candidate at Columbus State University

## Appendix Q

## Third Recruitment Email

TO:  
FROM:  
DATE:  
SUBJECT: Please participate in an important research study

Last week, I emailed you a link to a survey requesting you share your knowledge and experience with principal preparation programs and their effect on students with special needs. If you have completed this survey, thank you so very much for your willingness to take the time to help us out with this important study.

[survey link]

If you had technical difficulty with the survey and questionnaire or you have any questions about the survey itself, please let me know. I will make sure you receive the questionnaire, so you can share your knowledge and experience and be an important contributor to our understanding of knowledge gaps in Special Education law and how these gaps may affect you, your students, your school, and your district itself.

If you complete the survey, you can opt to have your name entered into a random drawing for a \$10 Starbucks gift card. Thanks again so much for all you do as a Georgia educator and for your willingness to participate in this important study.

Sincerely,  
Robert Lewis  
DeKalb County Special Education Teacher and Ed.D. Candidate at Columbus State University



## Appendix R

## Incentive Winner Notification Email

TO:  
FROM:  
DATE:  
SUBJECT: Congratulations

Thank you for participating in the survey that I sent you. You have been randomly selected to receive the \$10 gift card from Starbuck's. Please send me the mailing address where you would like the gift card sent.

Sincerely,  
Robert Lewis  
DeKalb County Special Education Teacher and Ed.D. Candidate at Columbus State University