UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

WORKING TOGETHER: SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS SUPPORTING TEACHERS OF STUDENTS WITH BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGES

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

By

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NORMAN, OK

2023

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WORKING TOGETHER: SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS SUPPORTING TEACHERS OF STUDENTS WITH BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGES

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR DEPARTMENT OF

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my committee, Dr. Curt Adams, Dr. Beverly Edwards, and Dr. Jeffrey Maiden, who were each kind enough to help me complete this journey. Dr. Kendra Williams-Diehm was a calming presence and advocate on my committee who I appreciate greatly. Thank you each for your time, knowledge, and insight into this research. I would like to thank Dr. Carrie Ciro for being a guide and encourager for the last few semesters. I am also thankful for Dr. Shirley James who helped me immensely with the data analysis process. A special thanks to Dr. Amber Davis for being a professional confidante, proof-reader, editor, and most of all, friend.

My experience as a special education director inspired the questions to begin this research. I stand in awe and thankfulness for the many educators, paraprofessionals, and school administrators who experience the challenges of serving students with significant behavioral challenges. There is much more study and work yet to do to give these students the opportunities and education they deserve.

I am privileged to have had so many fearless, strong, and wonderful women mentors in my life. Meme, I miss you. I hope that I have made you proud. Mama De, you were the giver of hugs and late-night laughter. Ella, you taught me humility and humble service to others. I had many wonderful, dedicated, caring, and life-long teachers in the Idabel Public School System. I would fail if I tried to mention them all. Mrs. H., thank you for the introduction to ballet, opera, A.A. Milne and the life lessons from Pooh and friends in the 100 Acre Wood. Marcia Mitchell, I’m forever in your debt. I learned more from your example without words than I could share here.

Darren, you came into my life at just the right time. I am so thankful that you are my protector and my friend. Thank you for always having the tissue to dry my tears, the hand that holds mine, the dad jokes to make me laugh, and the vision to share my dreams. You have my heart.

For my beautiful and brilliant daughters. Kaylee, you made me a mother. When I first heard your cry, I knew you would be strong, bold, and independent. You have challenged me, and I have been blessed to watch you grow. Rachel, your wit and your wisdom have always amazed me. I appreciate and admire your sensitivity, your sense of what is right and what is wrong, and your unconditional loyalty to those you love. Abbie Grace, you keep life exciting. Your fierce passion for people, your drive to challenge what people think, and your boldness to step out in faith are beautiful and inspiring parts of your character. Girls, please never discount your relationship with each other and the importance of each of your sisters in your life. Always be thankful for each other and the bond you share.

David, you are the bookend to our family, we wouldn't be a cohesive unit without you. I am so grateful for our everlasting friendship. Through our highs and lows, I've always known we would forever have each other's back unconditionally.

More than my words will ever be able to express, Mom and Dad, you have been the constants in my life. Through happiness and tears, you have never wavered in your support and encouragement. Mom, you are tireless. Thank you for always modeling how you love, serve, and share so much of yourself with others. Dad, I've learned from you the appreciation of a good story, a sense of justice, and fairness. I'm thankful for your steadfast and unwavering protectiveness of our family. I dedicate the following pages to you both. I love and admire you deeply.

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ABSTRACT

Special educators who teach students with significant or challenging behaviors may experience physical aggression, verbal aggression, the destruction of classroom or personal property, or the elopement of a student. Student behaviors such as these can lead to physical and mental exhaustion and stress in teachers. School leadership needs to know what special educators of students with significant behaviors report as supportive to decrease injury and burnout, to promote educator retention and ultimately student success. This study defines the types of supports provided by school principals that special education teachers in Oklahoma report to be helpful in these difficult situations. This quantitative survey research project used a pragmatic and non-experimental design to describe special education teachers' perceived support by a principal with the reported desired support types. In previous studies by Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross (1994) the findings of special education teachers' perceived supports were similar to House's 1981 social supports study, where teachers rated emotional, appraisal, informational, and instrumental supports as important. In this study, the sample was obtained by asking special education directors of Oklahoma public school districts to distribute the survey to teachers in their school district who teach students with challenging behavior. The survey inquired about specific challenging behaviors including elopement, physically aggressive behavior, property destruction, and verbally aggressive behavior. Teachers rated all areas of support as important, with emotional support identified as the most important form of support. Principals can help special education teachers experience greater confidence and skill by providing emotional, appraisal, informational, and instrumental support. With intentional and focused support, principals can influence the work of teachers of students with behavior challenges and be instrumental in supporting teachers through successful behavior interventions and increased

academic achievement of students with behavioral challenges (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

Keywords: special education teacher support retention, principal support, students with behavioral challenges

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Special educators have unique positions to apply their expertise and hone their skills (Hughes, Passmore & Maggin (2022). No intervention or program will work for every child they provide services for. Special education is thinking on your feet and out of the box most of the time. Educators who are called to this work require the active support of school administrators. Whether it is knowing how to apply policy and legislation in a situation, how to help safely intervene when a student displays challenging behavior, knowing what constructive feedback is appropriate, or how to respond to a frustrated parent, principals play a critical role in the success and ultimately the retention of special educators (Bettini, Cheyney, Wang, & Leko, 2015). There is much research on the role of effective school leaders (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Leithwood, & Riehl, 2003). However, less is known or applied when the situation involves supporting special education teachers. Special educators who have students with challenging behaviors sometimes experience physical aggression, verbal aggression, have a classroom or personal property destroyed, or the elopement of a student (Bettini, et al., 2020; Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006; Westling, 2010). Behaviors like these can lead to physical and mental exhaustion and stress (Amstad & Müller, 2020; Park & Shin, 2020). School leadership needs to know what special educators of students with significant behaviors report as supportive to decrease injury and burnout, promote educator retention, and student success.

Special Education History

Special education law and policy in the United States is relatively young. The exclusion of students with disabilities in schools was the predominant practice until the 1950s. It was not

until the 1975 law, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) or Public Law 94-142, that schools began incorporating and educating students with disabilities. Several United States Supreme court cases beginning in the 1970s helped to expand the meaning of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to include students with disabilities. When the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) passed in 1990, students with disabilities began to have physical access to public school buildings. In 2001, with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and in 2004, with the authorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, students with disabilities were to have full access to a "fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education" (Wright, 2010, p. 5). Most recently, the unanimous decision by the United States Supreme Court in *Endrew F., v. Douglas County School District Re-1*, 137 S Ct. 988, rejected the standard of providing students with disabilities the educational benefit of "merely more than de minimus," stating in its ruling that "[t]o meet its substantive obligation under the IDEA, a school must offer an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that is reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances." The Court additionally emphasized the requirement that "every child should have the chance to meet challenging objectives" (*Endrew F., v. Douglas County School District Re-1*, 137 S Ct. 988). Current-day special education policy is comprised primarily of the above-mentioned federal laws.

The primary mechanism used to comply with policy and federal law is the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is "the centerpiece of the statute's education delivery system for disabled children." In the case of *Honig v. Doe*, 484 U. S. 305, 311 (1988), the IEP was established as the tool to ensure the delivery of equitable education for students with disabilities (Yell, Collins, Kumpiene, & Bateman, 2020). "A comprehensive plan prepared by a child's IEP

Team must be drafted in compliance with a detailed set of procedures" (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Cooper, 2018, p. 127). IDEA's definition of special education is "specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a student with a disability" (IDEA Regulations, 34 C.F.R. § 300.39(a) (2006). The IEP should describe how special education and related services are "tailored to the unique needs" of a particular child (*Endrew F*. v. Douglas County School District RE–1, 580 U.S. 2017). The IEP of each student must define the educational services, including related services such as speech, occupational, or physical therapy, counseling services, or transportation that are to be provided by the school. The central purpose of the IDEA is "to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living" (IDEA 34 CFR ss300.1(a).

As with other policy tools, the effectiveness of an IEP depends on its use by people. Teachers working collectively with students, families, and school leaders determine the extent to which students receiving special education services experience a quality education aligned with their individual needs. Special education teachers bear much of the responsibility for the delivery of services and the success of students. Research evidence reveals that the demands associated with special education contribute to teachers' emotional stress and tension.

The Effects of Challenging Behavior on Teacher Stress and Burnout

Teacher stress and burnout are very high among educators who teach students with significant behavioral challenges (Zabel & Zabel 2001). The need to maintain safe schools for students and staff is a part of this conversation, as teachers report intense struggles with classroom management when student behavior escalates (Baker, 2005). Overall, this specific

group of special education teachers reports low self-efficacy ratings as they work to meet the educational needs of a diverse group of learners (Abel & Sewell, 1999; Baker, 2005; Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006; Bullock, Ellis, & Wilson, 1994; Cooley & Yavanoff, 1996; George, Gillman, & Billingsley, 1995; Landers, Alter, & Servilio, 2008; Lewis, 1999; Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994; Singh, & Billingsley, 1996; Sutherland & Oswald, 2005; and Woolfold, Rosoff, & Hoy, 1990). Results from one study of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders in the mid-1990s found that more than 35% of a sample planned to leave their current position, and another 10% reported feeling uncertain about a future in special education (George, George, Gersten, & Grosenick, 1995, p. 227). It appears that the issue of teacher retention for this population of students continues through more current research from a study by Cancio, Albrecht, and Johns (2013). This finding is specifically significant because of the already critical shortage of teachers in the area of behavioral disorders. In the George, et al. l. (1995) study, teachers used words such as "physically and emotionally worn out." They described their reasons for considering leaving because the job was too "stressful," "draining," and "energy-consuming" (p. 230).

McManus and Kauffman (1991) find that educators who work primarily with students with serious behavioral and emotional disorders have difficult positions. In more recent research, Bradley, Doolittle, and Bartolotta (2008) and Hillel (2015) report similar findings. These authors present the argument that students with behavioral disorders are described as "aggressive" and utilize other behaviors that are described as "aversive" or "complex" (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008; Hillel, 2015; McManus & Kauffman, 1991). For these reasons, there is an unusually high rate of teacher attrition among special education teachers. Billingsley (2004) and George et al. (1995) relate that this is a sign of a problem that is outside of a specific classroom

or teacher but rather “suggests weaknesses at the programmatic or systemic level” (p. 234). Teachers need to feel supported, appreciated, and a part of a group with shared goals who can relate and offer advice (Berry et al., 2011). High attrition signals that many special education teachers are not experiencing the support they need.

During a student's behavior crisis, multiple situations may happen simultaneously, requiring a great level of management expertise in the classroom setting. If a student becomes aggressive, there is a general process or order of escalation for the event. According to the Crisis Prevention and Intervention network, the student may experience increased anxiety, where the student may pace, withdraw, and wring his or her hands (CPI, 2020). The second phase is when the student may become defensive and may begin to lose rationality. The student in this phase may become belligerent or obstinate, refuse to comply with directives, and become verbally aggressive. In the Crisis Development Model (CPI, 2020), the acting-out student may become physically aggressive and attack a staff member or peer. This can look like throwing items such as books or chairs or physical aggression such as biting, kicking, hitting, or eloping. During these circumstances, the teacher must be prepared to direct and maintain the safety of the entire classroom, including staff members such as paraprofessionals, and manage the behavior of the acting-out student. The teacher must, almost instantly, direct other students to get out of harm's way, including students who may not be physically independent or coordinated. If these students must evacuate the area, they continue to need constant supervision. As the teacher maintains the safety of the other students, it is also imperative to maintain the safety of the student acting out. Managing this situation safely and sanely requires quick thinking and fast action. It can be a very traumatic time for students, students acting out, and the staff (CPI, 2020).

Many special education teachers working with students with serious and complex behavioral challenges do not have adequate experience and instructional preparation to help them meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of these students (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006). George et al., 1995, noted over 20 years ago that "nearly two-thirds of [potential special education] teacher leavers and teacher stayers indicated their college coursework was poor preparation for the situations they encountered as teachers" (p. 231). Not much has changed, as Hill (2011) details that the limited amount of teacher training on working with students with behavioral challenges had a growing effect on teachers' willingness to stay in the field. A lack of administrative support is often given as a reason for leaving for teachers who work with students with significant behavior issues (Billingsley, 2003; Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013; George et al., 1992; and Lawrenson & McKinnon, 1992). This study seeks to define the types of support provided by school principals that special education teachers in Oklahoma report to be helpful in these difficult situations.

School Administrator's Problem of Practice

When teachers do not have enough experience or training to work effectively with students with behavioral disorders, classroom management, and overall school safety can be at risk (Farley, Torres, Wailehua, & Cook, 2012; Lewis, Jones, Horner, & Sugai, 2010; Niesyn, 2009). These issues present a significant administrative problem of practice, particularly when these students do not have the support they require to succeed. Discipline-related issues cause teacher stress (Lewis, 1999; Prather-Jones, 2011), but many teachers of students with known behavior challenges believe that they can educate these students if they persevere through challenging student behavior (Bandura, 1993; Hastings & Brown, 2002). Hill (2011) reports that teachers who work with students with behavioral challenges must have the active support of

school administrators, and these are the teachers who are at the highest risk for stress-related burnout and injury in the field.

The leadership practices of school principals influence the instruction gains of students. “Principals today must be instructional leaders capable of developing a team of leaders who deliver effective instruction to every student” (Wallace Foundation, 2013, p. 6). They must continually evolve and have an understanding and command of effective and researched-based educational practices. The principal’s role in a school’s educational programming and opportunities for students with disabilities is critical (Council for Exceptional Children CEC, 2006). Frick, Faircloth, and Little (2012) write that, the school principal is responsible for ensuring that all students, including those with special education needs, obtain appropriate instruction, and it is teachers, along with support staff carrying out this instruction who must receive continuous administrative and instructional supports.

Support from school leadership, or principals, is important to special education teachers' professional growth and development (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Lawrenson & McKinnon, 1982). These researchers find that principal support, through recognition of their work, constructive feedback, and encouragement of professional growth, helps special education teachers feel they make a difference for their students. “Research results suggest a positive relationship between leadership support and teacher commitment” (Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994, p. 298). Findings show that “teachers’ beliefs, attitudes, and job satisfaction are shaped by the workplace structures, policies, and traditions” (George et al., 1995, p. 228). George et al. (1995) found that when teachers perceived support from school leadership as adequate or more than adequate, they were more likely to stay

in the field of education and continue working with students with behavioral and emotional disabilities.

Teacher's Perceptions

Principals who communicate effectively provide both informational and appraisal support to teachers, which is critical to reducing stress (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015; Peters & Pearce, 2012; Cobb, 1978). Teachers who receive constructive feedback and encouragement from their principal report feeling more valued and believe they are making a difference in the lives of their students and school are more likely to work harder and contribute to school activities (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Consequently, in one survey, "38% of teachers [who work with students with emotional and behavioral disorders] reported feeling physically and emotionally worn out, 25% pointed to problems with administrators, stating that administrators lacked understanding and provided little support" (George et al. 1995, p. 230). Bettini et al. (2016) currently noted findings that back the George et al. study further detailing that a teacher's working conditions impact not only the physical effects on teachers but also on teacher retention intentions, instructional quality, and instructional effectiveness.

Findings show that "teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and job satisfaction are shaped by the structures, policies, and traditions of the workplace" (George et al., p. 228, 1995). Albrecht et al. (2009) gave similar findings noting that there is a "significant" influence of the workplace on teacher retention and that administrative support is a large part of that. George et al. found that when teachers perceived support from school leadership as adequate or more than adequate, they were more likely to stay in the field of education and continue working with students with behavioral and emotional disabilities.

The IDEA (2004) requires public schools to provide a Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for all students (*Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* RE–1, 580 U.S. (2017). Students who demonstrate significant behavior challenges will be provided educational opportunities in their least restrictive environment, similar to their non-disabled peers. Hughes, Matt, and O'Reilly (2015) documented through research that teachers who work with students with behavioral challenges must have the active support of school administrators. Additionally, these same researchers found that these teachers are at the highest risk for stress-related burnout and injury in the field. By setting the tone for the school environment with active involvement and interventions, instructional leaders and school principals can positively affect school culture, job satisfaction, teacher commitment, and teacher retention, which is increasingly difficult when working with students who struggle with behavior issues.

School administrators can be instrumental in supporting teachers through successful behavior interventions and increased academic achievement of students with behavioral challenges (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). By modeling active involvement and interventions, instructional leaders can positively affect school culture, which is increasingly difficult when working with students that struggle with behavior issues, as documented by Tschannen-Moran & Gareis in 2015 research.

Purpose of Research

One could list many current issues surrounding the support delivery for students receiving special education services. The effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic, early intervention and prevention, technology, results-driven accountability, placement decisions, transition planning, discipline, civil rights, teacher preparation and licensure, and student behavior are only a few issues, and much could be written on each topic. However, these topics are beyond the

scope of this research project. Issues important to this project are the definition of perceived support from the school principal that special education teachers provide when dealing with a student with challenging behaviors.

Therefore, the study's purpose was to allow teachers to identify the specific emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal supports they need or appreciate to feel satisfied, appreciated, equipped, and confident in this difficult work by the principals with whom they work. As with the Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross study (1994), principals are defined as the primary administrators of elementary and secondary schools. This project examined teacher perspectives through a survey to define appraisal, informational, instructional, or emotional supports provided by the principal to special education teachers when dealing with students with dangerous or significant challenging behaviors.

Research Questions to be Answered through this Study

1. What areas of principal support are demonstrated to special education teachers?
2. What areas of support are perceived as important components of principal practice by special education teachers?
3. Is there a difference between the type of principal support needed by special education teachers serving students who have challenging behavior and those who do not have students with significant behavior challenges?

“Support” Framework Defined

A key principle in research around school leadership includes the development of a school culture that supports teachers, grows teacher leaders within the school, and builds collaboration within the school consistently (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Pazey & Cole, 2013; Blasé & Blasé, 1998; Keyes et al., 1999, Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). In 1981, House defined a theoretical

framework to further describe the concept of social "support" in four ways: emotional, appraisal, instrumental, and informational. Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross (1994) further adapted and defined these areas of support through the lens of being a school principal:

> **Emotional support.** Principals show teachers that they are esteemed, trusted professionals and worthy of concern by such practices as maintaining open communication, showing appreciation, taking an interest in teachers' work and considering teachers' ideas.
>
> **Instrumental support.** Principals directly help teachers with work-related tasks, such as providing necessary materials, space, and resources, ensuring adequate time for teaching and non-teaching duties and helping with managerial-type concerns.
>
> **Informational support.** Principals provide teachers with useful information that they can use to improve classroom practices. For example, principals provide informational support by authorizing teachers' attendance at in-service workshops, offering practical information about effective teaching practices and providing suggestions to improve instruction and classroom management.
>
> **Appraisal support.** As instructional leaders, principals are charged with providing ongoing personnel appraisal, such as frequent and constructive feedback about their work, information about what constitutes effective teaching, and clear guidelines regarding job responsibilities.

The ways in which types of principal support differ may best be illustrated by using an example.

> Example: An educator has an urgent meeting scheduled with the parent of a middle school student served in special education under the category of autism

who eloped from the classroom earlier in the day. The student was found quickly and returned to the class without further incident. The principal will be in the meeting and wants to support the teacher in the most effective way.

Table 1

An Example of Types of Principal Support

Support Construct	Definition	Application of example
Emotional	Expressions of esteem, trust, communication, appreciation, and interest.	The principal reassures the teacher after the student is found safe. The principal attends the meeting and affirms the teacher's quick and calm response to the situation.
Instrumental	Direct help with work-related tasks, provision of materials, space, resources, and time, and help by management of details in some situations.	The principal actively helps in locating the student by reviewing the hallway video and calling the teacher to let her know which way to go. The principal meets the teacher in the hall to help escort the student back to class. The principal assigns an additional paraprofessional to help in the classroom. The principal actively engages in the meeting with the parent.
Informational	Providing practical information, including the ability to attend continuing education opportunities, suggesting ways to improve instruction and classroom management.	The principal and teacher meet later to discuss ways to maintain class safety, offering suggestions based on previous experience. The principal actively participates in a meeting with the parent offering additional problem-solving ideas and strategies to support the student.
Appraisal	Provide ongoing and constructive feedback about effective teaching methods and clearly defined job responsibilities.	The principal checks in with the teacher the following day and comments affirmingly on the new classroom arrangement with the

	student's desk farther away from the door and the new visual schedule on the desk with the break card. Talks with classroom staff to ensure everyone knows their role to prevent another elopement event.

Conclusion

Since the 1970s, when special education was first mandated in the United States, there has been extensive commitment and legislation to make schools inclusive for students; however, there is not as much progress noted in overall outcomes for those students receiving special education services (McLeskey & Waldron, 2015). One important factor in which student outcomes could increase is the school principal. School change research identifies three factors central to effective principal leadership: maintaining a school culture that is supportive of teachers, distributive leadership with teachers, and professional learning communities to guide teacher scholarship (Blase & Blase, 1998; Crow et al., 2003; Hoppey, & McLeskey, 2013; Keyes et al., 1999; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). As empirical evidence adds to the explicit knowledge of what principals can do to support teachers, they will be more able to utilize the types of prescribed assistance necessary. The literature review in Chapter Two examines the risk factors for students with behavioral challenges, the challenge of working with this population of students, what are effective supports for teachers, and evidence of the most necessary support from school administrators. Chapter Three reviews the methods of research for the study. In Chapter Four, details of the findings will be revealed, and finally, Chapter Five will discuss the findings and limitations of the research as well as implications for further study.

Definition of Key Terms

Appraisal support

As instructional leaders, principals provide ongoing personnel appraisals, such as frequent and constructive feedback about their work, information about what constitutes effective teaching, and clear guidelines regarding job responsibilities.

Elopement Behavior

Elopement behavior is defined as successful and/or unsuccessful attempts to leave the designated area without adult supervision and/or permission.

Emotional support

Principals show teachers that they are esteemed, trusted professionals and worthy of concern through such practices as maintaining open communication, showing appreciation, taking an interest in teachers' work, and considering teachers' ideas.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

All students with disabilities are entitled to a Free, Appropriate Public Education. This includes students who are eligible for special education from the ages of 3 through the end of the school year in which they turn 22. FAPE is determined for each student with a disability by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. The IEP team must develop an IEP that is reasonably calculated to enable the student to make progress appropriate in light of their unique circumstances.

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

An Individualized Education Program is a written statement for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with §§300.320 through 300.324.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children.

Informational support

Principals provide teachers with useful information that they can use to improve classroom practices. For example, principals provide informational support by authorizing teachers' attendance at in-service workshops, offering practical information about effective teaching practices, and providing suggestions to improve instruction and classroom management.

Instrumental support

Principals directly help teachers with work-related tasks, such as providing necessary materials, space, and resources, ensuring adequate time for teaching and non-teaching duties, and helping with managerial-type concerns.

Physical Aggression

Physical aggression is defined as physical contact with self, others, and/or property that is potentially harmful in nature. Physically aggressive behavior does not mean non-compliant behavior or off-task behavior. It also does not mean behavior that is disruptive to the learning of those around him/her.

Property Destruction

Property destruction is defined as successful and/or unsuccessful attempts to damage personal or public property.

Principal

For this study, principals are defined as the primary administrators of elementary and secondary schools.

Special Education Teacher

Per the Code of Federal Regulations, a special education teacher is a person who has obtained full State certification as a special education teacher (including certification obtained through an alternate route to certification as a special educator, if such alternate route meets minimum requirements described in 34 CFR 200.56(a)(2)(ii) as such section was in effect on November 28, 2008), or passed the State special education teacher licensing examination, and holds a license to teach in the State as a special education teacher

Specially Designed Instruction

Specially designed instruction means adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction— (i) To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability; and (ii) To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children

Verbal Aggression

Verbal aggression is defined as a threat or comment that indicates any form of physical harm to another person. Verbally aggressive behavior does not mean inappropriate commenting or the use of profanity.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Actions or threats that impact the safety of others at school influence many factors in the school setting. Students with significant behaviors interfere with their own and other student learning (Gage, Wilson, & MacSuga-Gage, 2014; Loe & Feldman, 2007; Trout, Nordness, Pierce, & Epstein, 2003). These students are at risk for negative school and life outcomes (Freeman, J., Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2019), and the teachers who work with them have adverse experiences as well. The literature shows that teachers of students with significant behavior issues report feelings of stress and thoughts of leaving the field of education (Abidin & Robinson, 2002; Barrett & Davis, 1995; Dake, Fisher, Pumpian, Haring, & Breen, 1993; Houston & Williamson, 1993; MacDonald & Speece, 2001; Nelson, Maculan, Roberts, & Ohlund, 2001; Van Acker, 1993). When teachers need help with these students, they may only sometimes receive the assistance they need from school principals. While these school leaders have a critical role in supporting special educators, they do not have adequate training and experience to help in many of these situations (Betinni, Cheyney, Wang, & Leko, 2014). This literature review summarizes what has been ineffective and effective in supporting teachers of students with significant and challenging behavior and the evidence around the practices of school administrators in these cases.

Students with Behavioral Challenges

Significant or challenging student behavior has been specified in literature as "intense," “dangerous,” having a “repeated pattern" that is "not developmentally appropriate," "interferes with the educational process," and "does not respond to interventions" based on the frequency and intensity of the behavior (Alter, Walker, & Landers, 2013; Westling, 2010). One way the

challenging behavior of students can be described is "students with behavioral disorders are often characterized by high rates of aggressive acts and other behaviors that their peers and adults find extremely aversive" (McManus & Kauffman, 1991, p. 247). In data from 2006, Billingsley, Fall, and Williams noted that about 8% of students identified with disabilities ages 6-21 in the United States receive special education services in the IDEA category of emotional disorders. Another study finds that problematic behaviors labeled as a mood disorder, oppositional-defiant, conduct disorder, and anti-social behaviors occur in 2% up to 16% of the school population (Mihalas, Morse, Allsopp, & Alvarez, 2009).

Ongoing negative school and life outcomes for students with significant behavior issues are well documented, with more than half of these students dropping out of school (Bullock & Gable, 2006; Cullinan & Sabornie, 2004; Lane et al., 2005; Reid, Gonzalez, Nordness, Trout, & Epstein, 2004) with some students with significant behavior issues performing a grade level or more below other peers in core academic subjects (Gage, Wilson, & MacSuga-Gage, 2014; Loe & Feldman, 2007; Trout, Nordness, Pierce, & Epstein, 2003). Students with long-term behavioral challenges are more likely to fall behind both academically and behaviorally, are suspended from school and drop out more often, and are more likely to be incarcerated as adults (Freeman, Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2019). When teachers are new or not yet certified, students with behavior challenges are repeatedly exposed to ineffective instructional practices, which can, over time, have devastating academic and emotional consequences (Mihalas, Morse, Allsopp, & Alvarez McHatton, 2009).

Students who demonstrate significant behavior challenges must be provided educational opportunities in their least restrictive environment, similar to their non-disabled peers. However, due to the challenging behaviors, studies suggest that students are less likely to be educated in

the least restrictive environment (Smith, Katsiyannis, & Ryan, 2011). Schools continue to address students' challenging behaviors through discipline measures such as school suspensions rather than through preventative measures to keep students' appropriate supports and accommodations as described by Baltodano, Harris, and Rutherford (2005); and Lane et al. (2005). These researchers' studies also show that out-of-school suspensions over ten days occur almost three times more with students with behavioral challenges than students with other disabilities. Consequently, teachers dealing with these behaviors on a regular basis face a special work-related challenge.

The State of Teachers Working with Students with Behavioral Challenges

Educating students with significant behavior challenges can be overwhelming, with high demands and unique challenges for teachers. Kauffman and Wong's (1991) research concludes that "different attitudes and additional skills may be required for effective teaching of students with behavioral disorders" (p. 225). Students may be moved to more restrictive educational placements when teachers are not equipped to meet their level of need (Rubinson, 2004).

For students with disabilities, including challenging behaviors, the individual education plan team must meet its substantive obligation under the IDEA to offer an IEP reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances (*Endrew F*. 2017, p. 11; Freeman, Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2019). However, current research on effective teaching practices in academics and interventions are limited in scope for this student population (Lane, Gresham, & O'Shaunessy, 2002; Pierce, Robert, & Epstein, 2004; Trout, Nordness, Pierce, & Epstein, 2003). These barriers make it difficult to document improving outcomes and ensure the provision of FAPE using evidence-based approaches. (Reinke, Herman, & Stormont, 2013; Scott, Alter, & Hirn, 2011).

The significant shortage of qualified teachers is another severe barrier to addressing the educational needs of students with significant behavioral issues (Freeman, Yell, & Katsiyannis, 2019). The problem multiplies exponentially due to the increasing number of emergency-licensed teachers due to certified teacher shortages (Boe & Cook, 2006; Mihalas, Morse, Allsopp, & McHatton, 2009; Sutherland et al., 2005), meaning that these teachers are far less prepared to address the academic and behavioral support of these students. Multiple studies have shown that newer teachers of students with challenging behaviors struggle with feelings of being unprepared, stressed, ineffective, and in need of support (Abidin & Robinson, 2002; Barrett & Davis, 1995; Dake, Fisher, Pumpian, Haring, & Breen, 1993; Houston & Williamson, 1993; MacDonald & Speece, 2001; Nelson, Maculan, Roberts, & Ohlund, 2001; Van Acker, 1993).

Teacher Preparation

Educators who work primarily with students with behavioral and emotional disorders report increased rates of burnout and job-related stress and are reportedly "among the least qualified special educators" (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006, p. 260). Using survey data published by the Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education and funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), Billingsley, Fall, and Williams (2006) identified the characteristics and preparedness of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. The data from this study highlighted that teachers of emotionally and behaviorally disordered students were less likely to be fully certified than other special educators, held more emergency certificates, and had been teaching shorter amounts of time than other special education teachers.

General education teachers are seeing a growing number of students with disabilities in their classrooms as federal laws continue to push schools to hold higher academic expectations

and inclusive environments for all students. McLeskey, Landers, Williamson, and Hoppey (2012) found that the number of students with disabilities spending eighty percent or more of their day in the general education setting increased between 1990 and 2011 from thirty-four percent to sixty-one percent. "Three-quarters of participants in a survey by Kahn and Lewis (2014) believe that teachers need special training to overcome prejudices and emotional barriers in working with students with disabilities" (p. 896). Adera and Bullock (2010) interviewed special education teachers who reported that some of their general education colleagues as unwilling to work with students with challenging behaviors and shared occasional derogatory comments about students with difficult behavior. In a 2014 study, Khelm found that educators reported feeling less welcoming of students with disabilities to their general education classroom when they did not feel equipped to teach students with disabilities effectively. The teachers in this study specifically stated concerns about being evaluated poorly due to the potential of students with disabilities earning lower test scores. "Teacher preparation and attitudes have been cited as major factors contributing to the success or failure of students with disabilities" (Kahn & Lewis, 2014, p. 885).

Studies find that approximately seventy percent of teachers support including students with disabilities in schools; however, they do not feel adequate to teach students with disabilities (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). In a more recent study, Vaz et al. concluded that teachers are concerned with the practicality of educating a student with a disability, and the more significant the student's disability, the less supportive teachers were of including the student (2015). Another study finds that "one-third of the special educators interviewed remarked that they provided services to students in areas they did not feel qualified or adequately prepared to teach" (Berry et al., 2011, p. 8).

What Supports are Effective for Teachers Who Work with Students with Significant Behavioral Challenges

Cancio, Albrecht, and Johns (2013) find that teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities need ongoing multidimensional support from principals and other school administrators. The administrator's role is to support teachers by providing an atmosphere where “they can do their best work” (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p.253). "By exhibiting care in explicit and meaningful ways, the administrator seeks to build and sustain relationships as well as create a community that embraces these values" (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 248). Special education teachers report wanting leaders who fairly delegate authority and tasks (Billingsley, 2003). Consequently, principals who value special educators and can provide informational and emotional support are more likely to have teachers who find great satisfaction in their work.

Teachers want to be a part of the problem-solving system in the school and work with school principals who are collaborative (Petty et al., 2012). A positive relationship with school leadership supports teacher commitment (Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994, p. 298). Teachers who feel supported, appreciated, and a part of a group with shared goals may feel valued as opposed to teachers who experience dissatisfaction within the school environment, which leads to absenteeism and teacher attrition (Rosenholtz, 1989). The Texas Center for Educational Research reported in 2006 that successful administrative support could counteract a difficult workload for teachers. In 1995, George et al., when school leadership was adequate or more than adequate, teachers reported that they were more likely to continue working with students with behavioral and emotional disabilities.

A positive school culture cultivated by the building principal is important to teacher retention. "Working conditions that allow teachers to meet their professional goals and gain

recognition from colleagues, supervisors, and parents enhance teachers' feelings of efficacy and their commitment to teaching" (George et al., 1995, p. 228). Teachers with a strong sense of belonging within a school are more deeply involved and perform better (Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994). "More than anything else, a commitment to a set of core values by teachers and administrators is part of what makes inclusive schools successful" (McLeskey & Waldron, 2015, p. 69). "One of the most promising ways to increase the support that new teachers receive is through hiring procedures, protected initial assignments, steady provision of mentor and other support, and improved evaluation to help novices" (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006, p. 261). As teachers stay in the profession longer, they gain more experience and skills applicable to the new and often complex situations they face with students with behavioral and emotional disorders.

Teachers who are invested in their students and stay in teaching longer benefit student learning. Administrators grow in leadership by fostering opportunities for special education teachers to collaborate (George et al., 1995). DuFour (2000), reports that spending time in thoughtful collaboration creates a shared vision among teachers. Spending time with colleagues for problem-solving, for example, in Professional Learning Communities or PLCs, encourages exchanging ideas and opportunities for professional dialogue (Baker, 2005). In some school settings, special education teachers may work in buildings that do not have other special education staff with whom to collaborate. Without the opportunity to collaborate with other special education teachers of students with significant behavioral challenges, teachers "easily lost sight of the fact that other special education teachers often face similar problems" (George et al., p. 234, 1995).

Effective teachers must have the knowledge and skills necessary to provide all students with the competence to achieve academic standards. Instructional leaders practicing collaborative relationships with teachers improve student outcomes (Billingsley, McLeskey, & Crockett, 2019). Principals who develop a positive relationship with their staff influence the use of inclusive best practices by providing multiple avenues to increase teachers' capacity (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 254). As principals supply special education teachers with the needed evidence-based behavioral and instructional resources, teachers report feeling connected (Cancio et al., 2014). It takes time to develop the skills needed to prepare and implement multiple accommodations throughout a lesson (Biddle, 2006, p. 53). Collaborating with teachers, school administrators help ensure educators have opportunities to increase their confidence and skills (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013; Lewis, Jones, Horner, & Sugai, 2010).

Ineffective Conditions for Special Education Teachers

Hill (2011) reports that teachers who work with students with behavioral challenges must have the active support of school administrators. These teachers are at the highest risk of stress-related burnout and injury. In a large survey of over a thousand special educators, reports of teacher burnout, poor working conditions, and feelings of “substandard quality of education for students” were cited as reasons for leaving the field (Council for Exceptional Children, 1998). The results of the 1995 George et al. research finds that teachers who reported they would leave the field within a year did not plan to do so because of experience, training, or competence; instead, they indicated they would leave due to the organizational structure of their position, including the service delivery model, the perceived support from school staff, and the time necessary to complete lessons and paperwork.

School leadership and policies, workplace structure, and the culture and traditions of the school shape teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and job satisfaction (George et al., 1995; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Hughes et al., 2014; McLeskey & Waldron, 2015). In 1995, Gersten, Gillman, Morvant, and Billingsley presented a paper at a forum relating to special education teacher satisfaction in Washington, D.C. Their findings include that perceived "administrative distance" was a factor in job satisfaction of special education teachers. In this research, teachers reported a difference in perceived priorities and values between themselves and central office administrators. Their perceptions were more negative if they had limited contact with district-level administrators. "This sense of being managed from a distance left many teachers feeling misunderstood, undervalued, and powerless to effect change" (Gersten et al., 1995, p. ii).

Overall, special education teachers report low self-efficacy ratings as they work to meet the educational needs of a diverse group of learners. (Abel & Sewell, 1999; Baker, 2005; Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006; Cooley & Yavanoff, 1996; George, Gillman, & Billingsley, 1995; Landers, Alter, & Servilio, 2008; Lewis, 1999; Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994; Singh, & Billingsley, 1996; Sutherland & Oswald, 2005; and Woolfold, Rosoff, & Hoy, 1990). Although teachers report feelings of stress and questions of self-efficacy when dealing with behavior-related discipline, they also noted that when they persevered and eventually found success in a situation, their confidence grew, and so did the willingness to attempt other behavior management strategies (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bishop, 1992; Woolfold, Rosoff, & Hoy; 1990). There is a "relationship between self-efficacy and readiness to manage challenging students, and it is incumbent upon school administrators to find ways to help teachers become more confident in their ability to meet the needs of their students" (Baker, 2005, p. 61).

Special education teachers serve students with many levels of ability, and student goals, supports, and accommodations are individualized. The heterogeneity in student abilities, placement, and individualized instructions requires an approach to teacher evaluation with amenable conditions and flexibility (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014). School principals who evaluate teachers' performance may or may not be trained to recognize special education teacher roles, responsibilities, and specialized instructional practice. Consequently, when evaluation feedback received was reported to be generalized rather than specific and not helpful, principals were thought to have little understanding of standards and instructional practices important for special education (George et al., 1995), and teachers reported that their principals are unable to provide effective leadership and supports.

Effective Supports Specifically for Special Education Teachers

Hughes, Matt, and O'Reilly (2015) documented through their research that teachers of students with behavioral challenges require the active support of school administrators. School administrators must model the belief that students with disabilities are more similar than different compared to their non-disabled peers with needs for comfort, security, respect, and achievement (Braaten, 1987; Lasky & Karge, 2006, Milsom, 2006). School principals are charged as leaders to set the example for meeting the educational needs of the diverse school population (Billingsley, McLeskey, & Crockett, 2019, p. 306). Special education teachers who perceived positive support that was adequate or more than adequate by their principals more often reported they intended to remain a special education teacher. Administrators who promote collaboration among their faculty influence teachers to stay in special education (George et al., 1995).

Student learning is best achieved through shared vision and relationships. Principals, teachers, district, and state agency leaders must collectively collaborate to improve student achievement (Crockett, 2017). Systems-level change with the goals of improving evidence-based practices and teacher preparation, the school's overall culture, and instruction evaluation methods are required to support sustained instructional improvement (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2012; Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014). Systems change for these issues is complex and requires multiple groups of people to work together, including researchers, educators, families, other stakeholders, and school administrators (Mihalas, Morse, Allsopp, & Alvarez McHatton, 2009).

Principal Support for Special Education Teachers

Instructional leaders can positively affect school culture, which is increasingly difficult when working with students that struggle with behavior issues, as documented by Tschannen-Moran and Gareis in 2015 research. Effective principals communicate school achievement goals with their staff (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005) and promote a culture within the school that establishes high expectations for students with disabilities that are shared among all teachers.

Klinger, Ahwee, Pilonieta, and Menendez (2003) researched the level of implementation of evidence-based instruction following comprehensive professional development paired with a high level of administrative support, finding that teachers reported "administrative support" as a facilitator of their ongoing use of good practices. They found that educators are more likely to maintain a higher level of practice when school principals or administrators participate in professional development and are knowledgeable and consistent about following through with the practice. A key determinant of principal effectiveness is if the principal sees themselves as a learner and how they approach their school's learning environment where teachers are accountable (Klinger, Ahwee, Pilonieta, & Menendez, 2003).

Shared leadership and decision-making are leadership practices of effective principals (Billingsley, McLeskey, & Crockett, 2019). "Principals are the most effective and report feeling most confident when they collaborate with teachers toward common goals and receive support for shared leadership from district leaders" (Billingsley, McLeskey, & Crockett, 2019, p. 307). Schools with robust and inclusive programming have administrators engaged in sharing vision, generating collaboration among teachers, investing in professional development, making decisions using data, and applying their knowledge of school change practice (Furney et al., 2005). "Effective schools seem to be headed by principals who have a clear vision of where they are going, who are knowledgeable about teaching to help teachers and students work toward desired ends, and who can protect schools from the kinds of demands that make it difficult for schools to operate on a professional basis" (Chubb & Moe, 1990, p. 84).

School leadership may be formal or informal and come from principals, assistant principals, teachers, and parents. However, the principal is the primary bearer of influence (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Research by Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) finds that one-quarter of the effects of school can be attributed to school leadership, second only to the influence of teachers. Hargreaves and Fink (2004) document that leadership must push forward beyond short-term gains to create overall improvements in learning. Branch et al. report results from their study that "indicate that highly effective principals raise the achievement of a typical student in their schools by between two and seven months of learning in a single school year; ineffective principals' lower achievement by the same amount" (2013, p.1).

Literature indicates that supportive leadership by the principal is necessary to meet both student needs and teachers' needs. Principals deemed "successful" model ways to support education for diverse learners (Billingsley, McLeskey, & Crockett, 2019). They ensure that

processes and policies are in place to foster equity, inclusion, and fairness while promoting creativity and imagination (Starratt, 2005). "Effective schools are effective because their culture supports achievement, rewards excellence, focuses on academic and intellectual tasks and provides opportunities for everyone to exercise some control over their environments and succeed at what they do" (Johnston, 1985, p. 3).

Principal Preparation for Supporting Special Education Teachers

A practical problem is often the principal's need for competency knowledge around special education and instruction for behaviorally challenged students to support these teachers (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). In a study by Ash and Bilton (2009), fifty-three percent of principals surveyed reported that they had yet to take a single course in special education. Young et al. (2009) write that when school administrators have special education coursework, it covers only the legal aspects rather than effective interventions or collaboration about inclusive leadership. A paper published by The Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform Center at the University of Florida documented “that only eight states required principals to receive training on special education as part of their preparation programs, and most of the coursework was focused on legal requirements rather than leading strong instructional programs for students with disabilities” (Courey, 2019 p.2).

Within the social justice model of school leadership, where equitable education is foundational, Pazey and Cole (2013) find that content, including students with disabilities, is lacking. Frick, Faircloth, and Little (2013, p. 211) state:

> The failure to provide adequate pre-service and ongoing professional development in the education and inclusion of students with disabilities within the general education environment has the potential to affect principals' ability

> detrimentally to effectively lead special education programs and services and thus work in the best interest of students with special education needs.

School leaders must support special education teachers but generally do not have the educational background to do so effectively (Betinni, Cheyney, Wang, & Leko, 2014). "A survey of more than 3,500 principals administered through the RAND American Educator Panels found that only 12% felt "completely prepared" to support the needs of students with disabilities.

General Evidence on Leadership Behavior or Practices that Support Teachers

Leadership that improves instruction is defined as "shared work and commitments that shape the direction of a school or district and their learning improvement agendas, and that engage effort and energy in pursuit of those agendas" (Knapp et al., 2014, p. 4). Leithwood and Sun (2012) found that "leaders influence school conditions through their achievement of a shared vision and agreed-on goals for the organization, their high expectations, and support of organizational members and practices that strengthen school culture and foster collaboration within the organization" (p. 403). "Educational leaders must ensure that the structures and procedures that support and channel the learning process reflect a concern for justice and fairness for all students while providing room for creativity and imagination" (Starratt, 2005, p. 127).

Leaders must communicate the vision and ideals they want their staff to experience to make staff members feel supported. Transformational leaders need the capacity to have charisma as well as vision. Transformational leadership empowers teachers and brings them into the decision-making process (Conley & Goldman, 1994; Leithwood, 1994) and facilitates the growth in all individuals, ultimately growing teacher leaders that amplify and continue the growth effect in the organization as a whole. Examples of transformational leadership include demonstrating in

context or modeling strategies for instruction, positive behavior interventions, and classroom accommodations.

"Transactional leaders determine what subordinates need to do for the leader to achieve their own and organizational objectives" (Luna, 2011, p. 9). In organizations where transactional leadership is utilized, rewards or bonuses are used as motivators for the preferred type of performance (Sergiovanni, 2004; Ruggieri, 2009; & Ashby, 2014). A weakness of this type of leadership is that it instills a desire for individual reward rather than improving the organization as a whole (Bass & Riggio, 2006). "By perfecting the combination of transformational and transactional leadership styles, principals allow faculty and staff to share their ideas, knowledge, and expertise in making decisions that focus on improving instruction and curriculum toward a shared vision" (Pepper, 2010, p.50).

There is a need for building relationships and sharing common values to achieve sustained reform and organizational learning (DuFour, 2000). The true catalyst for the vital work of schools is principals in positive and motivating relationships with teachers to continue to push for change. "At least two steps are integral to the development of more effective and efficient programs for preparing teachers and related services personnel to educate children and youth with disabilities in the 21st century: (a) recognition that change is needed, and (b) a commitment to pursue such change" (Simpson, Whelan, & Zabel, 1993, p. 8).

"Principals influence change through their active support, as this support serves to legitimize the importance of change and determine whether teachers should take it seriously" (Fullan, 2007, as cited in Billingsley, McLeskey, & Crockett, 2019, p. 310). A working definition of "principal support" relates to actions that provide time and resources for teachers to

collaborate (Ax et al., 2001), opportunities for professional growth (Gersten et al., 2001), and gives inspiration and comfort (Whitaker, 2003).

As principals and other school leaders invest in teachers, they create new resources for the school organization (Nichols, 2008). The role of the school principal includes developing personal and professional skills and that of the school staff, including supporting students who receive special education services and display significant behavioral challenges (Bradshaw, 2000). Teachers must know that the school administration supports them and witness that support in action.

Teachers who receive constructive feedback and encouragement from their principal report feeling more valued and believe they are making a difference in the lives of their students and school are more likely to work harder and contribute to school activities (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Appraisal supports by the principal provide timely and situation-based problem-solving opportunities for special education teachers. "As instructional leaders, principals are charged with providing ongoing personnel appraisals, such as frequent and constructive feedback about their work, information about what constitutes effective teaching, and clear guidelines regarding job responsibilities" (Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994, p. 298). Reduced stress is reported by teachers who have principals who communicate effectively and provide both informational and appraisal support (Cobb, 1978).

Informational supports by principals are critical to the ongoing process of developing the professional skills of educators. Professional development to address teachers continued learning and personal growth is vital to job satisfaction (Gersten et al., 1995). "Principals provide teachers with useful information that they can use to improve classroom practices. For example, principals provide informational support by authorizing teachers' attendance at in-service

workshops, offering practical information about effective teaching practices, and providing suggestions to improve instruction and classroom management" (Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994, p. 298). Teachers attributed professional development and learning as a responsibility of district-level staff. "Without opportunities to meet with other teachers to articulate problems, brainstorm solutions, and otherwise share concerns about particular students, teachers easily lost sight of the fact that other special educators often face similar problems" (George et al., 1995, p. 234).

Principals who value special educators and can provide both informational and emotional support are more likely to have teachers who find great satisfaction in their work. Emotional supports by school principals help teachers feel valued through sometimes difficult situations. "Principals show teachers that they are esteemed, trusted professionals and worthy of concern by such practices as maintaining open communication, showing appreciation, taking an interest in teachers' work and considering teachers' ideas" (Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994, p. 297).

Instrumental supports by school principals equip teachers to do the work they do with students daily. "Principals directly help teachers with work-related tasks, such as providing necessary materials, space, and resources, ensuring adequate time for teaching and non-teaching duties, and helping with managerial-type concerns" (Littrell, Billingsley and Cross, 1994, p.298).

Principals demonstrate instructional leadership by aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment, supporting professional learning, conducting observations, providing actionable feedback, and holding staff accountable for student outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

In the original 1981 study, House defined a theoretical framework to further describe the concept of “support” in four ways: emotional, appraisal, instrumental, and informational.

Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross (1994) further adapted and defined these areas of support through the lens of being a school principal, followed by the research of Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013.

> **Emotional support.** Principals show teachers they are esteemed, trusted professionals and worthy of concern by such practices as maintaining open communication, showing appreciation, taking an interest in teachers' work, and considering teachers' ideas.
>
> **Instrumental support.** Principals directly help teachers with work-related tasks, such as providing necessary materials, space, and resources, ensuring adequate time for teaching and non-teaching duties and helping with managerial-type concerns.
>
> **Informational support.** Principals provide teachers with useful information that they can use to improve classroom practices. For example, principals provide informational support by authorizing teachers' attendance at in-service workshops, offering practical information about effective teaching practices and providing suggestions to improve instruction and classroom management.
>
> **Appraisal support.** As instructional leaders, principals are charged with providing ongoing personnel appraisal, such as frequent and constructive feedback about their work, information about what constitutes effective teaching, and clear guidelines regarding job responsibilities.

School administrators can be instrumental in supporting teachers through successful behavior interventions and increased academic achievement of students with behavioral challenges. Significant research in this field indicates a positive correlation between special

education teacher commitment and leadership support (Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Cross & Billingsley, 1994; Glisson & Durick, 1988; Morris & Sherman, 1981).

Conclusion

Retaining experienced special education teachers is critical to positive student outcomes (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006). School administrators are in the position to change the educational process of students with significant emotional and behavioral disabilities (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013). While the research indicates a positive correlation between principal support and special education teacher retention, identifying what "support" means and how to ensure a principal understanding of support is unclear (Prather-Jones, 2011). The research design and purpose will be discussed in the next chapter to clarify the purpose further and the need for principal support.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

This study aimed to measure the perceived support special education teachers report receiving from school principals. The reason for engaging in this research was to increase the awareness and understanding of school principals and other school leadership personnel about ways they can support teachers of students with significant or dangerous risk behavior. Issues critical to this project are the definition of perceived support from the school principal provided to special education teachers when dealing with a student with challenging behaviors. This study allowed special education teachers to identify the specific emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal supports they need to feel satisfied, appreciated, equipped, and confident in this challenging work by the principals with whom they work.

Research Design

This quantitative survey research project used a pragmatic and non-experimental design to describe special education teachers' perceived support by a principal with the reported desired support types. For this study, principals are defined as the primary administrators of elementary and secondary schools. This research project aimed to determine support strategies and structures that are best practices for administrators leading teachers of students with risk or dangerous behavior. The ultimate purpose of the data collected was to inform school leaders of practices that positively influence an educational program to enable a student to make progress considering his or her circumstances by examining the relationship between the types of principal support currently perceived by special educators and their report of what type of support most impacts their response when students have significant behavioral issues at school.

Research Rationale

The previous study by Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross (1994) for special education teachers supported House's 1981 social supports study, finding that teachers rated emotional, appraisal, informational, and instrumental supports as important. Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross (1994) reported a gap between the perceived level of support (being lower) and the importance of these supports (being higher), indicating to these researchers that teachers perceived the importance of the type of principal support more than reports of the extent of support. The more recent study by Cancio et al. described similar findings.

In both the 1981 and 1994 studies, emotional support was found to be the most important dimension of support. The second most important type of support was determined to be appraisal support in both previous studies. Instrumental support was reported as the third most crucial area of support, and finally, informational support was considered to be least in importance. Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross (1994) determined that the findings implied that teachers felt that while principals provided support, they did not always determine the most helpful support type. This research project aimed to measure the perceived support of leadership behaviors of school administrators/principals.

Research Philosophy

The research aims to describe relevant findings to explain concerns or causal relationships around a specific topic, including reporting data and showing evidence to shape knowledge. Over time and with experience, researchers develop a worldview or beliefs that guide the nature of their research, philosophy, and action (Guba, 1990). One's worldview influences a sense of purpose.

From the worldview of Postpositivistism (Creswell, 2014), this research is intended to study the actions of school principals that, at least in part, contribute to the idea of success for teachers of significantly behaviorally challenged students. “Postpositivists hold a deterministic philosophy in which causes probably determine effects or outcomes” (Creswell & Creswell, p. 6, 2018). Thus, the problem of teacher support by school principals will be studied to reflect the need to identify the perceived support of teachers and assess the situations that influence perceived support.

Research Questions

The existing theory was that principal support is imperative to successful special education teachers. The problem is that teachers of students with significant behavior challenges need a specific type of principal support to be perceived as helpful. This research project collected data to determine conclusions on these research questions:

1. What principal support areas are perceived as most supportive by special education teachers?
2. What areas of support are perceived as important components of principal practice by special education teachers?
3. Is there a difference between the type of principal support needed by special education teachers serving students who have challenging behavior and those who do not have students with significant behavior challenges?

This research is different from other quantitative research to benefit educational leaders in that it is not a product of measuring student learning through students' standardized test scores (Billingsley, McLeskey, & 2019). Instead, it measures teacher perceptions and reported need for support, specifically when serving students with challenging behavior. Through the quasi-

experimental research design of this project, it is intended to be an empirical study used to estimate the causal impact of an intervention on its target population without random assignment (Glass & Asher, 1980). A proponent of this type of study is that it is useful in generating results for general trends, it is performed in a natural setting, and quasi-experiments provide comparisons between groups (Suter, 2011). Randomization of a control group was not viable with this survey. There is a potential for researcher bias during data collection by leading participants to the desired answer and selectively recording data due to wording within the survey instrument or other information provided to the respondents.

Research Strategy

The sample was obtained by asking special education directors of the 544 public school districts in Oklahoma to distribute the survey to teachers in their school district who teach students with challenging behavior. The survey, prepared in Qualtrics, was distributed with a link via email to the Oklahoma State Department of Education's list of school district special education directors. The survey was open to responses for six weeks in March and April of 2022. Respondents to the survey totaled 221 individuals (n=221).

The survey was presented to the participants with their informed consent and answered anonymously. Data about the respondent's school district was not recorded for this project. Respondents were assured that their privacy would be maintained, and responses would be considered confidential. Personal identification will not be sold or shared outside the boundaries of this research. Participants' cooperation was voluntary, with no expectation of reward or incentive for their cooperation. Participants could stop answering questions at any time throughout the survey. There were no known risks for participants in this study.

The survey consisted of several sections with sixty-four questions, including forty-three from the original survey published in 1994 by Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross. Each of the twenty-one questions relating to principal support was followed by a question asking respondents to rate the importance of receiving that type of support from their school principal (4=very important to 1=not important). Respondents were asked to identify the gender of the principal and how often they were able to interact with the school principal. Additionally, respondents were asked to identify the level of support they received from the district's special education director and to rate the importance of receiving this support (4=very important to 1=not important).

The section of the survey specific to challenging behaviors asked questions regarding four specific types of behaviors: elopement, physically aggressive behavior, property destruction, and verbally aggressive behavior. Definitions of these behaviors were taken from Tennessee Behavior Support Project (2019). Tier III RTI2 - B Training [PowerPoint Presentation] Vanderbilt University. These definitions were used in the survey tool and the data analysis.

> **Elopement** was further defined as a successful and/or unsuccessful attempt to leave the designated area without adult supervision and/or permission.
>
> **Physically aggressive behavior** was defined as physical contact with self, others, and/or property that is potentially harmful; further clarification included that physically aggressive behavior did not mean non-compliant behavior or off-task behavior, or behavior that is disruptive to the learning of those around him/her.
>
> **Property destruction** was defined as successful and/or unsuccessful attempts to damage personal or public property.

Verbal aggression was defined as a threat or comment that indicates any form of physical harm to another person, with the clarification that verbally aggressive behavior does not mean inappropriate commenting or the use of profanity.

Respondents recorded the number of students they teach for each of the four behaviors, how often the behavior happens (1= not applicable, 2=one time per week, 3=2-3 times per week, 4=4-5times per week, and 5=multiple times per day), and a rating of the degree of challenge for the specific type of behavior (1=not very challenging, 2=a little challenging, 3=challenging, 4=somewhat challenging, and 5=very challenging).

The final section of the survey included demographic information, including the respondent's gender, total years teaching, and years in their current position. The respondents were queried about what teaching certifications they held in Oklahoma currently, what grade levels they taught, how they were providing special education instruction (mostly in-person, mostly virtual, all in-person, or all virtual), as well as how they delivered services (in a resource classroom, direct instruction classroom, collaboration/monitoring services, co-teaching classroom, or in a self-contained class).

Analytic Technique

This chapter will summarize the research project and present results from the survey beginning with a description of the data analysis methods and the demographics of the teachers who responded to the survey. The findings related to each of the research questions were detailed through descriptive statistics to illustrate the study's findings. Descriptive statistics provide a good analysis method for describing relationships among variables and general tendencies in the data (Creswell, 2002). The mean and standard deviation of all responses to each set of survey questions were reported by the category of support. The percentage of respondents who rated the

type of support as either “important” or “very important” were reported for each set of questions. Finally, the total percent mean for each category of support was stated.

The binomial test is a test of proportions. It allows the comparison of a two-level categorical dependent variable, in this study, teachers who reported one or more students on their caseload with the designated behavior versus teachers who report zero students on their caseload with the designated behavior. The binomial follows a ‘z’ distribution and allows a determination of whether the proportions calculated from the number of teachers in each of the following categories (1=very important, 2=important, 3=a little important, 4=not important), varies from any hypothesized value. In this study, that value is 50:50 or even odds, the same as a coin toss. Any significant difference in proportions indicates a difference between those two sets of teachers. The null hypothesis in this case is then HO: No difference in the two groups or, restated, the difference = 50%. Any finding below an alpha = 0.05 indicates a deviation from ‘even odds’ and indicates a difference in the two groups. Three assumptions were made to utilize the binomial test. The first assumption was the use of a dichotomous variable of teachers who had no students or teachers with one or more students with the identified behavior. The second assumption was that one or more independent variables were measured on a continuous scale of 4=very important to 1=not important. The final assumption was that there was the independence of observation, in other words, there is no relation between dependent variables.

Sample Information

The survey was emailed to 544 special education directors in Oklahoma in March of 2022 with a request to forward the survey link in Qualtrics to the special education teachers in the school district. Two hundred ninety-one responses were recorded from the sample in the six weeks the survey was open. The respondents who completed the entire survey answered a total

of sixty-five questions. Fifty-five unique individuals answered all sixty-five survey questions. The sample size (*n*) analyzed for each research question is reported individually. The response rate for survey questions about principal support and the perceived importance of the support had a higher response rate than the questions related to specific significant behaviors on the teacher's caseload. When the respondent indicated they did not serve a child with the specific behavior, their survey response was not included in the data analysis for frequency of occurrence for the behavior or the degree of perceived challenge of the behavior.

Sample Demographic Data

Over 90% of the respondents to the survey were female. Just over 6% were male, <1% were non-binary individuals, <0.5% were transgender, and <2% of the respondents did not indicate a gender, as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2

Gender of Teacher Respondent (n=209)

Gender of Respondent	% of respondents
Female	90.4
Male	6.2
Non-binary	1.0
Transgender	0.5
Prefer not to say	2.0

Teacher respondents indicated that 61% of the principals they work with were female, and 38% were male, as shown in Table 3. Less than 1% of the respondents did not indicate the gender of the principal they work with.

Table 3

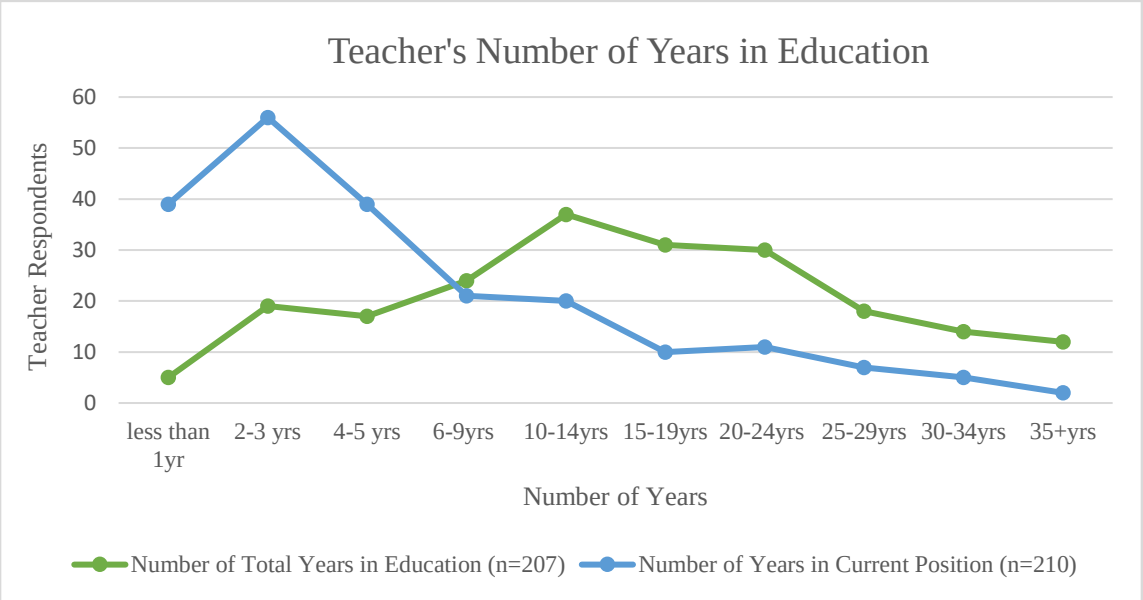
Gender of Principal as Reported by Teacher Respondent (n=218)

Gender of principal	% of principal gender as reported by the respondent
Female	60.7
Male	38.4
Prefer not to say	1.0

The sample included educators new to the field and veteran educators teaching for more than thirty-five years. Figure 1 shows that 63.81% of the cumulative sample have been in the field for less than five years. Twenty-four percent of the cumulative respondents reported being in the field of education for between six and nineteen years. Twelve percent of the respondents have been in education for over twenty years.

Figure 1

Teacher's Number of Years in Education (n=207) and Years in Current Position (n=210)

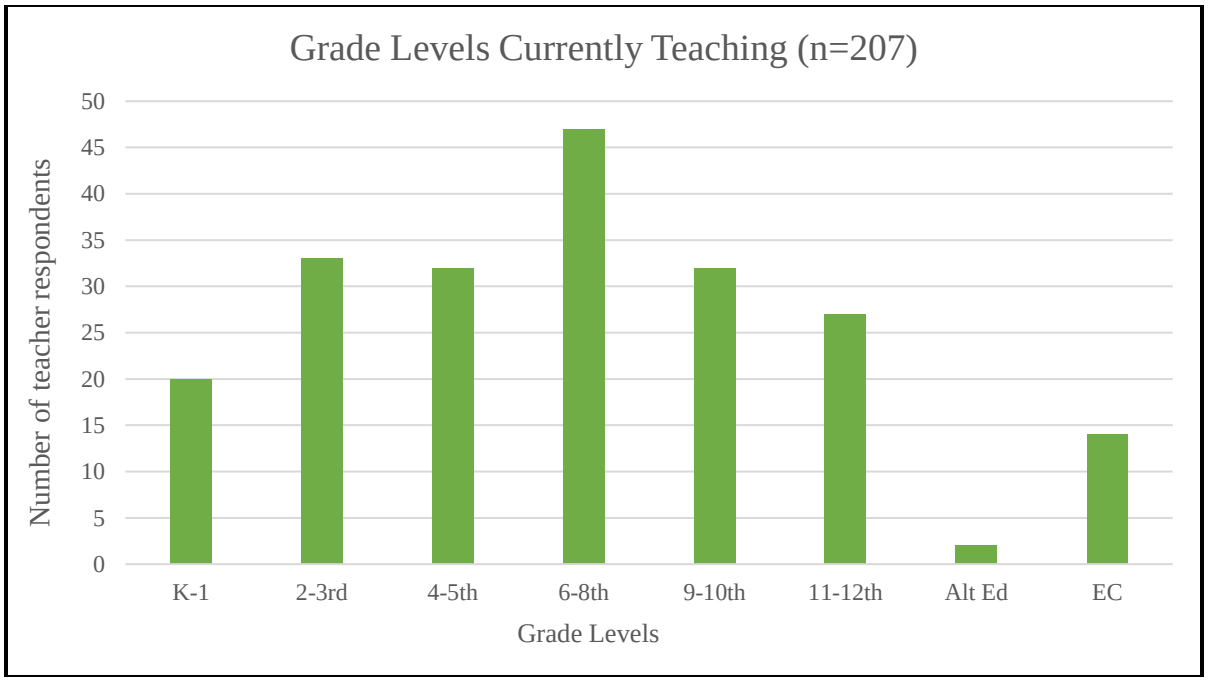


The largest frequency of respondents are educators teaching in grades 6th through 8th grade. Forty-seven teachers, or 22.7%, reported teaching in grades 6th-8th. Fourteen

respondents, or 6.8%, reported teaching Early Childhood students, while eighty-five respondents, or 63.8%, were kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers. Sixty-one respondents, or 29.5%, were teachers in high school grades ninth *through* twelfth or alternative educators.

Figure 2

Grades Sample are Currently Teaching (n=207)



One hundred fifty-one survey respondents, or 70%, reported holding a special education teaching license and one or more additional teaching certificates or registry training certificates. Figure 3 displays the number of respondents with teaching certifications relevant to special education. Twenty-nine teacher respondents, or 13.5% reported holding a single special education teaching certificate in either mild/moderate special education or severe/profound special education. Eleven respondents, or 0.1%, were provisionally certified through a special education boot camp and are working towards a standard special education teaching certificate. Five or .02% of the respondents reported holding a Speech Language Pathology teaching

certificate, with two additional speech-language pathologists or 0.01% responding that they also hold additional teaching licenses. Five respondents, or 0.02% to the survey reported they did not hold a teaching certificate or license in the state of Oklahoma. Twelve respondents, or 0.1%, did not indicate what type of current teaching license they held.

Figure 3

Respondent's Teaching Certification (n=215)

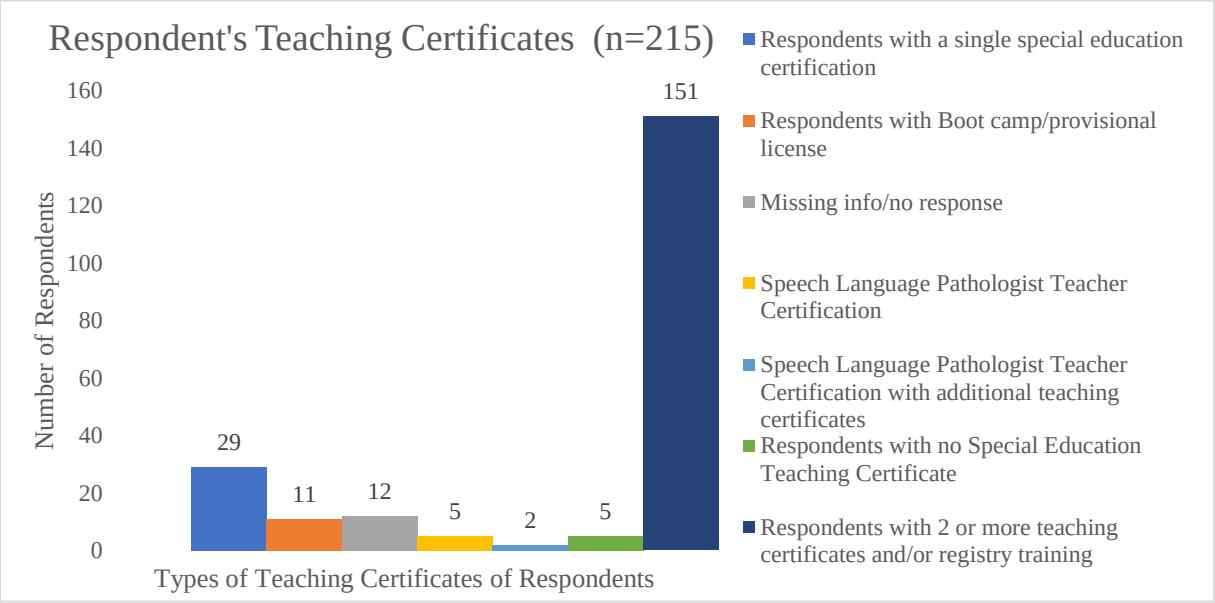
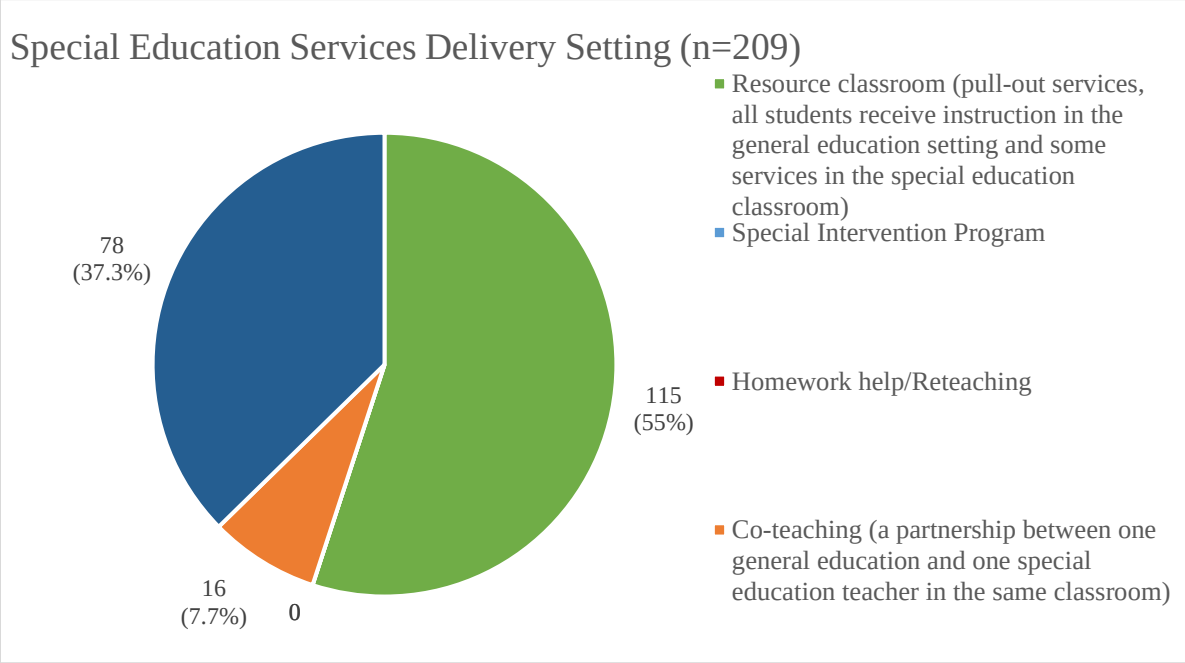


Figure 4 illustrates where respondents deliver special education services. One hundred fifteen respondents, or 55%, report providing services in a resource classroom setting where students receive instruction primarily in the general education setting with specific special education services provided in the special education classroom. In this scenario, students are pulled out of the general education classroom for special education instruction. Sixteen special education teacher respondents, or 7.7%, report providing services in a co-teaching setting in partnership with a general education teacher. Seventy-eight special education teacher respondents, or 37.3%, report providing special education services in a self-contained classroom where all students in the class are students with disabilities receiving special education services.

Figure 4

Special Education Services Delivery Setting (n=209)



Seventy-six (36.5%) teachers reported delivering special education services mostly in person. One hundred twenty-nine teachers (62%) reported delivering services in an all in-person setting. Two respondents reported delivering services in an all-virtual format. One respondent reported delivering special education services in a mostly virtual setting.

Research Reliability

Research reliability addresses the extent to which the outcomes from the research can be replicated under the same conditions. While a part of the survey instrument for this research replicates the 1994 survey by Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross measuring principal support, the focus of this study required adding questions for teachers related to specific challenging behavior. The addition of these new questions is a limitation of the study and is a threat to research reliability; however, measuring the support needs of teachers of students with challenging behavior is an area for future research. Another threat to research reliability is that

not all respondents completed the entire survey, and there was no "opt-out" for teachers who did not have students with challenging behavior on their caseload.

The amount of correlation between items in the instrument is its internal consistency (Bland & Altman, 1997). Cronbach's Alpha can be used to assess reliability by measuring the degree to which items are correlated and measuring a single principle which, in turn, measures the internal consistency of the items (Gennarelli & Goodman, 2013). Gennarelli and Goodman, 2013 and Taber, 2018 describe no absolute value for showing internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha statistic; it is widely accepted that in the early stages of validation, research α should exceed 0.70.

Table 4

Cronbach's Alpha Standard of Measurement for Internal Consistency

Cronbach's Alpha	**Internal consistency**
$0.9 \leq \alpha$	Excellent
$0.8 \leq \alpha < 0.9$	Good
$0.7 \leq \alpha < 0.8$	Acceptable
$0.6 \leq \alpha < 0.7$	Questionable
$0.5 \leq \alpha < 0.6$	Poor
$\alpha < 0.5$	Unacceptable

Research Validity

The validity of a research study refers to how well the results among the study participants represent true findings among similar individuals outside the study. In contrast, internal validity determines whether one variable is related to an outcome or the extent to which the results measure what they were intended to measure (Borsboom, Mellenbergh, & Van

Heerden, 2004). Threats to internal validity for this study included the survey instrument and sample size for the survey questions related to student behavior. The survey portion with questions about student behavior had not been previously determined valid. The data from teachers who responded that they did not have a student with one of the four defined areas of challenging behavior was not used for data analysis of the effect of behavior and limited sample size. This is a limitation of the current research project and an area for future study.

Conclusion

Proactive and intentional administrative support for teachers who work with students with significant behavior challenges is an integral part of maintaining content and committed staff (Bettini et al., 2015; Billingsley & Cross, 1992, Branch et al., 2013). The goal of the initiatives of this research project is to determine strategies and structure best practices for administrators through supporting teachers of students with risk or dangerous behavior. The data synthesized through this research project based on previous work by Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross (1994) and other researchers could be used to inform the practice of school leaders. The next chapter will apply the chosen methodology to analyze the data.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

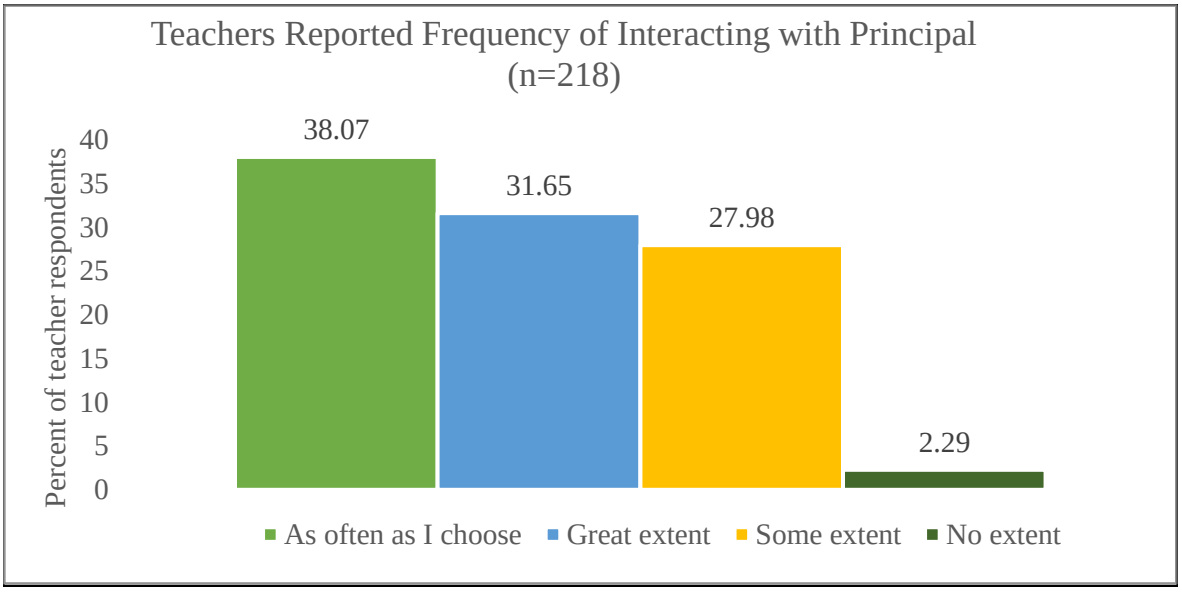
Addressing teacher support is important to the achievement of learners with challenging behavior. Research indicates that teachers of students with significant behavior issues report feelings of stress and thoughts of leaving the field of education (Abidin & Robinson, 2002; Barrett & Davis, 1995; Dake, Fisher, Pumpian, Haring, & Breen, 1993; Houston & Williamson, 1993; MacDonald & Speece, 2001; Nelson, Maculan, Roberts, & Ohlund, 2001; Van Acker, 1993). Principals are key to providing the support teachers perceive as helpful and unlocking students' ultimate success through equipping and supporting special education teachers. This research project used the social support framework from House (1981) to determine what types of principal support were perceived as most supportive for special education teachers, the frequency and type of student behavior that was perceived as challenging, and if support needs were different for special education teachers with challenging student behavior.

Research Question 1

What principal support areas are perceived as most supportive by special education teachers? To better understand the context surrounding Research Question 1, the project examined the extent of interaction between the special education teacher and the principal to determine the nature of access these teachers perceived to their principal. As noted in Figure 5, The frequency of respondents suggests that 38.1% of respondents were able to interact with the principal as often as they chose, 31.7% of respondents reported being able to interact to a great extent with the principal, 28% of the teachers in the sample indicated that they were able to access the principal to some extent. Finally, 2.3% of teachers indicated no interactions with the principal.

Figure 5

Teacher Reported Frequency of Interactions with Principal (n=218)



Based on interactions with school principals, respondents answered the survey questions in Table 5 to indicate the type of support they perceive as important. The composite data suggests that teachers perceive emotional support given by a principal as more valuable ($\bar{x}$=4.2) compared to the other types of principal support followed by instructional support ($\bar{x}$ =3.9), appraisal support ($\bar{x}$ =3.7), and informational support ($\bar{x}$ =3.6). The cumulative percent of the teachers sampled who responded either “strongly agree” or “agree” that the specific support was received indicated that emotional support rates the highest at more than 82%. Instructional support (69.2%), appraisal support (65.4%) and finally informational support (59.0%) follow as rated either “strongly agree” or “agree” by respondents.

Table 5

Perceived Principal Support by Composite Support Type

	Mean	SD	% of Respondents Reporting "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

Emotional Support	4.2	1.1	82.7%
Appraisal Support	3.7	1.2	65.4%
Informational Support	3.6	1.3	59.0%
Instructional Support	3.9	1.3	69.2%

Note. N=221. Support agreement represents the percentage of teachers whose response on items for each support type was reported as "strongly agree" or "agree."

Emotional support survey items included ratings reflecting principal practices that made teachers feel valued and professional on a five-point scale from 5=strongly agree to 1=strongly disagree (House, 1981). Reflected in Table 6, the special education teachers in this sample responded with a composite mean of 4.2 indicating their perception that emotional support is the most important of the four types of support. Respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the emotional support items on the survey were important at 82.7% which is more than 23% over informational support.

Table 6

Item Results for Perceived Emotional Support

Survey Question	Mean	SD	% of Respondents Reporting "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"
EMOTIONAL SUPPORT			
My principal is easy to approach	4.2	1.2	82.4%
My principal gives me a sense of importance and that I make a difference	4.2	1.1	81.5%
My principal allows me input into decisions that affect me	4	1.2	76.9%
My principal supports me on decisions	4.2	1.0	86.0%

My principal shows genuine concern for my program and students	4.1	1.2	77.8%
My principal trusts my judgment in making classroom decisions	4.5	0.8	91.8%
Overall Perceived Emotional Support	**4.2**	**1.1**	**82.7%**

Note. N=221

Appraisal support can be described as feedback about a teacher's responsibilities and work product (House, 1981). Respondents were asked to rate this type of support on a scale from 5=strongly agree to 1=strongly disagree. The composite mean of 3.7 for appraisal support suggests this area the third most important area of support for this sample of teachers following emotional and instrumental supports.

Table 7

Item Results for Perceived Appraisal Support

Survey Question	Mean	SD	% of Respondents Reporting "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"
APPRAISAL SUPPORT			
My principal gives clear guidelines regarding job responsibilities	3.7	1.3	67.4%
My principal offers constructive feedback after observing my teaching	3.9	1.2	73.3%
Provides suggestions for me to improve instruction	3.5	1.2	55.5%
Overall Perceived Appraisal Support	**3.7**	**1.2**	**65.4%**

Note. N=221

Informational support is a principal practice that can be described as providing information to improve classroom or teaching practices (House, 1981). Respondents in the sample rated the survey items for this area of support on the 5-point scale from 5=strongly agree

to 1=strongly disagree to reflect the informational support they receive from their principal. The composite mean for this area of support was the lowest of the four areas equaling 3.6. The data also suggests that respondents either were neutral, disagreed with, or strongly disagreed with these survey items significantly more than the other support types as documented by the lower composite agreement percentage of only 59%.

Table 8

Item Results for Perceived Informational Support

Survey Question	Mean	SD	% of Respondents Reporting "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"
INFORMATIONAL SUPPORT			
My principal provides information on up-to-date instructional techniques	3.4	1.3	51.8%
My principal provides knowledge of current special education legal policies and practices	3.1	1.4	38.6%
My principal provides opportunities for me to attend workshops, attend conferences, and take courses	4.1	1.2	72.7%
My principal identifies resource personnel to contact for specific problems he or she is unable to solve	3.7	1.4	64.7%
My principal assists with proper identification of students needing special education services	3.4	1.4	52.5%
My principal helps me solve problems and conflicts that occur	4	1.2	74.8%
My principal establishes channels of communication between general and special education teaching and other professionals	3.5	1.4	57.8%
Overall Perceived Informational Support	**3.6**	**1.3**	**59.0%**

Note. N=221

Instrumental support includes principals directly helping with teacher's work-related tasks and providing necessary resources (House, 1981). The teacher respondents to this survey rated items from this type of support on a 5-point scale from 5=strongly agree to 1=strongly disagree with the second highest composite mean equaling 3.9 as reflected in Table 9.

Table 9

Item Results for Perceived Instrumental Support

Survey Question	Mean	SD	% of Respondents Reporting "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"
INSTRUMENTAL SUPPORT			
My principal is available to help in my classroom when needed	3.6	1.5	62.7%
My principal helps me with classroom discipline problems	3.7	1.3	63.3%
My principal helps me during parent confrontations, when needed	4.2	1.1	76.5%
My principal provides material, space, and resource needs	3.8	1.3	67.0%
My principal participates in child study/eligibility/IEP meetings/parent conferences	4	1.3	76.6%
Overall Perceived Instructional Support	**3.9**	**1.3**	**69.2%**

Note. N=221.

Tables 5-8 show the means, standard deviations, and the percentage of respondents indicating they "agree" or "strongly agree" with survey items. While all four areas of support were rated positively, emotional support was indicated to be the most important to the special education teachers in this sample which is consistent with the original research and several subsequent research projects. The next section will discuss the teacher's perceptions of the level of importance for each support area.

Research Question 2

Each survey question describing a support action was paired with the question "how important is it to you to receive this support in your current position?" The results from these questions address this study's second research question, "what areas of support are perceived as important components of principal practice by special education teachers?" The composite results for these survey questions are reflected in Table 10. Overall, teachers indicated that all four areas of support were either "important" or "very important." Only eight of the two hundred twenty-one respondents scored one of the twenty-one survey questions rating importance as "not important" or "a little important."

Table 10

Composite of Data for Perceived Principal Support Importance

	Mean	SD	% of Respondents Reporting "Important" or "Very Important"
Emotional Support	3.9	0.5	97.0%
Appraisal Support	3.3	0.8	85.8%
Informational Support	3.5	0.8	85.5%
Instructional Support	3.7	0.7	90.4%

Note. N=221. Importance is the percentage of teachers whose mean response is at or above 3.0.

Tables 11-14 reflect the mean, standard deviation and the percentage of respondents who indicated their perception of the individual survey question as “very important” or “important.” Emotional support by the principal was rated as most important with a mean of 3.9 and standard deviation of 0.5. On a 4-point scale from 4=very important to 1=not important, 97% of teachers responded that emotional support was either “very important” or “important.” Within this group of survey items, interestingly more than 98% of special education teachers perceive their principal’s support in their decisions as “important” or “very important.”

Table 11

Perceived Principal Emotional Support Importance

Survey Question	Mean	SD	% of Respondents Reporting “Important” or “Very Important”
EMOTIONAL SUPPORT			
My principal is easy to approach	3.8	0.5	97.7%
My principal gives me a sense of importance and that I make a difference	3.3	0.7	94.5%
My principal allows me input into decisions that affect me	4.8	0.5	96.8%
My principal supports me on decisions	3.8	0.5	98.2%
My principal shows genuine concern for my program and students	3.8	0.5	97.3%
My principal trusts my judgment in making classroom decisions	3.7	0.5	97.3%
Overall Perceived Emotional Support	**3.9**	**0.5**	**97.0%**

Note. N=221

Appraisal support or feedback about a teacher’s responsibilities and work product (House, 1981) provided by principals had the lowest composite mean of 3.3 for importance.

Respondents were asked to rate this type of support on a scale from 4=very important to 1=not important.

Table 12

Perceived Principal Appraisal Support Importance

Survey Question	Mean	SD	% of Respondents Reporting "Important" or "Very Important"
APPRAISAL SUPPORT			
My principal gives clear guidelines regarding job responsibilities	3.5	0.7	91.4%
My principal offers constructive feedback after observing my teaching	3.4	0.8	88.7%
Provides suggestions for me to improve instruction	3.1	0.9	77.3%
Overall Perceived Appraisal Support	3.3	0.8	85.8%

Note. N=221

The importance of informational support was reported with a composite mean of 3.5. Informational support was ranked the third lowest in importance by teachers from the four types of principal support.

Table 13

Perceived Principal Informational Support Importance

Survey Question	Mean	SD	% of Respondents Reporting "Important" or "Very Important"
INFORMATIONAL SUPPORT			
My principal provides information on up-to-date instructional techniques	4.1	0.9	78.2%

My principal provides knowledge of current special education legal policies and practices	3.4	0.8	86.4%
My principal provides opportunities for me to attend workshops, attend conferences, and take courses	3.4	0.8	86.4%
My principal identifies resource personnel to contact for specific problems he or she is unable to solve	3.3	0.8	84.4%
My principal assists with proper identification of students needing special education services	3.2	0.9	80.7%
My principal helps me solve problems and conflicts that occur	3.6	0.6	91.3%
My principal establishes channels of communication between general and special education teaching and other professionals	3.5	0.7	91.3%
Overall Perceived Informational Support	3.5	0.8	**85.5%**

Note. N=221

The importance of instrumental support received a composite average of 3.7 mean. Instrumental support is the hands-on, sometimes physical help that these special education teachers ranked as second-most important to them.

Table 14

Perceived Principal Instrumental Support Importance

Survey Question	Mean	SD	% of Respondents Reporting "Important" or "Very Important"
INSTRUMENTAL SUPPORT			
My principal is available to help in my classroom when needed	3.3	0.8	84.9%
My principal helps me with classroom discipline problems	3.4	0.8	86.7%

My principal helps me during parent confrontations, when needed	3.7	0.6	94.0%
My principal provides material, space, and resource needs	4.5	0.6	93.1%
My principal participates in child study/eligibility/IEP meetings/parent conferences	3.6	0.6	93.1%
Overall Perceived Instructional Support	3.7	0.7	**90.4%**

Note. N=221

The data reported in Tables 10-14 addresses this study's second research question, "what areas of support are perceived as important components of principal practice by special education teachers?" The mean between the composite of each area is separated by only .2 with emotional support indicated as most important, followed by instructional support, informational support, and finally appraisal support.

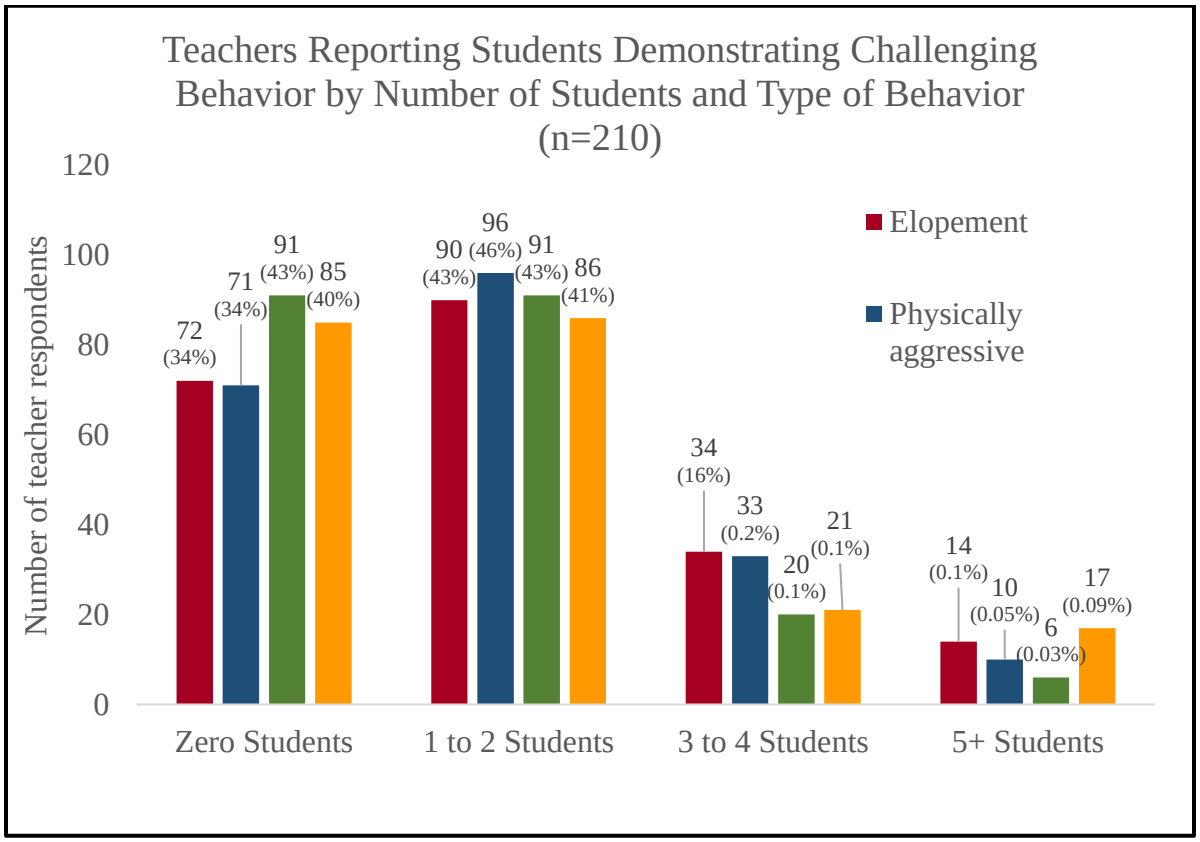
Research Question 3

The data in the following section will help inform a response to the third research point of this project. Is there a difference between the type of principal support needed by special education teachers serving students who have challenging behavior and those who do not have students with significant behavior challenges? In this sample of two hundred, twenty-one special education teachers, seventy-two of the teachers responded that they did not have a student with elopement behavior. Seventy-one teachers reported having no students with physically aggressive behavior. Ninety-one teachers responded that they have zero students with property destruction behaviors and eighty-five teachers in the sample responded that they had no students with verbally aggressive behavior. Conversely, more teachers overall reported having one or more students with one of the four defined challenging behaviors queried in this study. One hundred thirty-seven teachers reported having one or more students with elopement behavior.

One hundred thirty-nine teachers responded that they served one or more students with physically aggressive behavior. One hundred seventeen of the teachers in the sample reported students with property destruction behavior and one hundred twenty-four reported serving students with verbally aggressive behavior. Figure 6 shows the number of teachers reporting zero students with challenging behavior and those that reported one or more students with challenging behavior by the behavior type.

Figure 6

Number of Students Demonstrating Challenging Behavior as Reported by Respondents



The binomial test is a test of proportions that allows the comparison of a two-level categorical dependent variable. In this study teachers who reported one or more students on their caseload with the defined behavior were compared to the ratings of teachers who reported zero

students on their caseload with the designated behavior. The significance of the p-value indicates a difference between those two sets of teachers. The null hypothesis in this case is then H_O: No difference in the two groups or, restated, the difference = 50%. Any finding below an alpha = 0.05 indicates a deviation from 'even odds' and indicates a difference in the two groups.

The total number of teachers who report serving one or more students with elopement behavior was one hundred thirty-eight, and the number of teachers responding that they did not have a student on their caseload with elopement behavior was seventy-two. Considering elopement behavior and emotional support, 61 teachers (29%) in this sample with no students on their caseload who demonstrated elopement behavior, rated emotional support a '1' or 'very important.' Conversely, 112 (53%) teachers of one or more students with elopement behavior rated emotional support a "1" or 'very important.' The p-value of 0.00010 indicates that the difference in proportions is significant, meaning that teachers who have students in their classrooms value emotional support more highly than those who do not.

Similarly, still considering elopement behavior and emotional support, ten teachers (4.8%) in this sample with no students on their caseload who demonstrated elopement behavior, rated (emotional support) a '2' or 'important.' Conversely, 24 (11.4%) teachers of one or more student with elopement behavior rated emotional support a "2" or 'important.' The p-value of 0.02430 again indicates that the difference in proportions is significant, meaning that teachers who have students in their classrooms value emotional support more highly than those who do not. Three teachers (one reporting zero students with elopement behavior and two that reported at least one student with elopement behavior) felt that emotional support was 'a little important' and none thought it was unimportant as noted in Table 15.

Table 15

Elopement Behavior Z-Score, and P-Value Significance

Elopement Behavior				
Type of Support	Teachers reporting zero students with elopement behavior	Teachers reporting one or more students with elopement behavior	Binomial test H0: Proportion = 0.5	Significance
Emotional			z-score	p-value
Very Important	61.0 (29%)	112.0 (53.3%)	-3.8775	**0.00010**
Important	10.0 (4.8%)	24.0 (11.4%)	-2.401	**0.02430**
A little Important	1.0 (0.4%)	2.0 (0.10%)	-0.5774	1.00000
Not important at all	0.0	0.0	na	na
Appraisal				
Very Important	46.0 (21%)	73.0 (34.8%)	-2.4751	**0.01680**
Important	18.0 (8.6%)	50.0 (23.8%)	-3.8806	**0.00010**
A little Important	7.0 (3.3%)	11.0 (5.2%)	-0.9428	0.48070
Not important at all	1.0 (0.5%)	4.0 (2.0%)	-1.3416	0.37500
Instructional				
Very Important	37.0 (17.6%)	65.0 (31.0%)	-2.77240	**0.00720**
Important	24.0 (11.4%)	60.0 (28.6%)	-3.92790	**0.00010**
A little Important	8.0 (3.8%)	10.0 (4.8%)	-0.68820	0.64760
Not important at all	2.0 (0.10%)	1.0 (0.4%)	0.57740	1.00000
Informational				
Very Important	40.0 (19.0%)	85.0 (40.4%)	-4.024900	<**0.0001**
Important	25.0 (11.9%)	41.0 (19/5%)	-1.969500	0.064000
A little Important	5.0 (2.3%)	9.0 (4.2%)	-1.069000	0.424000
Not important at all	2.0 (0.10%)	2.0 (0.10%)	0.000000	1.000000

Note: N=72 for teachers without students with elopement behavior and N=137 for teachers serving students with elopement behavior.

The number of teachers reporting serving one or more students with physical aggression behavior was one hundred, thirty-eight, and the total number of teachers in this sample reported no students on their caseload who demonstrated physical aggression behavior was seventy-one. Considering physical aggression behavior and emotional support, one hundred fourteen (54.3%) rated emotional support as "very important." The p-value of <0.001 indicates that the difference in proportions is significant, meaning that teachers who have one or more students with physical aggression behavior value emotional support more highly than those who do not. Fifty-five (26.2%) teachers of students with physical aggression behaviors rated appraisal support as "important" with a p-value of <0.001 indicating that the difference in proportions is significant meaning that they value appraisal support more highly than teachers who do not have students with physically aggression behaviors. Sixty-five (31%) of teachers of students with these behaviors rated instructional support as "important" with a significant p-value of <0.0001. Finally, eighty-three (39.5%) teachers reporting students with physical aggression behavior reported informational supports as "very important" with a p-value of 0.0096 and forty-four (21%) teachers reported the same supports as "important" with a p-value of <0.0001. Table 16 displays the information for this behavior category.

Table 16

Physical Aggression Behavior Z-Score, and P-Value Significance

Physical Aggression				
Type of Support	Teachers reporting zero students with physical aggression	Teachers reporting one or more students with physical aggression	Binomial test H0: Proportion = 0.5	Significance
Emotional			z-score	p-value
Very Important	58.0 (27.6%)	114.0 (54.3%)	-4.2700	**<0.0001**

Important	11.0 (5.2%)	23.0 (11.0%)	-2.0580	0.0576
A little Important	2.0 (0.10%)	1.0 (0.4%)	0.5774	1.0000
Not important at all	0.0	0.0	na	na
Appraisal				
Very Important	49.0 (23.3%)	70.0 (33.3%)	-1.9251	0.0663
Important	13.0 (6.2%)	55.0 (26.2%)	-5.0932	**<0.0001**
A little Important	6.0 (2.9%)	12.0 (5.7%)	-1.4142	0.2379
Not important at all	3.0 (1.4%)	1.0 (0.4%)	1.0000	0.6250
Instructional				
Very Important	43.0 (20.5%)	61.0 (29.0%)	-1.7650	0.0950
Important	19.0 (9.0%)	65.0 (31.0%)	-5.0190	**<0.0001**
A little Important	7.0 (3.3%)	12.0 (5.7%)	-1.1471	0.3595
Not important at all	2.0 (.10%)	1.0 (0.4%)	0.5774	1.0000
Informational				
Very Important	52.0 (24.8%)	83.0 (39.5%)	-2.6681	**0.0096**
Important	12.0 (5.7%)	44.0 (21.0%)	-4.2762	**<0.0001**
A little Important	5.0 (2.4%)	9.0 (4.3%)	-1.0690	0.4240
Not important at all	1.0 (0.4%)	3.0 (1.4%)	-1.0000	0.6250

Note: N=70 for teachers without students with physical aggression behavior and N=139 for teachers serving students with physical aggression behavior.

Table 17 reflects data from respondents to the survey including one hundred seventeen teachers who reported students with property destruction behaviors on their caseload as well as the ninety respondents who reported zero students with property destruction behavior. Considering property destruction and appraisal behavior these teachers rated this type of support as “important” with a p-value of 0.0205 indicating that the difference in proportions is significant and that teachers value appraisal support as important more highly than those that do not.

Table 17

Property Destruction Behavior Z-Score, and P-Value Significance

Property Destruction				
Type of Support	Teachers reporting zero students with property destruction	Teachers reporting one or more students with property destruction	Binomial test H0: Proportion = 0.5	Significance
Emotional			z-score	p-value
Very Important	78.0 (38%)	94.0 (45.2%)	-1.2200	0.2527
Important	11.0 (5.3%)	22.0 (10.6%)	-1.9419	0.0801
A little Important	2.0 (0.01%)	1.0 (0.05%)	0.5774	1.0000
Not important at all	0.0	0.0	na	na
Appraisal				
Very Important	59.0 (28.4%)	59.0 (28.4%)	0.0000	1.0000
Important	24.0 (11.5%)	44.0 (21.2%)	-2.4254	**0.0205**
A little Important	6.0 (2.9%)	12.0 (5.8%)	-1.4142	0.2379
Not important at all	2.0 (0.01%)	3.0 (1.4%)	-0.4472	1.0000
Instructional				
Very Important	42.0 (20.2%)	48.0 (23.1%)	-0.6325	0.5984
Important	38.0 (18.3%)	57.0 (27.4%)	-1.9494	0.0642
A little Important	8.0 (3.8%)	9.0 (4.3%)	-2.2425	1.0000
Not important at all	2.0 (0.01%)	1.0 (0.05%)	0.5774	1.0000
Informational				
Very Important	60.0 (29%)	74.0 (35.6%)	-1.2094	0.2614
Important	23.0 (11.1%)	32.0 (15.4%)	1.2136	0.2806
A little Important	4.0 (1.9%)	10.0 (4.8%)	-1.6036	0.1796
Not important at all	3.0 (1.4%)	1.0 (0.05%)	1.0000	0.6250

Note: N=90 for teachers without students with property destruction behavior and N=117 for teachers serving students with property destruction behavior.

Eighty-five teachers reported zero students with verbally aggressive behaviors on their caseload while one hundred twenty-four teacher respondents indicated that they served one or more students with verbally aggressive behavior. Considering verbal aggression behavior and emotional support, one hundred (48%) teachers reported students with verbal aggression behavior rated emotional support as "very important." Twenty-three teachers (11%) rated emotional support a "very important." The p-values of 00.0478 and 0.0351 respectively indicate that the difference in proportions is significant, meaning that teachers who have students in their classrooms value emotional support more highly than those who do not.

For forty-two teachers (20.1%) who have students verbal aggression behavior rated appraisal support, "important" with a significant p-value of 0.0498 indicating these teachers value appraisal support more highly than those who do not. Fifty-four teachers (26%) rated instructional support as "important" with a corresponding p-value of 0.0080. Finally, thirty-eight teachers (18.2%) felt that informational support was "important" with a p-value of 0.0065.

Table 18

Verbal Aggression Behavior Z-Score, and P-Value Significance

Verbal Aggression				
Type of Support	Teachers reporting zero students with verbal aggression	Teachers reporting one or more students with verbal aggression	Binomial test H0: Proportion = 0.5	Significance
Emotional			z-score	p-value
Very Important	73.0 (35%)	100.0 (48%)	-2.0528	**0.0478**
Important	10.0 (4.8%)	23.0 (11%)	-2.2630	**0.0351**
A little Important	2.0 (1.0%)	1.0 (0.5%)	0.5637	1.0000

Not important at all	0.0	0.0	na	na
Appraisal				
Very Important	51.0 (24%)	68.0 (32.5%)	-1.5584	0.1421
Important	25.0 (12%)	42.0 (20.1%)	-2.0769	**0.0498**
A little Important	5.0 (2.4%)	13.0 (6.2%)	-1.8856	0.0963
Not important at all	4.0 (1.9%)	1.0 (0.5%)	0.1797	0.3750
Instructional				
Very Important	48.0 (23%)	55.0 (26.3)	-0.6897	0.5546
Important	29.0 (14%)	54.0 (26%)	-2.7441	**0.0080**
A little Important	5.0 (2.4%)	14.0 (6.7%)	-2.0647	0.0636
Not important at all	2.0 (1.0%)	1.0 (0.5%)	0.5774	1.0000
Informational				
Very Important	60.0 (29.0)	75.0 (36%)	-1.2910	0.2281
Important	17.0 (8.1%)	38.0 (18.2%)	-2.8316	**0.0065**
A little Important	4.0 (1.9%)	8.0 (3.8%)	-1.1547	0.3877
Not important at all	2.0 (1.0%)	2.0 (1.0)	0.0000	1.0000

Note: N=85 for teachers without students with verbal aggression behavior and N=124 for teachers serving students with verbal aggression behavior.

In summary, a binomial test was used to consider the proportion of a two-level categorical dependent variable in this study, teachers who report one or more students on their caseload with the designated behavior versus teachers who report zero students on their caseload with the designated behavior. The binomial follows a ‘z’ distribution and allows a determination of whether the proportions calculated from the number of teachers and their rating of support importance from the hypothesized value. In this study, that value is 50:50. Any significant difference in proportions indicates a difference between those two sets of teachers. The data suggests that there was statistical significance in the areas of support for each of the four defined types of behavior. Elopement behavior reflected the strongest significance for each of the four

types of support rated as “very important” for teachers who have students with this type of behavior. Property destruction reflected the least proportional statistical significance of importance for teachers of students demonstrating this behavior with only the support area of appraisal rated as “important.”

Research Reliability

Research reliability addresses the extent to which the outcomes from the research can be replicated under the same conditions. The amount of correlation between items in the instrument is its internal consistency (Bland & Altman, 1997). Table 12 reflects the results of the Cronbach Alpha for this survey is α=0.92, indicating the internal consistency of this survey is “excellent.” The review of individual questions within the survey was not problematic, and no data from them was discarded when determining internal consistency.

Table 19

Cronbach’s Alpha for Internal Consistency (α = 0.92)

Cronbach Coefficient Alpha	
Variables	**Alpha**
Raw	0.916735
Standardized	0.921428

Research Validity

The validity of a research study refers to how well the results among the study participants represent true findings among similar individuals outside the study. In contrast, internal validity determines whether one variable is related to an outcome or the extent to which the results measure what they were intended to measure (Borsboom, Mellenbergh, & Van Heerden, 2004). Threats to internal validity for this study included the survey instrument and

sample size for the survey questions related to student behavior. The data from teachers who responded that they did not have a student with one of the four defined areas of challenging behavior was not used for data analysis of the effect of behavior therefore limited the sample size. This is a limitation of the current research project and an area for future study.

Conclusion

Addressing the first and second research questions in the study, the data from over two hundred of Oklahoma's special education teachers suggest that emotional support is both most valuable and "important" to receive from the school principal, followed by the other areas of support in order of perceived importance: instrumental support, appraisal support, and informational support respectively. Survey data related to the third research question in this study shows that there is a statistically significant proportion for the type of supports needed by special education teachers who report working with students with elopement, physical aggression, property destruction, or verbally aggressive behavior. The data reported in this research project closely mirrors the data reported in the larger Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross 1994 study. Teachers continue to rate all support areas as important, with emotional support as the most important form. In the next chapter, major points of the study will be synthesized and compared to existing research, limitations will be discussed, and recommendations for further research will be outlined.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

There is rich research on school leadership, but the lens of a school principal leading and supporting special educators can add a unique layer of challenge. The primary purpose of this study was to identify special educators' perceptions of principal support and to determine which dimensions they consider most important, specifically regarding their perceptions of support with the variable of working with students with significant and challenging behaviors. This chapter will conclude by summarizing the key research findings concerning the research aims and discuss the value and contribution thereof. It will also review the study's limitations and propose opportunities for future research.

Special educators who have students with challenging behaviors sometimes experience physical aggression, verbal aggression, have classroom or personal property destroyed, or the elopement of a student. Behaviors like these can lead to physical and mental exhaustion and stress for teachers (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006). Effective principals can enhance their skills by understanding what special educators of students with significant behaviors report as supportive to help decrease injury and burnout, promote educator retention, and ultimately increase student success (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Hill, 2011; Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015; Peters & Pearce, 2012). This project examined teacher perspectives in Oklahoma by surveying special education teachers who serve students with significant behavior challenges to identify what supports provided by a school principal were perceived as most helpful. Four dimensions of social support were first defined by House (1981), then further adapted, and defined these areas of support through the lens of being a school principal by Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross (1994), including emotional, appraisal, instrumental, and informational supports are the central tenements of the project.

Dimensions of Principal Support and Importance

Considering appraisal, emotional, informational, and instrumental support as defined by House (1981), and Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross (1994), emotional support was perceived as most important to general and special education teachers in the original study. As reported in the Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross 1994 study, the teachers in Oklahoma also indicated that emotional support is most valued and most desired. Principals who ensure that teachers know they are appreciated, project concern for their students, and allow teachers' input into decisions show reinforcing, emotional support for teachers. For example, this research found that two hundred eighteen special education teachers reported interacting with their school principal "as often as they choose."

Instrumental supports were reported to be the second most crucial area in the current research, with appraisal supports closely following. In contrast, in the Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross study, appraisal then informational supports were reported to be "very important." Principals provide instrumental support to teachers when they directly help with their work, including taking part in student interventions during behavior challenges, meeting with the teacher and parents, and allocating materials.

Providing constructive feedback is a type of appraisal support that is very important for special education teachers with students with significant behaviors on their caseload. A lack of feedback could lead teachers to question their performance and lead to feelings of uncertainty (Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994). Informational support, such as providing teachers access to continuing education opportunities and other professional growth, is ranked last in importance by the special education teachers in this sample. Notably, all four areas of support rank "very important" more frequently than support actions perceived as "not important."

Challenging Behavior

In this sample, more than half of the teacher respondents revealed that they had one or more students on their caseload who displayed one or more of the defined behaviors in this study. Most often, the behavior observed was physical aggression with one hundred thirty-nine teachers reporting one or more students on their caseload with this behavior, followed closely by one hundred thirty-eight teachers serving students with elopement behaviors. One hundred twenty-four teachers indicated they serve students who display verbally aggressive behaviors, and one hundred seventeen teachers reported serving one or more students with property destruction behavior. Further research is necessary to draw a more precise description of the relationship between the number of students, the frequency of the behavior, and the degree of perceived challenge by teachers.

Challenging Behavior and Principal Supports

For special education teachers who report working with students with challenging behavior, emotional support given by the school principal was perceived as "very important." Even teachers who reported having no students on their caseload with challenging behavior projected the perception that emotional support would be very important. Only eight teachers of the two hundred twenty-one who responded scored one of the twenty-one survey questions with an importance rating of “not important” or “a little important.”

Research Findings and Application

Principals can help special education teachers experience greater confidence and skill by providing emotional, appraisal, informational, and instrumental support. Special education teachers report that receiving emotional support from their school principal is "very important" and almost 40% of the teachers reported having access to their principal to the extent they

choose. Hughes, Matt, and O'Reilly (2015) documented through their research that teachers who work with students with behavioral challenges must have the active support of school administrators. With intentional and focused support, principals can influence the work of teachers of students with behavior challenges and be instrumental in supporting teachers through successful behavior interventions and increased academic achievement of students with behavioral challenges (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

Importance of Study for Teachers

While the original Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross (1994) study looked at some of the personal health and well-being of teachers, the purpose of this project was to consider the support needs of teachers who work with students with significant behaviors. An additional goal was to add to the knowledge base for school leaders who may be able to support these teachers. This study contributes to influential school leaders' practices by distinguishing specific supports that benefit teachers for students with significant behavior issues. The findings for this research project are similar to those of previous research on the particular topics of principal support and perceived importance. Emotional support given by principals was reported to be the most important. Instrumental and appraisal supports were ranked second and third important in previous research. The close replication of the findings closely is important because the original study was published almost twenty years ago, the IDEA (2004) has been re-authorized since that time, and there has been a worldwide pandemic where the practice of education was one of virtually every facet of life that was challenged for almost three years.

Importance of Study for Students

Research has been clear that students with long-term behavioral challenges “consistently” lag behind their peers academically and behaviorally, are likely to be excluded from school, drop

out more frequently, and face higher incarceration rates and a host of other negative outcomes as adults" (Freeman, Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2019, p. 97). Research by Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) finds that one-quarter of the effects of school can be attributed to school leadership, second only to the influence of teachers. When principals are knowledgeable about the need for support and systematic in their planning to support teachers in ways that the recipients perceive, ultimately, students may benefit due to teacher consistency and growth in practice.

Theory and Practical Implications

The research findings offered school principals broad areas to study and fine-tune their transformational leadership skills. Three factors identified in school change research central to effective principal leadership are maintaining a school culture that is supportive of teachers, distributive leadership with teachers, and professional learning communities to guide teacher scholarship (Blase & Blase, 1998; Crow et al., 2003; Hoppey, & McLeskey, 2013; Keyes et al., 1999; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). Principals who maintain a positive school culture through emotional support, provide informational support by collaborating with teacher groups to grow teacher learning and practice and show appraisal support by sharing ownership of leadership opportunities with teachers. Refining administrative practices by targeting specific supports may improve leadership outcomes.

In practice, some steps can be immediately added to one's leadership repertoire to benefit educators and students. For example, teacher evaluations are one area to use appraisal support, but giving specific feedback at other points in time can help grow teacher practice. Becoming more aware of high-leveraged and evidence-based special education practices will allow for sharing interventions and informational support. Providing instructional support may include

working with the teacher to help create a positive response plan for students with challenging behavior, so the team can act to prevent significant behaviors or coordinate efforts when significant behaviors occur. Emotional supports that can be put into practice right away may be talking with a teacher about their concerns and valuing their perspective regarding serving students.

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations to this study include sampling issues. More than 200 respondents answered questions related to areas of principal support and their perceived importance of the support. The survey included twelve questions from four defined challenging behaviors, including 1) the number of students on the respondent's caseload with four different types of behavior, 2) the frequency of occurrence, and 3) the degree of challenge the behavior presented. The respondents could answer "no students" if they did not have a student with the identified behavior on their caseload, but the survey response did not include a "no students" or opt-out response on the frequency or degree of challenge questions. For teachers that did not have a student who did not participate in one of the four behaviors, it appears the respondents did not answer those questions creating missing information. When data was not complete for the behavior questions for an individual respondent, the individual's data was not utilized for analysis on that data set.

Recommendations for future research include further study of the support needs of teachers of students with significant behavioral challenges. The specific support techniques could be further researched to determine how much time should be invested in developing professional relationships with teachers that are regarded as “supportive?” A further query could help determine if physical or instrumental supports and interventions are helpful for situations in which a student has aggressive behavior. Sixty-four percent of respondents to the survey

reported being in special education for less than five years. Are teachers of students with challenging behavior leaving the field at a higher rate or more quickly than other special education or general education teachers? Furthermore, what can school leaders do to help slow this loss? Another future study may involve the teacher's need or drive for additional training. In this study, of the two hundred fifteen respondents, or more than 70% indicated that they hold more than one current Oklahoma teaching license or certificate. What is the value or the need of having more than one teaching certificate in the field of special education?

Conclusion

Emotional, appraisal, instrumental, and informational support are valuable to special education teachers. It is essential for school leadership to know what special educators of students with significant behaviors report as supportive of decreasing injury and burnout to promote educator retention and, ultimately, student success. Whether it is knowing how to apply policy and legislation in a situation, how to help safely intervene when a student displays challenging behavior, knowing what type of constructive feedback is preferred, or how to respond to a frustrated parent, principals play a critical role in the success and ultimately the retention of special educators. This study aimed to identify other ways school leaders could support teachers of students with significant behavioral challenges.

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