Fall 12-2019

The Importance of Administrative Supports in Retaining Special Educators: A Comparison of Administrator and Teacher Perceptions

Mary Ellen Seymour
University of Maine, mary.bowden@maine.edu

THE IMPORTANCE OF ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORTS IN RETAINING SPECIAL EDUCATORS: A COMPARISON OF ADMINISTRATOR AND TEACHER PERCEPTIONS

By

Mary Ellen B. Seymour

B.S. Husson University, 1995

M.Ed. University of Maine, 2007

A DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(in Special Education)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

December 2019

Advisory Committee:

Janet Spector, Associate Professor Emerita of Special Education, Co-Advisor

Janet Fairman, Associate Professor of Education, Co-Advisor

James Artesani, Associate Professor of Special Education

Sarah Howorth, Assistant Professor of Special Education

Deborah Rooks-Ellis, Assistant Professor of Special Education

THE IMPORTANCE OF ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORTS IN RETAINING SPECIAL EDUCATORS: A COMPARISON OF ADMINISTRATOR AND TEACHER PERCEPTIONS

By Mary Ellen B. Seymour

Dissertation Co-Advisors: Dr. Janet Spector and Dr. Janet Fairman

An Abstract of the Dissertation Presented
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
(in Special Education)

December 2019

This study compared the perceptions of special education administrators (SEAs) and special education teachers (SETs) regarding the importance of administrative supports in retaining SETs, and also explored SETs' levels of satisfaction with current supports and factors that correlated with satisfaction. Survey methods were used to identify and compare the perceptions of the importance of 23 administrative supports to the retention of SETs by 39 Maine SEAs and 122 Maine SETs. Using a framework developed by House (1981), administrative support items were assigned to one of four categories of support: emotional, instrumental, informational, or appraisal. The results of the study indicated that SEAs perceived emotional supports as being more important to the retention of SETs than other forms of supports, while SETs rated the importance of emotional and instrumental supports as more important than the other two types of supports. There was alignment between both groups for only two items that were deemed as most important to teacher retention: (a) *showing genuine concern for teachers' program and students* and (b) *providing support when teachers become overloaded.* SETs indicated varying levels of satisfaction with SEA-provided supports. Although they were generally satisfied with most supports they received, three supports that were perceived as

highest in importance were ranked as lowest in satisfaction: (a) *having input into decisions that affect me*, (b) *providing support when I become overloaded,* and (c) *having time for non-teaching responsibilities*. Correlational analyses revealed a relationship between satisfaction and two SET characteristics and job conditions: frequency of interaction with SEAs and intent to remain in the profession. SETs who interacted with their administrator at least once a week, tended to be more satisfied with supports than teachers who interacted less frequently. In addition, SETs who indicated intent to remain in the profession for two or fewer years were significantly less satisfied with supports received than those indicating intent to remain three or more years. There was no relationship between SET satisfaction and length of teaching experience, type of special education program, or caseload size.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my advisors for their support throughout this journey. I am especially grateful for the commitment, guidance, and patience provided by my chair, Dr. Janet Spector. She faithfully gave her time and expertise to help me through every aspect of this process. Her feedback and attention to every detail were instrumental in my success. Despite entering into retirement, she stayed the course with me through this project and for that I am indebted to her. I am also immensely grateful for the guidance, support and input provided by my other chair, Dr. Janet Fairman. In addition to her significant feedback and encouragement, she also provided a different perspective that prompted me to think in new ways. I appreciate her thoughtful conversation, expert suggestions, and consistent input. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the rest of my committee members, Dr. James Artesani, Dr. Sarah Howorth, and Dr. Deborah Rooks-Ellis for their input, guidance and suggestions.

In addition to my academic support team, I would like to thank the special education directors and special education teachers who participated in my study. Their input and experience have been invaluable to this study. I value and appreciate the challenging work they do everyday to support special learners in our state.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their unwavering support. I am appreciative of my children and grandchildren who gave me their love and encouragement throughout this process. I attribute my success in life to my mother's love and positive influence, and for that, and all she does for me, I am forever grateful. For being the most patient of all, I am thankful for my husband, Steve, who loved and supported me through every step of this journey, and who never once complained about the time I spent in my home office researching and writing.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Teacher Supply

A persistent and severe shortage of special education teachers (SETs) has long been identified as a problem in the United States (McLeskey, Tyler & Flippin, 2004). In their 2015-2016 reports to the U.S. Department of Education, forty-eight states identified special education as a shortage area (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). SET shortages have been especially noted in rural areas (which make up 40% of the nation's districts) (Berry, 2012), and in high poverty, high minority schools (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop & Darling-Hammond, 2016).

Overall, reports have indicated that the U.S. teacher supply is shrinking, with an attrition rate of about 8% annually (Sutcher et al., 2016). Within the field of special education, the Council for Exceptional Children (2000) commissioned a study of the conditions of teaching children with exceptional learning and created a report titled: The Bright Futures Report (Coleman, 2000). Findings in the report were based on two years of intensive research and field work including surveys with 246 SETs, 158 SEAs, 110 principals, and 72 regular education teachers, as well as data from national databases and a set of published research studies that were completed during the five years prior to the report. The survey examined four areas: (a) materials available, (b) physical facilities, (c) collegiality/professionalism, and (d) communication. Data were analyzed to compare general education and special education, teachers and administrators, and elementary and secondary groups. Coleman (2000) reported that experienced SETs were leaving their jobs at nearly twice the rate of general educators. Additionally, Coleman found that inexperienced and unqualified SETs, who have lower levels of commitment to the field, were even more likely to leave the profession. Coleman reported that although college and university programs in the United States prepared approximately 17,000 SETs annually, this was only

about half the number needed to replace those that were leaving the field each year. Additionally, The Bright Futures report concluded that shortages were more the result of high attrition from the profession than insufficient recruitment into the profession, a conclusion that has been confirmed in recent research (e.g. Berry, Petrin, Gravelle, & Farmer, 2011; Bettini, Cheyney, Wang, & Leko, 2015; Cowan, Goldhaber, Hayes, & Theobald, 2016; Podolsky et al., 2016; Sutcher et al., 2016). More recently, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projected an 8% increase in the number of SETs who will be needed between 2016 and 2026 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2018).

Teacher Attrition Factors

Numerous factors have been identified as contributing to SET attrition, including lack of administrative support, burnout, classroom conditions, excessive paperwork, professional isolation, physical exhaustion, challenging student behaviors, role ambiguity, and the diverse instructional needs of the students (Billingsley, 2004a; Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1997; Coleman, 2000; Embich, 2001; Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999; Podolsky et al., 2016; Sutcher et al., 2016). In her extensive review of the literature, Billingsley (2004a) linked the following teacher characteristics and qualifications to greater risk of attrition: (a) being younger and inexperienced, (b) lacking certification, and (c) having higher test scores (e.g. National Teacher Exam scores). Additionally, she concluded that work environment factors (e.g. low salaries, lack of administrative support) may lead to negative effects (e.g. high levels of stress, low levels of job satisfaction), and ultimately to withdrawal and attrition. Among the latter factors, lack of administrative support may be particularly critical to address because of its potential to influence

almost all of the other factors that contribute to attrition. Indeed, Coleman (2000) found that teachers who left the field cited a lack of administrative understanding of and support for their work as a key factor in their decision to stay in or leave the profession.

Prior analyses of the work conditions for SETs have indicated that much of what SETs believe and do is influenced by actions of and interactions with administrators (Coleman, 2000; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003). For example, from their interviews with 93 Florida SETs who had left the classroom, Brownell, Smith, McNellis, and Miller (1997) concluded that attrition resulting from stress, certification status, and workload manageability was reduced when teachers perceived their administrators to be supportive. Other investigators have concluded that educators who perceived their administrators as supportive tended to be more committed (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013), more satisfied with their jobs, and less likely to express intention to leave (Billingsley, 2004a). At the same time, Coleman (2000) found that the perspectives of teachers differed greatly from those of administrators. Although teachers reported concerns, growing frustration, and beliefs that their situation was not understood, administrators, on the other hand, reported that conditions of teaching were positive and not as dire as teachers professed.

Research Questions

While there has been considerable evidence linking SET attrition and administrative support, researchers have noted that studies to date have not clearly identified the types of supports that teachers most value and desire nor have they examined administrators' perspectives on the supports that they perceive to be important in increasing teacher retention (Billingsley, 2004a; Cancio et al., 2013). Given this gap in the literature, further investigation was warranted to identify and compare the supports that special education administrators (SEAs) perceive are

important to teacher retention with the supports that SETs perceive as important, and to identify the level of satisfaction that SETs have with the supports currently received. The purpose of this study was to identify the gaps that exist between the perceptions of SETs and their SEAs with regard to the importance of SEA-provided supports. Specifically, the study addressed three research questions:

1. To what extent is there alignment between the types of supports SEAs perceive to be most important in retaining SETs and those that SETs perceive to be most important?
2. How satisfied are SETs with the supports they currently receive from their SEAs?
3. What factors are associated with greater SET satisfaction with supports they receive from their SEAs?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Researchers and policy analysts have identified insufficient retention of SETs as a major challenge in the field (e.g. Billingsley, 2004a; Cancio et al., 2013; Coleman, 2000). SETs work with students who have significant learning, behavioral, emotional and/or physical challenges that impact their success in school. These students require instruction and supportive services that are research-based, implemented with fidelity, and provided by highly trained, qualified teachers. Unfortunately, many of the teachers who are hired to work with special needs students lack the proper certification, training, or experience to be effective. Because of their inexperience, and related feelings of ineffectiveness and frustration, SETs may choose to leave special education - a result known as attrition (Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Billingsley, 2004a; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Kaff, 2004).

Within the literature on special education, SET attrition generally refers to one of three changes in employment: (a) a teacher moving from special education into general education, (b) a teacher moving to a special education position in a different building or district, or (c) a teacher leaving the profession entirely (Billingsley, 2004a; Coleman, 2000). Approximately half of the SETs who enter the field will leave before their fifth year (Fish & Stephens, 2010). According to experts in the field, SET shortages or inexperience contribute to less than adequate educational experiences for students with disabilities, lower achievement levels, and lack of preparation or skills to graduate and enter the workforce (Coleman, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996; Podolsky et al., 2016). High teacher attrition rates, therefore, continue to be of great concern and require further study to identify ways to increase retention of SETs.

Administrative support has the potential to influence many factors that contribute to teacher attrition including burnout, challenging student behaviors, classroom conditions, the diverse instructional needs of the students, excessive paperwork, physical exhaustion, professional isolation, and role ambiguity (Boe et al., 1997; Coleman, 2000; Embich, 2001; Miller et al., 1999). In the literature review below, I discuss research on teacher retention and the relationship between administrative support (central office or building administrators) and SET attrition.

Special Education Teacher Shortages

A shortage typically is defined as the inability to fill vacancies using current wages with persons qualified to teach in the fields needed (Sutcher et al., 2016). Current shortages come as school districts are refilling positions cut during the recession of 2008 and as teacher attrition rates are high (Sutcher et al., 2016). Additionally, teacher preparation program enrollments have decreased 35% nationwide during the past five years. All totaled, this is a decrease of nearly 240,000 teachers between 2009 and 2014 (Sutcher et al., 2016). With an ongoing need for new teachers and a reduced supply of certified teachers available, districts must either hire uncertified staff, increase class sizes, cancel classes, use short-term substitutes, or assign teachers from other specialties to fill the voids (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Impact of Shortages on Special Needs Students

Because of shortages in the teaching workforce, uncertified teachers are often hired to work with students with special needs (Billingsley, 2004a). The single most important school influence in a student's education is a well prepared, caring, and qualified teacher, yet many individuals with exceptionalities do not receive the high-quality education required to reach successful adult outcomes (Coleman, 2000). As reported by Billingsley (2004b), based on 2003

data from the U.S. Department of Education, during the 2000-2001 school year, 47,532 SETs nationally (11.4% of all SETs) lacked appropriate certification. Billingsley (2004b) suggested that hiring uncertified and unqualified teachers is particularly costly to students with disabilities: "Those students who need the most assistance lose critical learning opportunities as these new teachers struggle to figure out what to do" (p. 370).

Impact of Shortages in Maine

In the state of Maine, SET shortages have been noted annually since the early 1990s and were again predicted for school year 2017-2018 (Maine Department of Education, 2016). During the 2015-2016 school year, Maine employed 4,504 (95%) fully certified SETs, and 256 (5%) SETs without full certification (Maine Department of Education, 2016). Unfortunately, overall education graduates in Maine have decreased by 36% in less than 10 years (Maine DOE, 2016). Given these trends, retaining qualified teachers that come into the profession is crucial to providing quality programs to special needs students in Maine.

Development of a comprehensive approach to reduce attrition of teachers would reduce the demand for hiring new teachers each year and allow districts to use those savings toward developing mentoring programs and other initiatives to improve instruction and programming (Sutcher et al., 2016). Thus, in order to improve outcomes for our students we need to cultivate and retain a qualified staff of SETs. If attrition rates continue as they have, then this will be a difficult task. Development of administrative policy and activities may be one solution to this problem, but first we need to better understand what the research tells us about teaching and working conditions for SETs.

Factors that Contribute to Special Education Teacher Attrition and Retention

In her critical analysis of the research literature, Billingsley (2004a) reviewed studies that investigated factors contributing to SET attrition and retention focusing on four major themes: (a) teacher characteristics and personal factors, (b) teacher qualifications, (c) work environments, and (d) teachers' affective reactions to work. Two conceptual models provided the basis for examining factors that influence teachers' decisions to stay in or leave the profession. The first was Billingsley's (1993) schematic representation and included three broad categories: external factors, employment factors, and personal factors. External factors (e.g. economic, societal, institutional) are presumed to have an indirect impact on teachers' career decisions because these factors are derived from outside sources. Personal factors (e.g. life circumstances, priorities) are those that occur outside the context of employment and may directly or indirectly influence teachers' career decisions. Employment factors (e.g. professional qualifications; work conditions and rewards; commitment), the primary focus of this model, were hypothesized by Billingsley (1993) to have a direct impact on commitment.

The second conceptual model, offered by Brownell and Smith (1993), was based on Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model of four interrelated systems. Brownell and Smith (1993) adapted this model to examine variables related to teachers' career decisions and included: (a) the microsystem (a system of relationships and classroom variables that interact with the teacher), (b) the mesosystem (includes facets of the microsystem, plus workplace variables such as collegiality and administrative support), (c) the exosystem (social structures and the socioeconomic level of a community), and (d) the macrosystem (dominant cultural beliefs and ideologies, and economic conditions of the community).

Prior research examined in Billingsley's (2004a) literature review was generally divided into two major approaches to studying teacher attrition and retention: (a) studies that examined existing populations of teachers to determine their future intent to leave the profession, and (b) studies that examined final, attrition decisions of teachers. The latter method of examining attrition behavior has been noted to be more time-consuming and costly (Billingsley, 2004a). While using the intent to leave variable has been considered controversial by some researchers who question its applicability to actual attrition behavior (Billingsley, 2004a), other researchers have found a relationship between future plans and actual attrition behaviors (Gersten et al., 2001). Thus, studying retention using this approach seems reasonable.

Billingsley's (2004a) review of the literature revealed two key findings. First, certain teacher characteristics and levels of qualification may be linked to attrition. These included: (a) being younger and less experienced, (b) lacking proper certification, (c) achieving higher scores on their exams (e.g. Scholastic Aptitude Test, National Teacher Exam), and (d) having personal reasons such as staying home to raise children or moving for a spouse's job. Second, work environment factors (e.g. lack of administrative support) may lead to increased stress, reduced job satisfaction, and reduced commitment to the organization or the job, which in turn may lead to attrition behaviors.

More recently, Fish and Stephens (2010) studied the factors that contributed to career decisions of 57 SETs in a metropolitan region of a southwest state. Participants completed a survey to indicate their perceptions of factors that contributed to (a) their decisions to pursue a profession in special education, (b) their job satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and (c) their decisions to remain in or to leave the field of special education. The majority of participants indicated overall job satisfaction levels that were relatively high; however, lower satisfaction levels with

their particular district were noted compared with their satisfaction with their specific role within that district. It should be noted that the majority of SETs in this study had five or more years experience – a factor that has been indicated by other researchers to increase potential retention (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008). SETs in this study ranked a lack of administrative support and excess paperwork as two factors that most impacted their levels of frustration. Despite these frustrations, the majority of participants indicated a high probability of remaining in the field of special education and only one indicated he/she might leave within the next five years due to overall dissatisfaction. Overall, participants indicated that although their districts took careful measures to effectively recruit new SETs, SETs' perceptions of efforts to retain these teachers were less favorable. The impact of teacher job satisfaction is discussed in the next section.

Impact of Job Satisfaction and Commitment on Retention

To identify the factors that influence teacher commitment to remain in the profession and job satisfaction among general and special educators, Billingsley and Cross (1992) surveyed 463 SETs and 493 general educators in Virginia. Responses were analyzed using scales that measured commitment (e.g. professional and organizational commitment) and job satisfaction, stress, leadership support (e.g. principal), role conflict (seen when inconsistent behaviors are expected from an individual), and role ambiguity (the lack of necessary information available to an individual). Based on their analyses of the responses, Billingsley and Cross reported that job satisfaction for both general and special educators was associated with greater support from leadership, more work involvement, and reduced levels of role conflict and stress. Commitment to the organization for both groups was associated with more leadership support and less role conflict. For SETs in particular, reduced levels of stress and role ambiguity were associated with increased job satisfaction. Billingsley and Cross (1992) concluded that perceptions by SETs of

higher levels of role conflict and role ambiguity than those experienced by general educators were linked to increased stress and burnout among special educators. Based on these findings, Billingsley and Cross (1992) suggested that to increase job satisfaction and increase retention of staff, more attention should be paid to role conflict and role ambiguity. More recent studies have further clarified the relationship between satisfaction, commitment, and retention.

In her review of the literature, Billingsley (2004a) reported that one of the most important ways to reduce attrition is to increase teachers' job satisfaction because these two factors have been linked in studies of teacher intentions (e.g. Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Billingsley, Gersten, Gillman, & Morvant, 1995; Gersten et al., 2001). Previous studies examined by Billingsley (2004a) indicated that different work conditions, such as creating supportive relationships with teachers and principals, reducing stress, clarifying job expectations, and offering professional support to teachers should help improve teacher satisfaction (Cross & Billingsley, 1994; Gersten et al., 1994; Singh & Billingsley, 1996). With regard to commitment, Billingsley (2004a) found that several studies have indicated that a strong relationship exists between higher levels of professional and organizational commitment, remaining in the profession (Miller et al., 1999) or indicating intent to remain in the profession (Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Gersten et al., 2001; Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994).

Impact of Professional Development, Support, and School Culture on Retention

Gersten et al. (2001) conducted a study that added to the growing body of research on job satisfaction, commitment, and retention. The primary differences between the Gersten et al. (2001) study and the study completed by Billingsley and Cross (1992) were that Gersten et al. (2001) surveyed only SETs, and they looked at predicted *and* actual factors for leaving. Using survey instruments that included attitudinal scales, they gathered 614 SETs' perceptions of the

factors that lead to SET attrition and retention. Approximately 15 months after the surveys, follow up interviews were conducted with 33 respondents who had indicated intent to leave the profession within the next year to determine if intent was actualized. Of the 33 participants who reported intent to leave, 69% had actually left the field of special education, a finding that indicates a fairly strong connection between reported intent to leave and actually leaving.

Gersten et al. (2001) identified several factors that participants identified as influential in their decisions to remain in or to leave the field of special education. These factors included (a) being understood, (b) being listened to, (c) receiving professional development, (d) receiving support for conflicts, (e) obtaining building level support, (f) having opportunities to observe and learn from each other, and (g) having positive working conditions and appropriate job design. From these findings, Gersten et al. (2001) identified three critical components to support and retain qualified SETs: (a) relevant professional development opportunities, (b) support for conflicts and the demands of the job, and (c) fostering a school culture that includes support from fellow teachers.

Gersten et al. (2001) described professional development opportunities as the extent to which SETs perceived that they were provided with opportunities to improve and receive professional advancement. Gersten and colleagues found that SETs who perceived greater levels of professional development opportunities experienced less job dissatisfaction. Billingsley (2004a) found additional support for this finding in her review of the literature. For example, Brownell, Smith, McNellis, and Lenk (1995) conducted qualitative interviews with 14 current and ten former SETs and found that those who chose to remain in the profession were more likely to take charge of some aspects of their own learning by seeking out professional development opportunities to increase their skills. Brownell et al. (1995) suggested that SETs

satisfaction with professional development opportunities was influenced by the content of the professional development, when it takes place, the quality of the development, and benefits to the teacher for participating.

Support for teachers can take many forms including administrative, colleague, and induction and mentoring (Billingsley, 2004a). In her review of the literature, Billingsley (2004a) reported that teachers are more likely to leave teaching, or indicate intent to leave, when there is a lack of support from administrators and colleagues (e.g. Miller et al., 1999; George, George, Gersten, & Grosenick, 1995). As reported by Billingsley (2004a), in their national study, Boe, Barkanic and Loew (1999) found that teachers who remained in their positions were nearly four times more likely to perceive their administrators' behavior as supportive and encouraging than teachers who left the profession. In a similar finding, Miller et al. (1999) found a strong relationship between perceived support from building administrators and decisions to stay or leave. Additionally, SETs and general education teachers who indicated receiving higher levels of principal support were less inclined to stress and were more inclined to be committed to, and satisfied with, their jobs compared with those teachers who received less support (Billingsley & Cross, 1992). (A further discussion of the impact of supports provided by building and central office administrators is presented in another section of this chapter.)

Although less attention has been paid to the relationship between supports provided by colleagues and attrition, studies to date have provided mixed results. For example, in their study of over 1,000 Florida SETs, Miller et al. (1999) found a relationship between levels of support from colleagues and intent to stay or leave. Conversely, in their study of SETs of students with emotional and behavioral challenges, George et al. (1995) found that nearly a quarter of these SETs indicated that support received from their general education peers was inadequate, but their

reported intent to stay or leave was not related to these peer relationships. Billingsley (2004a) suggested that a plausible explanation for the differences discovered in these studies may have been related to the methods of gathering data (e.g. open-ended responses versus questionnaires), whether measurement was based on intent to leave versus leaving, and sample size differences.

Another form of support provided to beginning teachers is in the form of induction and mentoring (Billingsley, 2004a). Billingsley suggested that it is critical to support beginning teachers because they are at greater risk of leaving in the first few years of employment and yet few special education attrition studies have focused on the relationship between early career supports and attrition. In one such study, Whitaker (2000) explored SETs' perceptions of effective mentoring programs and examined the impact of these programs on their intent to remain in the field, and their level of satisfaction. Those SETs with higher levels of induction support were more likely to express positive beliefs surrounding the manageability of their role, to reach the most difficult students, and to feel successful in delivering instruction to students with disabilities. However, there did not appear to be a significant relationship between level of induction support that was provided to new teachers and their intent to stay in the profession. Another significant finding from Whitaker (2000) was that mentoring support provided by a fellow SET (as opposed to a general education teacher mentor) was an important factor in delivering effective mentorship.

School climate is one of the broadest work environment variables covered in the literature for special education attrition (Billingsley, 2004a). Billingsley (2004a) cited three large scale studies (A High-Quality Teacher for Every Classroom, 2002; Billingsley, Carlson & Klein, 2004; Miller et al., 1999) and reported a relationship indicating that teachers who had a positive view of school climate were more likely to stay, or to indicate intent to stay, in the profession

compared with those who held a less positive view of school climate. The studies used different measures of school climate (e.g. the morale of staff, the provision or availability of necessary materials, cooperation among staff members, administrative behavior). Billingsley (2004a) indicated that although researchers have attempted to separate these various work-related factors that affect school climate, it is a difficult process because they are "inextricably linked" (p.45). Regardless, climate is an important variable to consider because it gets at the overall opinion of whether a school or district is a good place to work (Billingsley, 2004a).

In summary, these studies suggested that job satisfaction and commitment were important factors in teacher decisions to stay or leave. Furthermore, there appeared to be a substantial connection between intent to leave and actually leaving the profession, a finding that supported the validity of previous research findings such as Billingsley and Cross (1992) that were based on intent to leave. A discussion of a differing conceptual framework of administrative support follows next.

Framework for Conceptualizing Administrative Support

In the following discussion of studies related to administrative support, some researchers have drawn upon the foundational work of House (1981) who studied the effects of social support on work-stress, health, and the relationship between stress and health. House surveyed 1,809 white, male factory workers in a large tire, rubber, chemicals, and plastics manufacturing plant located in a small northeastern city. The survey included items related to the effects of social support, work stress, health, and the relationship between stress and health in their workplace. Examples of items included: *How much can each of these people (e.g. supervisor, other people at work, spouse, friends and relatives) be relied on when things get tough at work*? and *My supervisor is very concerned about the welfare of those working under him*. Participants

responded to items using a 4-point scale (*not at all, a little, somewhat, or very much*, and *not at all true, not too true, somewhat true, very true*). Based on his findings, House concluded that work-related sources of social support (i.e. supervisory or administrative support) were the most effective type of support in reducing occupational stress and in buffering the effects of stress on employee health.

House (1981) conceptualized support as a multidimensional concept that included a wide range of behaviors. He categorized these behaviors and concluded "that social support is an interpersonal transaction involving one or more of the following (a) emotional concern (liking, love, empathy); (b) instrumental aid (goods or services); (c) information (about the environment); or (d) appraisal (information relevant to self-evaluation)" (p. 39). Although job conditions vary for factory workers and teachers, subsequent researchers have used this framework to design surveys pertaining to the relationship between support and teacher attrition and retention. In the sections that follow, I examine more recent research on these forms of support in an educational context including studies that investigated educators' relationships with their principal and studies that focused on the relationship between SETs and their SEAs.

Role of the Principal in Special Education Teacher Attrition

In a study of principal effects on SET and general educators' attrition rates, Littrell et al. (1994) used a questionnaire to survey the perspectives of 385 SETs and 313 general educators in Virginia on the relationship between principal support and their stress, job satisfaction, school

commitment, health, and intent to stay in teaching. Littrell et al. (1994) developed their survey to include items in each of the four categories of social support within House's (1981) framework and defined the four categories as follows (p. 297):

1. 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.
2. Instrumental support. Principals directly help teachers with work-related tasks, such as providing necessary materials, space, and resources, ensuring adequate time for teaching and nonteaching duties, and helping with managerial-type concerns.
3. Informational support. Principals provide teachers with useful information that they can use to inform 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.
4. 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.

Littrell et al. (1994) developed a questionnaire containing several sections including items on: principal support, stress, job satisfaction, school commitment, personal health, and intent to remain in teaching. The questionnaire was mailed to a random sample of 201 SETs of students with emotional disturbance, 206 SETs of students with learning disabilities, and 206

SETs of students with mental retardation. All SETs invited were also asked to provide the survey to one typical, general education teacher in their school. Thus a total of 613 general education and 613 SETs were potential participants.

The support items used in the Littrell et al. (1994) survey were based on House's (1981) framework for support, and also included ideas obtained from open-ended teacher interviews and from the literature. Their primary finding was that principal support was important to teachers' self-reported well-being. More specifically, principals who were perceived as emotionally supportive and who provided informational support were more likely to retain teachers who were satisfied with their work. These findings were consistent with the results of previous research (e.g. Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Cross & Billingsley, 1994; Billingsley, Gersten, et al., 1995) indicating that support is an important factor in teacher retention.

With regard to school commitment, Littrell et al. (1994) found that both instrumental and emotional support were significant predictors for both general and SETs' feelings of commitment to their schools. They hypothesized that emotional support provided teachers with a sense of belonging that motivated them to higher performance and involvement in their buildings. Additionally, when teachers reported a greater level of emotional support provided by principals, they reported fewer health problems. Overall, they concluded that administrators who offered constructive feedback to teachers about their job performance, encouraged teacher participation in decisions about school issues, showed concern for the teacher's students and programs, and fostered the teacher's sense of importance promoted teachers' willingness to remain in the field.

Littrell et al. (1994) reported that while most principals offered support to all educators in their buildings, it was not always the kind of support that teachers believed was important. The study results suggested that teachers believed that their principals were providing support; however, not all teachers found the type of support or level of support given to be helpful. For example, teachers reported instrumental support (e.g. principal assistance with discipline or parent confrontations) as more important than informational support (e.g. provides opportunities to attend conferences or workshops, or knowledge of legal policies); however, they reported receiving more informational support than instrumental support.

Role of the Central Office Administrator in Retaining Teachers

While the above study focused on the relationship between building level administration (i.e. principal) and teacher retention, few recent studies have investigated the relationship between support provided by central office personnel such as SEAs and satisfaction and retention of SETs. Although principals are critical to providing day-to-day support to teachers, central office administrators oversee district, state and federal compliance regulations and laws that are an important part of SETs' case management responsibilities. To be fully informed and supported on all aspects of these requirements there must be a positive working relationship between SETs and their central office administrators.

Billingsley et al. (1995) investigated SET perceptions of both building-level and central office level administrators. Using survey and interview data obtained from approximately 375 SETs in six large urban districts, Billingsley et al. (1995) summarized findings regarding SET perceptions of their support needs and experiences with building-level principals and central office supervisors.

Overall, Billingsley et al.'s (1995) findings indicated the importance of positive working relationships between SETs and their SEAs. Across each district, SET satisfaction, commitment, and intent to leave were all highly associated with administrative support at the building and central office level. They found, however, that SETs indicated frequent difficulties related to their relationship with building level administration. Problems noted included lack of understanding of what SETs did in their classrooms, failure to realize the significance of the work challenges and accomplishments of SETs, limited assistance with specific challenges such as discipline or mainstream efforts, and hesitation to involve teachers in decisions that shaped the special education programs in their school. Many of the respondents reported positive and supportive relationships with their building principals, yet still expressed concerns around the above list. For example, even with an emphasis on inclusive education, many SETs reported that they did not feel included in events in their school and that they received limited assistance from their building administrator in integrating their students. Billingsley et al. (1995) concluded that a great proportion of SETs felt isolated in their buildings and the level of isolation varied across buildings and districts.

With regard to their relationship with the central office administrator (i.e. the SEA), Billingsley et al. (1995) found that positive perceptions of the type and level of central office support received was dependent on effective communication and clear administrative expectations for special education that aligned with their core values and priorities. In many cases, SETs reported that lack of frequent contact and a focus by SEAs on paperwork rather than student progress, caused them to infer that administrators prioritized or valued legal compliance over SETs' abilities to make meaningful progress with students. Since SEAs were making decisions from a distance and without adequate information, SETs were left feeling

misunderstood, undervalued, and powerless to make change. Billingsley et al. (1995) concluded that increased communication surrounding the values, priorities, policy, and rationale between SEAs and SETs would benefit these relationships.

Defining administrative support has been an area of weakness in the literature (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013; House, 1981; Littrell et al., 1994). Since support needs vary depending on the context of the situation, and since certain decisions will need to be made by specific administrative staff, it is not surprising that a common definition of support remains elusive (Billingsley et al., 1995). Cancio et al. (2013) conducted a study examining the relationship between administrative support and attrition of SETs of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD). They also attempted to identify the most critical dimensions of administrative support, using as a starting point House's (1981) four categories of support: emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal framework.

Specifically, Cancio et al. (2013) surveyed 408 certified and practicing SETs of students with EBD. The online questionnaire consisted of 96 items in six clusters: (a) extent of administrative support, (b) satisfaction with the job, (c) feelings about the job, (d) views about the school, (e) self-descriptive statements, and (f) demographic information. Most items were adapted from Littrell et al.'s (1994) earlier survey. An important feature of the survey was a question about how long the respondent planned to teach. This item enabled the researchers to identify those who indicated a probability of leaving in the short-term and those who were likely to stay for the long-term.

Cancio et al. (2013) reported two key findings related to the different types of administrative support perceived to be important to SETs of students with EBD, and the impact of administrative support on SETs' satisfaction, school commitment, and intent to stay in

teaching. First, using factor analysis, (and the same support definitions proposed by Littrell et al., 1994), Cancio et al. (2013) identified four administrative support factors of importance to SETs of students with EBD, three of which aligned with House's framework: guidance and feedback (i.e. similar to appraisal support), opportunity for growth (i.e. similar to informational support), and trust (i.e. similar to emotional support). House's fourth category, instrumental support, did not surface in Cancio et al.'s (2013) factor analysis. Instead, they identified appreciation as a fourth factor of importance. Cancio et al. (2013) defined appreciation as administrators showing teachers that they were respected and worthy of concern.

Second, Cancio et al. (2013) found that for the SETs who intended to remain in the profession long-term, higher levels of support from administrators in opportunity for growth, appreciation, and trust were noted compared to those SETs intending to leave in the short-term. Mean ratings for job satisfaction and views about the school were significantly higher for long-term SETs than for those who intended to leave prior to retirement. Furthermore, similar to Littrell et al. (1994), Cancio et al. (2013) found that SETs' commitment to remain in the profession was related to satisfaction with the work setting, pride in the school, loyalty to their colleagues and students, and ownership and investment in their programs.

Summary of the Literature

One of the largest malleable influences on teacher attrition is administrative support (Billingsley, 2004a). Positive working relationships between SETs and their administrators is therefore of utmost importance (Billingsley et al., 1995). Teachers who feel supported by their administrators have reported a greater likelihood of remaining in the profession indicating that administrators have the potential to promote teachers' willingness to remain in the field (Littrell et al., 1994). Administrative support is multidimensional and often is categorized into four types

of support: emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal (Cancio et al., 2013; House, 1981; Littrell et al. 1994). Not all teachers, however, have found the type or level of support provided to them to be helpful (Coleman, 2000; Littrell et al., 1994).

A significant missing piece in the research studies described above is what SEAs perceive are important supports to retain SETs. In addition to knowing what SETs need and value in the form of support, we need to better understand the perceptions of SEAs vis a vis SETs' needs and values. The present study sought to identify and address this gap in the literature by surveying SEAs and their SETs on the importance of supports to teacher retention. In addition, the study examined SETs' satisfaction with supports received, and the relationship of their satisfaction to their intent to remain in the profession.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Overview

The purpose of this study was to compare the perceptions of SEAs and SETs regarding the importance of SEA-provided supports to the retention of SETs and to investigate SET satisfaction with the supports they receive. For this purpose, I used electronic survey methods to obtain perceptions of both groups. Demographic information was also collected about the 37 participating districts through an online state database. All data collection occurred within a three-month period between April and June 2018. In this chapter the sampling procedures, survey design, and data analyses employed in this study are described. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. To what extent is there alignment between the types of supports SEAs perceive to be most important in retaining SETs and those that SETs perceive to be most important?
2. How satisfied are SETs with the supports they currently receive from their SEAs?
3. What factors are associated with greater SET satisfaction with supports they receive from their SEAs?

Sampling Procedures

Recruitment of participants for this study was a two-step process first involving SEAs and then SETs. Each of these steps is described below.

Recruitment of Special Education Administrators

I obtained a list of SEAs and their email addresses from the Maine Department of Education database (https://www.maine.gov/doe/specialed/). Emails were sent to 147 out of 148 public school SEAs in the database inviting them to participate in the study. The only SEA that

did not receive an email invitation was the SEA working in the district in which I am employed. The invitation included a description of the study, informed consent, and a link to an online survey (see *Appendix A*). Approximately one week after the original survey request was emailed, all SEAs received a "thank you" for participating and a reminder/follow-up request to consider participating if they hadn't yet replied. A second and final request to participate was sent to non-responding SEAs approximately two weeks after the initial invitation.

After I received completed surveys, I retrieved demographic information about the 37 school districts whose SEAs participated in the survey from the Maine Department of Education data warehouse (MDOE Data Warehouse, July, 2018). The information was based on the October 1 enrollment and staffing count for the 2017-2018 school year. I then replaced names of school districts with code numbers in my database so that survey responses could no longer be directly linked to specific districts. Characteristics of participating administrators and their districts are described in the next chapter on survey results.

Recruitment of Special Education Teachers

After receiving survey responses from SEAs, the school websites in districts whose SEAs participated in the SEA survey were reviewed in order to identify email addresses of SETs in those districts. Email invitations to participate in the study were then sent to 488 SETs who worked in the 37 school districts that had been named by respondents in the SEA's survey. Two of the 39 returned SEA surveys did not include the name of the school district, so invitations were unable to be sent to SETs from those districts to participate in the study.

The invitation to participate for SETs included a description of the current study, informed consent, and a link to an online survey (see *Appendix B*). SET surveys were sent in batches as SEA surveys were received and a thank you/reminder email was sent approximately one week after the original survey request, and then again one week after that.

Surveys asked SETs to identify the name of their district. Upon receipt of completed surveys, names of school districts were replaced with code numbers so that survey responses could no longer be directly linked to specific districts. Characteristics of participating SETs are described in the next chapter.

Survey Design

Original Survey

The starting point for the online survey was a survey instrument developed by Littrell et al. (1994) which was modified for this current study. Littrell et al. designed their study to identify general and SETs' perceptions of principal support. Their survey included the following sections: (a) ratings of support items, (b) the effects of perceived principal support on teacher stress and (c) personal health, (d) job satisfaction, (e) school commitment, (f) intent to remain in the profession, and (g) demographic information.

The first section of the Littrell et al. (1994) questionnaire consisted of 40 principal support items aligned with the four dimensions of support described by House (1981). For each of the 40 support items, respondents were asked to describe: (a) the extent of support they received from their central office administrators, principal, assistant principal, special education teachers, and general education teachers (1 = *no extent* to 4 = *great extent*); and (b) the importance of receiving this support in their current role (1 = *not important* to 4 = *very important*). In the next two sections, teacher stress and personal health were assessed by asking

individuals to indicate the extent to which they experienced stressful feelings (e.g. frustration, nervousness, tension), and health problems (e.g. headaches, sleeplessness, eating problems), and used a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*). In the fourth section, teachers were asked to indicate their satisfaction with various aspects of their job (e.g. importance and challenge, working conditions, salary and benefits) using a four point scale ranging from 1 (*very dissatisfied)* to 4 (*very satisfied*). The fifth section, school commitment, was measured using 12 attitudinal items (e.g. I feel very little loyalty to this school) using response choices that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The sixth section, teacher intent to remain in teaching, was assessed by asking respondents to indicate how long they planned to teach using choices that ranged from 1 (*definitely plan to leave teaching as soon as I can*) to 5 (*until forced to retire due to age*). And finally, the last section, participant demographic information, included age, race, gender, total number of years in current position, total years in education, endorsements, and grade level taught. Additional questions in the participant description section addressed school characteristics: the socioeconomic level of students, level of parent support, and whether their school could be characterized by a feeling of camaraderie. According to the authors, experts in support, survey methodology, and classroom teaching reviewed the survey instrument. Littrell et al. (1994) also field-tested the survey with nine special and seven general education teachers. Final revisions to the questionnaire were made based on the comments and data received during field-testing.

Current Survey

I obtained permission to use and modify the Littrell et al. (1994) survey from Sage Publishing who now owns the rights to the Littrell et al. instrument (see *Appendix C*). I designed and formatted two parallel surveys for administration through an online survey platform, the Qualtrics Survey Program (www.qualtrics.com): one for SEAs and one for SETs (see complete surveys in *Appendix D* and *Appendix E*).

I modified Littrell et al.'s (1994) survey in several ways. First, although Littrell et al. (1994) included items on their survey that asked about personal effects of the job (e.g. stress, health problems), those items were not included on this survey because they were not pertinent to this study's research questions. Second, the Littrell et al. (1994) questionnaire addressed supports provided by multiple categories of personnel. Instructions to participants in my study were to consider only the supports provided by their SEA. Third, the current study's survey design was shorter and only included three sections: (a) open-ended and fixed-choice items on participant characteristics, (b) a scale for perceptions on administrator supports, interactions, and satisfaction, and (c) an open-ended item that had not been part of the Littrell et al. (1994) survey.

Finally, Littrell et al. (1994) asked participants to rate the importance of supports and the extent of support they received. The survey used in this study asked both SETs and SEAs to rate the importance of SEA-provided supports specifically within the context of teacher retention. In addition, SETs were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the level of SEA-provided support they received rather than the extent of support they received. Further information about each section is provided below.

Participant characteristics. The questions in the first section of the survey included general demographic information about the administrator or teacher (i.e. gender, ethnicity, number of years as an administrator or teacher, type of teaching certificate held, grade levels served). The survey also asked administrators to indicate the number of special educator positions that would need to be filled or replaced in the fall of 2018 and to identify the extent to which the retention of special educators in their district had been an issue in the past. The survey also asked teachers to indicate how long they planned to remain in their current position and to identify a reason why they might leave their current position, both of which used a fixed-choice question format.

Upon receipt of completed surveys, I obtained additional information online from the Maine Department of Education Data Warehouse for each district: total student enrollment, number of special education students, number of special education teachers, and percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

Importance of administrative supports to the retention of special education teachers. Items in the second section of both surveys include a scale comprised of 23 items related to one of the four types of supports identified by House (1981): emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support. The number of administrative support items selected for the second section of the survey was reduced from 40 in the Littrell et al. (1994) survey for two reasons. First, to limit survey length, items that were redundant with another item on the survey were eliminated. For example, "allows me input into decisions that affect me" was retained, but "considers my ideas" was eliminated. Second, some items were more applicable to a principal rather than an SEA. For example, "equally distributes resources and unpopular chores," was eliminated as it is a task more commonly performed by principals than central administrators like

a special education director. The wording of selected items in this section was nearly identical to that in the original Littrell et al. (1994) survey and for both the SEA and SET surveys but with slight changes in wording to match the respondents' role. For example, the original item, "allows me input into decisions that affect me" from the Littrell et al. (1994) survey was retained exactly on the SET survey, but was reworded as "allowing teacher input into decisions that affect them" on the SEA survey.

Both groups were asked to rate the importance of various administrative supports in retaining special educators (e.g. offering constructive feedback after observing my teaching, noticing my efforts, being easy to approach, helping during parent conflicts when necessary) using the following response choices: 1=*least important*, 2=*less important*, 3=*more important*, and 4=*most important*. SET surveys included an additional column to report level of satisfaction with supports they currently receive and used a similar response scale: 1=*least satisfied*, 2= *less satisfied*, 3=*more satisfied*, and 4=*most satisfied*. Within the survey, items were ordered randomly rather than by type of administrative support identified by House (1981) to avoid a response set based on a category of support. The method used by Littrell et al. (1994) to assign support items to one of the four support categories was not described in their paper; however, using their definitions for each category the items were sorted into one of the four categories. Table 3.1 depicts the support items on each survey by category for this study.

To assess the reliability of the assignment of items to categories, I asked two additional individuals, an SEA and a special education faculty member to sort the items by category. Across the 69 judgments (i.e. 23 items judged by 3 individuals), there was full agreement on 66 items (96%). On the items where there was not 100% agreement, only one individual had placed the item in a category other than the original sort.

Table 3.1

Littrell et al. (1994) Administrative Support Items Assigned to Each House (1981) Support Category

Support Category	Administrative Support Item
Emotional	
	Allowing teacher input into decisions that affect them
	Giving teachers a sense of importance that they make a difference
	Showing appreciation for teachers' work
	Supporting teachers on reasonable decisions
	Noticing teachers' efforts
	Showing genuine concern for teachers' program and students
	Being easy for teachers to approach
Instrumental	
	Providing teachers with materials and resources needed to do their job
	Assisting teachers with proper identification of students with disabilities
	Helping teachers during parent conflicts, when necessary
	Providing teachers with time for various non-teaching responsibilities (e.g. IEP* meetings or completing paperwork)
	Helping teachers solve problems and conflicts that occur
	Providing teachers with support when they become overloaded
Informational	
	Providing knowledge of current legal policies and administrative regulations
	Providing information on up-to-date instructional & behavioral techniques
	Providing opportunities for teachers to attend workshops or conferences
	Identifying resource personnel for specific problems teachers are unable to solve
	Providing suggestions to teachers to improve instruction
	Providing opportunities for teachers to learn from fellow special education teachers
Appraisal	
	Giving clear guidelines regarding teachers' job responsibilities
	Offering constructive feedback after observing teaching
	Providing standards for teachers' performance
	Providing frequent feedback about teachers' performance

*IEP = individualized education plan or program

The second section of the SET survey also included one fixed-choice item in which teachers indicated how frequently they typically interacted with their SEA given five choices: daily, 2-4 times a week, once a week, 1-2 times a month, or less than monthly, and a second

fixed-choice item that asked teachers to rank order the method of interaction most typically experienced with their administrator given four choices: in person, by telephone, by email/electronic communication, and by letter/interoffice mail.

Open-ended response item. Both the SET and SEA surveys concluded with a broad open-ended question: *Is there anything else you would like to add about the importance of administrative supports in retaining special educators*? The purpose of this question was to elicit additional feedback to supplement conclusions drawn from importance and satisfaction ratings.

Survey Field Test

I piloted the survey with one SEA and three SETs in one district that would not be participating in the study using the same description of the study, informed consent, survey instructions and electronic link that I planned to use in the study. Pilot participants were asked to provide feedback about portions of the survey instrument that might be confusing. Based on this feedback, the introductory statements to the items in section two were adjusted to reduce wordiness and unnecessary explanation. No other concerns or comments were reported about survey questions. Participants reported that the survey took only five to seven minutes to complete. Final revisions to the survey were made after meetings with doctoral co-chairpersons and the doctoral committee.

Methods for Data Analyses

Data were downloaded from the Qualtrics online survey platform and entered into SPSS for analyses. There were three types of data to analyze: (a) fixed choice items pertaining to demographic and professional characteristics of the participants and their districts, (b) scaled items based on importance and satisfaction ratings, and (c) one open-ended response item.

Analyses of Fixed-Choice Items

To analyze fixed-choice items, I computed descriptive statistics relating to response rate, and key demographic and professional characteristics of the participants and their districts. I reported response frequencies for the response choices associated with these items.

Analyses of Survey Scales

To analyze survey scaled items I computed internal consistency reliability (coefficient alpha) to ensure that all scales had sufficient reliability to support continued analyses. Independent *t*-tests were used to compare SEA and SET perceptions of importance for the four types of support and across the full set of 23 items, and paired samples *t*-tests were used to compare SET importance ratings with satisfaction ratings. I examined trends in ratings on individual items between and within the support scales to describe the participants' perspectives on the importance of supports. I conducted repeated measures of analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine whether importance ratings varied by subscale, and to determine if SET satisfaction ratings varied by category of support. I also used correlational analyses to examine the relationship between SET satisfaction levels and SET characteristics and job conditions. Alpha was set at .05 in determining the statistical significance of results.

Analyses of Written Comments

To summarize the open-ended responses and compare them to other survey results, I developed a set of coding guidelines. First, the original 97 responses were sorted into one of three categories based on alignment of the response with the focus of the study on the importance of special education administrative supports to retention of special educators: 1) special education administrative support factors, 2) other retention factors, or 3) non-codable responses.

The first category, *special education administrative support factors*, included comments directly related to something special education administrators have responsibility for or that they could potentially impact (e.g. "Special educators should be provided with meaningful professional development rather than be an afterthought or forced to do professional development that doesn't apply to them.").

The second category, *other factors*, included comments that addressed factors that special education administrators could not directly impact (e.g. "Teacher training does not provide special education teachers with the tools and skills they need to feel confident in their work."). This category also included comments that referenced responsibilities of other personnel (e.g. "Building administration is the most important to be able to support my program as they are available to help out in safety situations and decisions."), or identified other challenges facing special educators that might affect retention (e.g. "I very strongly feel that special educators are taken advantage of in the general education world."). Given that the purpose of this study was to shed light on the views of SEAs and SETs regarding the importance to retention of supports provided by SEAs, further analyses related to responses in the *other factors* category were not conducted. However, the seven factors that were mentioned by two or more participants are included in *Appendix Table E.1,* along with the number of administrators and teachers who cited each factor.

The third category, *non-codable responses*, included comments that were not subjected to any further categorization or analyses because they were (a) unrelated to the topic (e.g. "Good luck on the research."), (b) represented an ambiguous or incomplete thought or sentence (e.g. "Cohesive sped team – Cohesive building team – availability – visibility"), or (c) were too vague

to categorize (e.g. “I have had some experience, in a past job, where I was a department head/administrator, so I have a pretty good ‘base’ knowing about the role an administrator plays.”).

Next, the 50 responses that fell into the first category (Special Education Administrative Support Factors) were coded according to the four House (1981) factors: emotional supports, instrumental supports, informational supports, and/or appraisal supports (see Table 3.1 for specific items related to each support type). Some responses reflected more than one support category. In these instances, multiple codes were assigned. For example, within the comment “Student-centered decision making, feedback, support in difficult situations with parents, training,” the support factors of emotional, appraisal, instrumental and informational were all coded. To assess the reliability of assignment of responses to categories, a special education faculty member was asked to use these guidelines to sort 25% of the responses. Across the 50 judgments (i.e. 25 items judged by two individuals) there was full agreement (on support categories and House factors) on 48 items (96%). One rater judged the discrepant response item as a special education administrative support while the other rater judged it as an “other factors” support.

Summary

To date, only a few studies have addressed how SETs perceive the importance of different forms of administrative support (Littrell et al., 1994; Billingsley et al., 1995; Billingsley, 2004b; Cancio et al., 2013). In addition, I was unable to locate any studies that investigated how SEAs view the importance of the supports that they provide to SETs. Based on

these gaps in the literature, it is important to understand the importance of SEA-provided supports as viewed by SEAs and SETs, and to understand the perceived level of satisfaction with supports by SETs. The results of the analyses are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter presents results from analyses of survey responses. Specifically, I analyzed the importance of supports to the retention of SETs from the perspective of both SEAs and SETs. Additionally, the satisfaction expressed by SETs with current levels of support, and the relationship between satisfaction with supports and SET characteristics were examined including (a) number of years of experience, (b) number of students on caseload, (c) type of program, (d) intended length of continued service in this role, and (e) frequency of interaction with their SEA. Finally, I examined responses to an open-ended item that allowed respondents the opportunity to provide written comments on the importance of SEA-provided supports. In the sections that follow, I describe the characteristics of participating SEAs and SETs, and present the results of analyses bearing on three research questions:

1. To what extent is there alignment between the types of supports SEAs perceive to be most important in retaining SETs and those that SETs perceive to be most important?
2. How satisfied are SETs with the supports they currently receive from their SEAs?
3. What factors are associated with greater SET satisfaction with supports they receive from their SEAs?

In this chapter, I begin by describing the sample. Second, I report on SEAs' perceptions of retention in their districts, SETs' intentions to remain in or leave the profession, and SETs' frequency and mode of interactions with their SEA. Then, I describe the results of perceptions of the importance of supports to the retention of SETs and SETs' level of satisfaction with SEA-provided supports. Finally, I report on support factors associated with SET satisfaction and I analyze responses to the open-ended item.

Description of Sample

Thirty-nine SEAs participated in this study, including two SEAs who did not identify their districts. One hundred twenty-two SETs participated in the survey. In the sections below, characteristics of the participating school districts and each group of participants are described.

Participating School Districts

I obtained information about the 37 school districts whose SEAs participated in the survey from the Maine Department of Education data warehouse (MDOE Data Warehouse, July, 2018). The information was based on the October 1 count of school year 2017-2018. Table 4.1 displays key demographic characteristics of the districts served by SEAs in the sample and compares them to district characteristics statewide. As can be seen, there was considerable variability across districts on all characteristics, but the means were similar to the state mean, indicating that the sample for this study was fairly representative of districts across the state.

Table 4.1

Characteristics of Participating SEAs' Districts Compared to Statewide Means

Characteristic	Sample Mean	State Mean
Percentage of students receiving free and/or reduced-price meals	43.1	46.5
Percentage of special education students in k-12 compared to total student population	18.2	12.3
Percentage of special education teachers compared with total teaching staff	13.0	12.8

Special Education Administrators

Survey responses were received from 39 out of 147 SEAs (26.5%), representing 39 of Maine's 205 public school districts (19%) and 13 of Maine's 16 counties (81.2%). Counties not represented by SEAs were Piscataquis, Franklin, and Sagadahoc. Ratings of the importance of SEA-provided supports were critical to address my research questions. Therefore, to be included

in analyses described in this chapter, respondents must have completed at least half of the importance ratings on each support subscale. This criterion resulted in the exclusion of one SEA who had not completed any importance ratings. The final analytic sample of 38 SEAs represented 25.8% of all public SEAs statewide.

The vast majority of SEAs were white (97.4%) and female (73.7%). Table 4.2 summarizes their professional characteristics. As can be seen, only one served as a first-year SEA, with the remainder fairly evenly distributed across the remaining levels of service. Among respondents, the majority served all grade levels with only a few SEAs serving at only the elementary, the middle, or elementary/middle levels combined.

Table 4.2

Professional Characteristics of Participating SEAs

Professional Characteristics	*F*	%
Length of service		
First year	1	2.6
2-5 years	12	31.6
6-10 years	11	28.9
More than 10 years	14	36.8
Teaching levels served[a]		
Elementary	37	97.4
Middle/Jr. High	37	97.4
High School	33	86.8

[a]Frequencies add to more than 38 because administrators served multiple levels.

Special Education Teachers

Responses were received from 122 out of the 488 SETs surveyed (25.0%). Not all SETs indicated the name of their district (nine SETs did not). SETs that did name their district represented 12 of Maine's 16 counties (75%), and 28 of the 37 identified districts (76%). Counties not represented included Piscataquis, Franklin, Hancock, and Sagadahoc. The highest number of districts responding from a single county were from Penobscot county (nine districts),

but Cumberland county was the county most represented by individual SET responses (30 participants from six districts). Districts that were represented varied in total student population from 137 students to 3,654 students. Thus, the completed surveys broadly represented most regions of the state and districts of varying size.

As was the case for the SEAs' survey, SETs had to have completed at least half of the importance ratings on each subscale to be included in analyses in this chapter. Eleven respondents did not continue beyond the introductory section of the survey and so were eliminated from subsequent analyses. In addition, another SET indicated that satisfaction ratings were based on the principal rather than the SEA, and so that SET's response was eliminated from the analyses. The final number of participating SETs whose data were analyzed in this study was 110. Similar to the sample of SEAs, the vast majority of SET respondents were white (98.2%) and female (83.6%). Additional SET characteristics are reported below.

Professional background. Table 4.3 shows the professional background of SETs. As can be seen, the majority of SETs were highly experienced professionals. Few respondents were in their first year of their teaching career or in the first year of their current position. More than half of the respondents reported being in their current position for more than five years and more than half of the respondents had overall teaching careers greater than 15 years. A small percentage of teachers reported less than five years overall experience, while nearly half indicated working in their present position for less than five years. More than half of the respondents held a teaching certificate to work with students with disabilities at the elementary (grades K-8) school level while about a third held a secondary (grades 7-12) certificate. The most prevalent certification

category was 282, the category for SETs working primarily with students with mild to moderate disabilities (grade K-12). Few of the respondents reported holding a 286 certificate, the category for SETs working primarily with students with severe disabilities (grade K-12).

Table 4.3

Professional Background of Participating SETs

Professional Background	*F*	%
Certificate type		
Teacher of students with disabilities		
282E (K-8)	63	57.3
282S (7-12)	40	36.4
286 (K-12)	6	5.5
No response	1	0.9
Length of service in current position		
First year	12	10.9
2-5 years	35	31.9
6-10 years	25	22.6
11-15 years	14	12.6
More than 15 years	24	21.6
Length of service in overall career		
First year	3	2.7
2-5 years	13	11.7
6-10 years	21	19.0
11-15 years	14	12.6
More than 15 years	58	52.5
No response	1	0.9

Characteristics of special education programs. Table 4.4 depicts the characteristics of programs served by participating SETs. As can be seen, the majority of respondents taught at the elementary school level while about one-third taught at the high school level and one-quarter taught at the middle school level. The most frequent caseload sizes were 8-14 students and 15-21 students, with only a small number of SETs reporting caseloads below eight or larger than 21 students. In addition, the majority taught in resource programs, while less than one-quarter of respondents taught in self-contained/life skills programs and an even smaller number taught in emotional/behavioral programs. Respondents who reported "other" often indicated working in programs that were a combination of one or more of the three program types and constituted less than a quarter of the total respondents.

Table 4.4

Characteristics of Programs Served by Participating SETs

Program Characteristics	*F*	%
Grade level[a]		
Elementary	50	45.5
Middle	28	25.5
High	39	35.5
Number of students on caseload		
1-7	9	8.2
8-14	34	30.9
15-21	41	37.3
22-28	18	16.4
More than 28	7	6.4
No response	1	0.9
Special education program type		
Resource	63	57.3
Self-contained/life skills	19	17.3
Emotional/behavioral	11	10.0
Other	17	15.5

[a]Frequencies add to more than 110 due to multiple grade spans taught

Special Education Administrators' Perceptions of Retention

A primary purpose of the study was to investigate perceptions of the importance of supports to the retention of SETs. Table 4.5 shows the results of questions pertaining to the retention of staff in SEAs' districts. As can be seen, over two-thirds of the respondents indicated that retention was a problem in at least some years, although only about 10% of SEAs indicated that retention of qualified SETs had been an issue nearly every year or during most years. Nearly half reported that retention was a less frequent problem, occurring only during some years, and

almost a third indicated that retention was almost never a problem. At the same time, responses indicated that about 80% had vacancies to fill for the current year and nearly equal percentages of SEAs indicated they were or were not able to hire fully qualified, certified SETs for those vacancies. Similarly, almost 80% of respondents noted that they would have at least one SET position to fill in the upcoming year.

Table 4.5

SEAs' Perceptions of SET Retention in Districts Served by Participating SEAs

Teacher Retention Questions	*F*	%
How many special education teacher positions do you estimate your district will need to replace/fill in the fall of 2018?		
0	8	21.1
1-2	23	60.5
3-4	4	10.5
5-6	3	7.9
To what extent has the retention of qualified special education teachers been an issue in your district?		
Almost every year	4	10.5
Most years	4	10.5
Some years	18	47.4
Almost never	12	31.6
During the current school year, were you able to hire fully qualified, certified special education teachers for all vacancies in your programs?		
Yes	16	42.1
No	15	39.5
Not applicable – no vacancies	6	15.8
No response	1	2.6

Special Education Teachers' Intentions to Remain in or Leave the Profession

Table 4.6 indicates SETs' predicted intent to remain in the profession and their likely reasons for leaving. Few SETs indicated an intent to leave at the end of the current school year while more than half of SETs indicated they intended to remain in this profession for five or more years. Retirement was the single most frequent reason cited for leaving the profession in

the future. Nearly a third of respondents reported intent to remain a SET in either a different kind of special education position or a similar position in another school or district. The remainder of responses were nearly equally distributed between moving into a general education position or into an administrative position, and leaving teaching for another career.

Table 4.6

SETs' Predicted Length of Service and Potential Reasons for Leaving

Survey Question	*F*	%
How long might you continue in current profession?		
Leave at end of this year	6	5.5
1-2 more years	13	11.8
3-5 more years	29	26.4
More than 5 years	62	56.4
What is the most likely reason for leaving?		
Take a similar position in another school/district	22	20.0
Take a different kind of special education position	16	14.5
Move into general education teaching position	10	9.1
Move into an administrative position	10	9.1
Leave teaching for another career	21	19.1
Leave the job market	2	1.8
Retirement	29	26.4

Special Education Teachers' Frequency of Interactions with Administrators

Table 4.7 depicts the interaction frequency of SETs with SEAs. As can be seen, just over half of the SETs interacted with their SEA at least once a week, with the remainder reporting that they interacted with their SEA less frequently. Only a small portion of SETs reported interaction frequencies of less than once per month.

Table 4.7

SETs' Interaction Frequency with their SEA

Frequency of Interaction	*F*	%
Less than once per month	13	11.9
1-2 times per month	39	35.8
Once per week	23	21.1
1-4 times per week	26	23.9
Daily	8	7.3
Total	109	100

Special Education Teachers' Mode of Interactions with Administrators

On the survey, SETs rank ordered the frequency of four different modes of interaction with their SEA: in person, by telephone, by email, or by interoffice mail. Table 4.8 depicts the rank order for each method of interaction ranging from most frequent to least frequent. Five SETs did not provide a response to this question thus responses are based on 104 SET responses. As can be seen in Table 4.8, nearly three-quarters of SETs reported that the primary method of interaction with their SEA was by email. The second most frequent method of interaction, in person, was reported by about one-fifth of SETs, followed by interactions by telephone and by interoffice mail.

Table 4.8

Frequency of SETs' Mode of Interaction with their SEA

	Mode of Interaction with Special Education Administrator			
Rank of interaction mode from most to least frequent	Email	In Person	Phone	Letter/Inter-office Mail
	F (%)	*F* (%)	*F* (%)	*F* (%)
1	78 (75)	20 (19.2)	5 (4.8)	1 (1.0)
2	16 (15.4)	47 (45.2)	31 (29.8)	10 (9.6)
3	9 (8.7)	29 (27.9)	53 (51.0)	13 (12.5)
4	1 (1.0)	8 (7.7)	15 (14.4)	80 (76.9)

Perceptions of the Importance of Supports to the Retention of Special Education Teachers

The primary purpose of the study was to investigate the alignment between SEAs and SETs in their perceptions of the importance of SEA-provided supports in retaining SETs. To address this purpose, I asked SEAs and SETs to rate the importance of 23 SEA-provided supports on a scale from least to most important. Items were selected to align with each of House's (1981) four dimensions of support: emotional, instrumental, informational or appraisal. In the sections below, I present results of analyses of importance ratings.

Support Subscales

The first step in determining whether there was alignment between supports that SEAs perceived to be most important and those perceived by SETs to be most important, was to compute subscale scores for each of the four support types. Subscale scores were calculated by averaging ratings across the items within each of the four support types. As I mentioned in the

previous chapter, participants rated the importance of each support type on a scale from 1 to 4 (*1 = least important, 2 = less important, 3 = more important, and 4 = most important*), so the maximum subscale score for each support type was 4.

Next, the internal consistency reliability of each subscale and the inter-correlations among subscales were examined. The purpose of the first analysis was to evaluate whether the scales demonstrated sufficient reliability to merit use in further analyses. The purpose of the second analysis was to evaluate whether each scale appeared to be measuring a distinctive construct, an indicator of construct validity.

Internal Consistency Reliability of Subscales

According to educational assessment experts (e.g., Overton, 2003; Salvia & Ysseldyke, 2004), internal consistency reliability of at least 0.5 - 0.6 is adequate for a measure that will be used for research purposes and to describe groups rather than individuals. The internal consistency (coefficient alpha) of each subscale for SEAs and for SETs is reported in Table 4.9. As can be seen, all the scales had sufficient reliability to support use in subsequent analyses. The reason for the somewhat lower reliability of the Instrumental Scale for SEAs was lack of variability: one of the items received the highest importance ratings by virtually all SEAs. Without that item, reliability would have been .64.

Table 4.9

Reliability of Support Subscales

Factor	# of items	Cronbach's α
Emotional		
Administrator	7	0.66
Teacher	7	0.71
Instrumental		
Administrator	6	0.55
Teacher	6	0.65
Informational		
Administrator	6	0.77
Teacher	6	0.67
Appraisal		
Administrator	4	0.71
Teacher	4	0.75

Inter-Correlations Among Subscales

To determine whether each subscale appeared to be measuring a distinct construct, inter-correlations among the subscales were examined. As can be seen in Table 4.10, the correlations were all positive and ranged from small to moderate indicating that although there was overlap among scales, each of the scales appeared to be measuring a distinct construct.

Table 4.10

Inter-Correlations among SEAs' and SETs' Ratings of the Importance of Supports by Subscale

Subscale	Instrumental	Informational	Appraisal
Emotional			
Administrator	0.58**	0.65**	0.44**
Teacher	0.56**	0.40**	0.36**
Instrumental			
Administrator	-	0.49**	0.40**
Teacher	-	0.45**	0.26**
Informational			
Administrator		-	0.66**
Teacher		-	0.62**

***p<.01.*

Perceptions of the Importance of Supports

The next step in the analysis was to examine perceptions of the importance of different types of support. First, repeated measures ANOVA was used to compare scores across the four support scales to determine whether some forms of support were rated as more important than others. Second, I examined item level trends within the support scales. These analyses were conducted for SEAs and SETs separately, and then examined to determine if trends were similar for SEAs and SETs.

Importance Ratings by Support Scale

Table 4.11 shows the means and standard deviations of importance ratings for each group by support scale. The repeated measures ANOVA results for SEAs indicated that there was significant variability in importance ratings across the four scales, $F(3, 111) = 15.16$, $p = .00$, $\eta^2 = .29$.

Table 4.11

Mean Ratings of Importance for Each of Four Support Types for SEAs and SETs

Support Type	Administrators (n =38)		Teachers (n =110)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Emotional	3.65	0.28	3.43	0.40
Instrumental	3.49	0.38	3.39	0.41
Informational	3.33	0.43	3.07	0.45
Appraisal	3.26	0.45	2.99	0.54

The results of post-hoc tests with Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons indicated that emotional supports were rated as significantly more important than each of the other three types of supports: instrumental ($p = .03$; $d = .47$); informational ($p = .00$; $d = .86$); appraisal ($p = .00$; $d = 1.03$). Ratings of instrumental supports and informational supports ($p = .14$) did not differ in importance nor did ratings of informational and appraisal supports ($p = 1.0$). Instrumental supports were rated as significantly more important than appraisal supports ($p = .02$; $d = .55$).

Among SETs, the results of repeated measures of ANOVA also indicated that there was significant variability in importance ratings across the support types, $F(3, 327) = 46.61$, $p = .00$, $\eta^2 = .30$. Post-hoc tests using Bonferroni correction indicated that importance ratings were similar for emotional and instrumental supports ($p = 1.0$), and both of these types of supports

received higher importance ratings than informational (emotional vs informational $p = .00$; $d = .85$; instrumental vs informational, $p = .00$; $d = .75$) and appraisal supports (emotional vs appraisal $p = .00$; $d = .92$; instrumental vs appraisal $p = .00$; $d = .83$). Informational supports did not differ from appraisal supports ($p = .39$).

Comparison Between Groups on Importance of Supports

To determine whether there were differences between administrators and teachers in their perceptions of the level of importance of each different type of support in retaining SETs, independent groups *t*-tests were conducted to compare the mean importance ratings of SEAs and SETs on each of the four types of supports.

The independent groups *t*-test results revealed a significant difference between SEAs and SETs on the importance of emotional supports (t (3.73) = ($p = .01$). As can be seen above in Table 4.11, SEAs rated emotional supports as significantly more important to retention of SETs than SETs rated them to be ($d = .64$). There was no statistically significant difference between groups for ratings of instrumental (t (1.357) = $p = .37$), informational (t (3.173) = $p = 1.0$), or appraisal supports (t (2.809) = $p = .54$).

Item Level Ratings

To further describe participants' perspectives on the importance of SEA-provided supports in the retention of SETs, trends in ratings on individual items between and within the support scales were examined (see item ratings in *Appendix Table E.2*). Descriptively, the vast majority of SEAs viewed all items as important. Specifically, at least 71% of SEAs rated *all* 23 items as either *more important* or *most important*, and 90% or more of SEAs rated 74% ($n = 17$)

of the items as *more* or *most important*. A majority of SETs also viewed almost all listed supports as important. At least 64% of SETs rated *all* 23 items as *more important* or *most important*, and nine items were rated as *more* or *most important* by at least 90% of teachers.

Out of the 23 item ratings, the items that were most frequently rated as *most important* by each group of participants were also examined. Operationally, these were items that were roughly in the top 25% in how often they were rated as *most important* (*n* items = 6). As can be seen in Table 4.12, for SEAs, five of these items were on the emotional support scale and one was on the instrumental support scale.

Table 4.12

Items with the Greatest Number of 'Most Important' Ratings among SEAs

Scale Item	Prevalence of 'most important' ratings (*n* = 38)	
	F	%
Emotional		
Showing appreciation for teachers' work	32	(84)
Being easy for teachers to approach	31	(82)
Giving teachers a sense of important that they make a difference	30	(79)
Noticing teachers' efforts	30	(79)
Showing genuine concern for teachers' program and students	30	(79)
Instrumental		
Providing support when teachers become overloaded	27	(71)

For SETs (see Table 4.13), two of the items that were most frequently rated as *most important* were on the emotional scale and four were on the instrumental scale. As can be seen, there was alignment between SEAs and SETs in supports that were most frequently rated as *most important* on only two items: *showing genuine concern for teachers' program and students*, and *providing support when teachers become overloaded*.

Table 4.13

Items with the Greatest Number of 'Most Important' Ratings among SETs

Scale Item	Prevalence of 'most important' ratings (n = 109)	
	F	(%)
Emotional		
Showing genuine concern for my program and students	75	(68)
Allowing input into decisions that affect me	65	(59)
Instrumental		
Providing time for non-teaching responsibilities (i.e. paperwork)	73	(66)
Helping me during parent conflicts	66	(60)
Providing me with materials and resources needed to do my job	59	(54)
Providing support when I become overloaded	59	(54)

Special Education Teachers' Satisfaction with Administrative Supports

In this section, I report results that addressed my second research question: How satisfied are SETs with the supports they currently receive from their SEAs? To address this question, SETs were asked to rate their satisfaction with 23 SEA-provided supports on a 4-point scale from *least satisfied* to *most satisfied.* This section included the same 23 supports that SETs had rated on importance. The first step in analyzing SET satisfaction was to compute subscale scores for each of the four House (1981) support types. Subscale scores were calculated by averaging ratings across the items within each of the four support types. Participants rated their satisfaction of each support type on a scale from 1 to 4 (1=*least satisfied*, 2= *less satisfied*, 3=*more satisfied*, and 4=*most satisfied*), so the maximum subscale score for each support type was 4.

Next, I examined the internal consistency reliability for each subscale and the inter-correlations among subscales. The purpose of the first analysis was to evaluate whether the scales demonstrated sufficient reliability to merit use in further analyses. The purpose of the second analysis was to evaluate whether each scale appeared to be measuring a distinctive construct.

Internal Consistency Reliability

As mentioned above, internal consistency reliability of at least 0.5 - 0.6 is considered adequate for a measure that will be used for research purposes and to describe groups rather than individuals (e.g. Overton, 2003; Salvia & Ysseldyke, 2004). The internal consistency (coefficient alpha) of each subscale for SETs is reported in Table 4.14. As can be seen, all the scales had sufficient reliability to support use in subsequent analyses.

Table 4.14

Reliability of SET Satisfaction Subscales

Support Type	# of items	Cronbach's α
Emotional	7	.94
Instrumental	6	.83
Informational	6	.84
Appraisal	4	.81

Inter-Correlations Among Subscales

To determine whether each subscale appeared to be measuring a distinct construct, inter-correlations among the subscales were examined. As can be seen in Table 4.15, correlations between the subscale scores were substantial ranging from .65 - .79. In other words, SETs who tended to be satisfied with one type of support also tended to be satisfied with other types of supports.

Table 4.15

Inter-Correlations among SETs' Ratings of their Satisfaction with Supports by Subscale

Subscale	Instrumental	Informational	Appraisal
Emotional	.79**	.72**	.77**
Instrumental	-	.70**	.65**
Informational		-	.75**

***p<.01. Correlation was significant at the .01 level.*

Differences in Satisfaction Ratings by Support Type

The next step in the analyses was to compare scores across the four support types to determine whether satisfaction with some forms of support was greater than satisfaction with other types of support. Means and standard deviations for satisfaction ratings are summarized in Table 4.16. I used one-way repeated measures ANOVA with Greenhouse-Geisser correction to examine differences in satisfaction ratings among the four scales representing different types of SEA-provided supports. Results indicated that there were no differences among the four scales in magnitude of satisfaction ratings, $F(2.76, 298.42) = .143$, $p = .923$, $\eta^2 = .001$. That is, satisfaction did not vary by type of SEA-provided support.

Table 4.16

Mean SET Satisfaction Ratings for Four Different Types of SEA-Provided Supports

Support type	Teacher Satisfaction	
	M	SD
Emotional	2.78	0.83
Instrumental	2.76	0.68
Informational	2.75	0.63
Appraisal	2.75	0.65

Comparison between Importance of Support and Satisfaction with Support

To determine whether there were differences between SETs' perceptions of their ratings of importance and ratings of satisfaction, I conducted paired samples *t*–tests to compare the mean importance ratings with mean satisfaction ratings across each of the four types of supports. As can be seen in Table 4.17, SETs' perceptions of importance were greater than their perceptions of satisfaction across all four support types. The paired samples *t*-test results revealed a significant difference between importance and satisfaction for emotional supports (t (7.38) = (p = .00), with SETs rating the importance of emotional supports as significantly greater than ratings of satisfaction with emotional supports (d = 1.00). There was a statistically significant difference between importance and satisfaction for instrumental supports (t (8.54) = (p = .00), with importance rated significantly higher than satisfaction (d = 1.13). Similar results were found for informational supports (t (4.77) = (p = .00), with a moderate effect size for importance ratings compared with satisfaction (d = .59). Appraisal supports also revealed a significant difference between importance and satisfaction ratings (t (3.13) = (p = .00), with a moderate effect size (d = .41).

Table 4.17

Mean Ratings of Importance and Satisfaction for Each of Four Support Types for SETs

Support Type	Importance (n =109)		Satisfaction (n =109)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Emotional	3.43	0.40	2.78	0.83
Instrumental	3.39	0.41	2.76	0.68
Informational	3.07	0.45	2.75	0.63
Appraisal	2.99	0.54	2.75	0.64

Item Level Ratings and Special Education Teacher Satisfaction

To further describe SET satisfaction with supports I examined trends in ratings on individual items between and within the support scales. Overall, at least 50% of SETs indicated that they were *more satisfied* or *most satisfied* with 21 of the 23 SEA-provided supports (see complete list of satisfaction ratings in *Appendix Table E.3*). The two exceptions were the emotional item *allowing input into decisions that affect me* (48% more or most satisfied), and the instrumental item *providing time for various non-teaching responsibilities (i.e. paperwork)* (37% more or most satisfied). Further, at least 70% of SETs reported being *more* or *most satisfied* with the following SEA-provided emotional supports: (a) *is easy to approach*, (b) *supports me on reasonable decisions*; instrumental supports: (c) *assists me with proper identification of students*, (d) *helps me during parent conflicts*, and informational support: (e) *provides me with knowledge of current legal policies and regulations*.

Two support items were ranked as *least satisfied* or *less satisfied* by at least 50% of SETs. The support item *allows input into decisions that affect me*, was rated as *least satisfied* by 19.1% and *less satisfied* by 30.9% of SETs. The support item *provides time for various non-teaching responsibilities (i.e. IEP meetings or completing paperwork)*, was rated as *least satisfied* by 33.6% and *less satisfied* by 28.2% of SETs.

I also examined the supports that were most highly rated and conversely, lowest rated, with respect to satisfaction. Operationally, these were items that fell roughly in the top 25% in number of *most satisfied* or *least satisfied* ratings ($n = 6$). As can be seen in Table 4.18, two of the highest rated items reflecting *most satisfied* were on the emotional support scale, two were on the instrumental support scale, and two were on the informational support scale.

Table 4.18

Items with the Greatest Number of 'Most Satisfied' Ratings among SETs

Scale Item	Teacher Ratings (n = 109)	
Emotional	*F*	(%)
Being easy for teachers to approach	37	(34)
Showing genuine concern for my program and students	33	(30)
Instrumental		
Helping me during parent conflicts, when necessary	47	(43)
Assisting me with proper identification of students with disabilities	35	(32)
Informational		
Providing knowledge of current legal policies and administrative regulations	34	(31)
Providing opportunities for me to attend workshops or conferences	31	(28)

As can be seen in Table 4.19, three of the lowest rated items, reflecting least satisfaction with supports, were on the emotional support scale, two were on the instrumental support scale, and one was on the informational support scale. The appraisal support scale didn't include any items that were among either the highest or the lowest rated on satisfaction.

Table 4.19

Items with the Greatest Number of 'Least Satisfied' Ratings among SETs

Scale Item	Teacher Ratings (*n* = 109)	
Emotional	*F*	(%)
Allowing input into decisions that affect me	21	(19)
Noticing my efforts	18	(16)
Showing appreciation for my work	18	(16)
Instrumental		
Providing me with support when I become overloaded	22	(20)
Providing me with time for various non-teaching responsibilities (e.g. IEP meetings or completing paperwork)	37	(34)
Informational		
Providing opportunities for me to learn from fellow special education teachers	15	(14)

Support Factors Associated with Special Education Teacher Satisfaction

The third purpose of this study was to examine factors that were associated with greater SET satisfaction with supports they received from their SEAs. One SET did not provide any satisfaction ratings, so analyses were based on 109 SET responses. Given the substantial correlations among satisfaction ratings across support types and the fact that mean satisfaction didn't vary across support types, I conducted these analyses using the mean satisfaction rating

across all support types. This index was computed for each SET by averaging satisfaction ratings across all 23 items. Overall, the mean satisfaction rating across SETs was 2.76 (SD = .62) and the results of reliability analysis indicated high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$).

To address this purpose, correlations between SET satisfaction and six factors that reflected differences in SET characteristics and job conditions were examined: (a) number of years of teaching experience, (b) number of students on caseload, (c) type of special education program, (d) intended length of continued service in this role, (e) frequency of interaction with their SEA, and (f) mode of interactions with their SEA. In the sections that follow I describe the relationships between each of the SET factors and satisfaction with SEA-provided supports.

Special Education Teacher Experience

First, the correlation between satisfaction and two variables related to experience were examined: years in current position ($r = .073$, $p = .45$) and total years' experience ($r = .17$, $p = .07$). Neither correlation was significant, although the small correlation (.17) between total years' experience and satisfaction approached significance ($p = .07$).

Program Type

Next, the relationship between SET satisfaction and the type of program in which SETs taught was examined. Table 4.20 shows the means and standard deviations of satisfaction ratings for SETs working in four different types of programs. A one-way ANOVA to compare satisfaction of SETs teaching in different types of programs indicated no differences between groups in mean satisfaction, $F(3, 105) = 1.32$, $p = .27$.

Table 4.20

Mean SET Satisfaction Ratings for Four Different Types of Teaching Programs

Type of program	*n*	Mean satisfaction (SD)
Resource	63	2.74 (.61)
Self-Contained/Life skills	19	2.91 (.56)
Emotional/Behavioral	11	2.47 (.55)
Other	17	2.85 (.75)

Student Caseload Size

Correlations between SET satisfaction and the number of students on SETs' caseloads were examined to determine if a relationship existed between SET satisfaction and the number of students for whom they were responsible. As previously depicted in Table 4.4, the survey categorized caseload sizes into ranges: (a) 1-7 students (n = 9), (b) 8-14 students (n = 34), (c) 15-21 students (n = 41), (d) 22-28 students (n = 18), and (e) more than 28 students (n = 7). Given the small number of SETs with caseloads of fewer than eight students or more than 28 students, I collapsed caseload size into three levels: (a) small caseloads (1-14 students, n = 43), (b) midsize caseloads (15-21 students, n = 41) and (c) large caseloads (22 or more students, n = 25). A one-way ANOVA was then used to compare the groups on satisfaction with SEA-provided supports. The ANOVA results indicated that satisfaction with SEA-provided supports was comparable among SETs with smaller (M = 2.79, SD = .64), midsize (M = 2.78, SD= .61), and larger (M = 2.61, SD = .59) caseloads, $F(2, 105) = .729$, $p = .49$.

Intent to Remain in the Profession

To identify whether satisfaction was related to intent to remain in the profession, one-way ANOVA was used to examine differences in mean satisfaction for SETs who varied in intended length to remain in the profession. Results indicated a significant difference $F(2,106) = 6.149$, $p = .00$. The results of posthoc tests with Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons indicated that those who intended to remain in the profession for 0-2 years were significantly less satisfied with supports received ($n = 19$, M = 2.32, SD = .68) than those who intended to remain for 3-5 more years ($n = 29$, M = 2.82, SD = .52, $p = .02$, $d = .82$) or for more than five years ($n = 61$, M = 2.86, SD = .60, $p = .00$, $d = .84$). Those intending to remain for 3-5 years did not differ in satisfaction with supports from those intending to remain more than five years ($p = 1.0$).

Frequency of Interaction with Administrators

A one-way ANOVA was used to identify whether SETs who interacted more frequently with their SEAs were more satisfied with the supports they received than SETs who interacted less frequently with their SEAs. Table 4.21 shows mean satisfaction ratings for SETs who varied in how often they typically interacted with their SEA.

Table 4.21

SET Satisfaction Means and Standard Deviations by Five SEA Interaction Frequencies

Frequency of Interaction	*n*	Mean Satisfaction (SD)
Less than monthly	13	2.28 (.61)
1-2 times per month	39	2.49 (.51)
Once per week	23	2.95 (.52)
2-4 times per week	26	3.00 (.58)
Daily	8	3.49 (.45)

Overall, ANOVA results indicated a significant positive relationship between frequency of interaction and satisfaction, $F(4,103) = 10.20$, $p = .00$. The results of posthoc tests using Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons indicated that SETs who interacted with their SEAs less than monthly did not differ in satisfaction from SETs who interacted only 1-2 times a month ($p = 1.0$). Both of these groups, however, were significantly less satisfied than the three groups who interacted with their SEA once a week or greater (less than once per month vs once per week, $p = .01$, $d = 1.18$; less than once per month vs 1-4 times per week, $p = .00$, $d = 1.22$; less than once per month vs daily, $p = .00$, $d = 2.3$; 1-2 times per month vs once per week, $p = .02$, $d = .88$; 1-2 times per month vs 1-4 times per week, $p = .00$, $d = .93$; 1-2 times per month vs daily, $p = .00$, $d = 2.07$). SETs who interacted with their SEA once a week did not differ in satisfaction from those who interacted 1-4 times per week ($p = 1$) or daily ($p = .21$), and those who interacted 1-4 times per week did not differ in satisfaction from those who interacted daily ($p = .36$). In other words, SETs who had interactions with their SEAs at least once per week were more satisfied than those who had interactions less often than that. To further quantify the magnitude of difference between these two groups of SETs, I computed the effect size for the difference in satisfaction with supports between SETs who interacted with their SEA at least once per week (M = 3.04, SD = .56) and those who interacted less often than that (M = 2.44, SD = .54), yielding an effect size greater than 1 SD ($d = 1.09$).

Mode of Interaction with Administrators

In the final correlational analysis, the relationship between SET satisfaction and the frequency of four different modes of interaction with SEAs was examined. As mentioned above, SETs rated their frequency of interaction for each mode of communication using a rating of *1* for most frequent, *2* for more frequent, *3* for less frequent, and *4* for least frequent. None of the

correlations were significant; however, there was a small and marginally significant relationship between frequency of in-person communication and SET satisfaction (r = -.17, p = .08), indicating that SETs who identified *in-person* as a more frequent method of interaction tended to be higher in satisfaction than SETs who rated *in-person* as a least frequent method of interaction. Correlations between satisfaction and ratings for the other modes of communication were *by telephone,* r = -.07; email or electronic communication, r = .15; and letter/interoffice mail, r = .14.

Analysis of Written Responses to the Open-Ended Question

Twenty-four SEAs (63%) and 73 SETs (66%) provided a written response to the open-ended item: *Is there anything else you would like to add about the importance of administrative supports in retaining special educators*? The analysis of this item was framed using the first research question: *To what extent is there alignment between the types of supports SEAs perceive to be most important in retaining SETs and those that SETs perceive to be most important*? Through qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses, I was looking to further explore whether SEAs and SETs had similar or different perspectives on the importance of different types of SEA-provided support.

Using the guidelines described in Chapter 3, responses were sorted into three categories: those that related to an SEA-provided support (n = 50; 7 SEAs and 43 SETs); those that related to factors that were not within the control of the SEA (n = 44; 16 SEAs and 28 SETs); and those that could not be coded due to vagueness or lack of relevance to the research focus (n = 3; 1 SEA and 2 SETs).

Next, the 50 SEA support responses were sorted by House (1981) support type: a) emotional (n = 17); b) instrumental (n = 24); c) informational (n = 6); and d) appraisal (n = 3). Additionally, responses in the four House support types were separated into two categories: comments made by SEAs and those made by SETs, and then examined for alignment with ANOVA results.

Emotional Support Factors

Repeated measures ANOVA results described earlier in this chapter indicated that SEAs rated emotional supports as significantly more important in retaining SETs than the other three types of supports while SETs rated emotional and instrumental supports similarly and more important than the other two types of supports. Additionally, SEAs rated emotional supports as significantly more important to retention of SETs than SETs' did. In the next section, I describe the types of emotional factors that SEAs or SETs mentioned in their written comments, starting with SEAs' responses first.

Special Education Administrator Responses

Only two SEA responses addressed emotional support. I compared these two responses to the seven items on the emotional support scale to see whether content aligned. Although comments didn't align perfectly with the wording of the individual items they did align with the broader definition of emotional supports, particularly with regard to maintaining open communication. One SEA wrote "Frequent check ins to listen to them" while the other SEA wrote:

> I believe that it is significant for the Director to connect with special education staff including educational technicians as equal partners in this stressful and highly regulated field, such that they feel that they are in a team-based relationship. Nothing is as damaging to the morale and sense of purpose for a special educator as feeling alone and unsupported.

Special Education Teacher Responses

Fifteen open-ended responses from SETs (21%) addressed emotional supports. Some of these comments reflected satisfaction with current emotional supports and others reflected dissatisfaction. Illustrative examples of different perspectives are provided below.

As with the SEA responses, SET responses did not align precisely with items on the emotional support scale but similarities existed. The item *allowing input into decisions that affect me* was one of the six items rated as most important to retention by SETs and two of the open-ended responses written by SETs also reflected this type of support and their perception of dissatisfaction with this type of support. For example, one SET wrote, "Allow professional staff to make decisions, support them in these, and do not attempt to micro-manage." And another SET wrote, "Providing resources and allowing us to be a part of the decision making are very important." SETs rated the item *allowing input into decisions that affect me* as one of the six items for which they were least satisfied.

SEAs ranked the item *showing appreciation for teachers' work* in the top six for importance while SETs ranked this item in the lowest six for satisfaction. Three SET open-ended responses aligned with this item. One SET response related a positive experience for feeling appreciated. She wrote:

> I have worked out of state where I didn't feel appreciated or supported. I suffered daily headaches and wasn't sure how long I would last in teaching. I also felt that I was a failure at teaching. Since moving to Maine I have had a totally different experience. I no longer suffer from daily headaches and I love going to work every day.

Another SET wrote about a desire to be appreciated, "Value and support them. Show them that their effort is appreciated...not just a general e-mail to teachers." Similarly, another SET wrote,

"Special Educators are smart people and at the front lines of work with students, teachers, administrators, parents, etc… All we ask is to be recognized and appreciated for our knowledge and insights."

Having an SEA who they could easily access also appeared to be important to SETs as reflected by three SET responses that aligned with the item *being easy for teachers to approach*. For example, this SET's recommendation was, "Very important that a special ed director is very approachable and visible" while another SET wrote, "An approachable, warm administrator who communicates clearly is also important." This item was not in the SET top six for importance in retaining SETs; however, this item was in the lowest six on SET satisfaction.

Both SEAs and SETs ranked the emotional support item *showing genuine concern for teachers' program and students* in the top six on importance. One SET response aligned with this item, "The special ed director in my district is amazing and she is very helpful with everything. She is knowledgeable and cares a lot about what I need and what my students need." This response supports ANOVA results that placed this item as one of the top six on satisfaction among SETs.

Instrumental Support Factors

Repeated measure ANOVA results of analyses indicated that SETs ranked instrumental supports as higher in importance than informational or appraisal supports, but not higher than emotional supports. In fact, among SETs, two-thirds of the items in the top 25% in importance ratings related to instrumental support. In contrast, among SEAs, only one item that fell in the top 25% in importance ratings related to instrumental supports. Only four SEAs (17% of all SEA open-ended responses) compared with 20 SETs (27% of all teacher open-ended responses) wrote

responses that aligned with instrumental supports, which suggests that these types of supports may be of more importance to SETs than SEAs. SEA and SET open-ended responses were separated to compare comments, and are described separately in the section that follows.

Special Education Administrator Responses

Both SEAs and SETs ranked the instrumental item *providing support when teachers become overloaded* in the top six for importance in retaining SETs. Three of four SEA open-ended responses addressed this item. For example, one wrote, "It is important to provide clarity and support for the completion of required documents, as that seems to be the most intimidating part of their work." Another SEA explained how her supports helped to retain staff, "I retain people because I attend the meetings, do the written notices, and do as much of the IEP as I can – they do present levels and goals." The response of the last SEA in this group aligned with the item *providing teachers with time for various non-teaching responsibilities*, "The job of a special educator is so complex and they do need extra time to focus on relationships with parents/families and completing the paperwork and case management responsibilities."

Special Education Teacher Responses

Four of the SETs' top six rated items for importance in retaining SETs aligned with instrumental supports. As mentioned previously, one item, *providing support when teachers become overloaded*, was also a top six item for SEAs. This item was also in the lowest six on satisfaction among SETs. Six of the 20 SETs (30%) whose responses related to instrumental supports wrote about this item. One SET expressed satisfaction with current supports in this area:

> My current special education director completes all paperwork generated by each meeting. This is a huge help to the teacher obviously. This allows the teacher to focus on being a teacher. Previous directors that I have worked under have not had this policy, and so much of my time was eaten up by the paperwork load, that I did little teaching and my ed tech did most of that task.

Other SETs expressed more frustration with their current supports. For example, one SET wrote:

> I feel like our Sped Administrator is far removed from daily duties, lessons, and issues that Sped Teachers deal with every day. There is no reality around the amount of paperwork we do outside of school hours. I keep hearing "that is part of case management." Well spending my weekends on paperwork is not okay and it has gotten only worse lately. There is zero support for new staff and the turnover has been unbelievable.

This sentiment was echoed by another SET who wrote:

> Don't cc the principal when there is an issue with your paperwork. Please go to the teacher and ask if there is something the administrator can do to support you in getting paperwork done. Also, support with scheduling meetings. Trying to get ahold of a parent, schedule around a parent, teachers, and an administrator is so time consuming. It's a very frustrating part of the job! The only time I hear from my director is when there's a problem. I dread seeing her walk into my room. It's not that she isn't a nice person, she just needs to be around more than just if there's a problem.

Another top six item for importance as ranked by SETs was the instrumental item *providing me with time for various non-teaching responsibilities*. This item was also ranked in the lowest six among SETs on satisfaction with current supports. Eight SET open-ended responses referenced time and the general consensus was that more time was needed to complete tasks. For example, one SET wrote, "There isn't enough time in the day to do all parts of our job well. We need admin who recognize that and make carving out time in our schedules to do all the parts a priority." Another SET cited lack of time as a possible reason to leave her employment, "I have considered leaving my district several times because special education teachers are not given adequate time to fulfill our case management responsibilities…My teaching responsibilities and case management responsibilities could each be full time jobs." One

SET concurred that there isn't enough time but explained how her SEA gives her support for time:

> When IEP meetings are scheduled 2 and 3 a month, there is not enough time to do classroom duties and complete the paperwork involved in a timely manner. When this happens, my administrator has helped me by providing a sub in the classroom and allowing me to sit in a quiet space and just get the paperwork done.

Some comments aligned with two or three instrumental items. For example, this response written by an SET aligned with the previously mentioned item *providing me with time for various non-teaching responsibilities* as well as the item *providing materials and resources needed to do my job*: "PAPERWORK is the hardest to keep up with and finding time to get it completed. We need help with this!! We also need more resources such as personnel to support students." Extending this theme further, one SET's comment aligned with the two items mentioned above as well as a third item, *helping me during parent conflicts, when necessary*:

> First, having clear goals, resources to meet those goals, and time to maintain systems and to innovate is key. Second, when dealing with very difficult and litigious situations it is very helpful to have an administrator who clearly communicates and offers support and protection from unreasonable demands and criticisms.

Other SETs also iterated the importance of being supported during parent conflicts. For example, one SET wrote, "Most important is intervention with litigious parents, protecting teachers from harassment at IEP meetings by emails or other contact. " This theme continued with this SET's experience with SEA-provided support during parent conflicts and speaks directly to SET retention:

> I believe administrative supports when dealing with challenging parent situations is the most important aspect of retaining special education teachers. The amount of stress we deal with on a regular basis is one thing but when situations arise, admin support is crucial, especially with those more challenging parents. Without the support of my administrators in recent years, I would most likely have left the profession.

Informational Support Factors

Neither SEAs nor SETs identified informational supports in the top 25% on importance to retaining SETs. Similarly, fewer open-ended responses aligned with this support factor. In fact, only one SEA (4% of SEA responses, $n = 24$) and five SETs (7% of SET responses, $n = 73$) wrote a response that aligned with informational supports. Results for each group are reported below.

Special Education Administrator Responses

The sole SEA comment in the informational support category best aligned with the item *providing opportunities for teachers to attend workshops or conferences*,

> Provide access to high quality training that directly relates to the position they are working in. Teachers come to us ill prepared to do the job. Schools must provide additional training and support to help teachers learn how to do the work successfully.

Special Education Teacher Responses

Two items in the informational supports category were rated in the top six by SETs on satisfaction: *providing teachers with knowledge of current legal policies or regulations* and *providing opportunities for teachers to attend workshops or conferences*. SETs wrote about professional growth and related personal experiences that aligned with informational supports and expressed satisfaction with current supports. First, the comments of two SETs illustrate their satisfaction with how SEA-provided support has allowed personal growth,

> Administrative support has allowed me to grow as a teacher. I am able to get into classrooms, team-teach with general educators, and support my kiddos where they need me the most. My administrator's willingness to take risks and have a growth mindset, has benefitted my program.

> My administrators are very adept at supporting my colleagues and I. I have been working to complete my professional 282 certificate and they have been very supportive of the process.

Second, one SET reported satisfaction with supports related to knowledge of current legal policies, "I am highly satisfied with the level of support that our director provides. She does her best to keep us informed (despite the moving target of educational policies)."

Appraisal Support Factors

Neither SEAs nor SETs ranked appraisal supports in the top 25% on importance in retaining SETs. Additionally, SETs did not rank this support area as an area of greatest or least satisfaction and only three open-ended responses aligned with this support factor. All three were from SETs.

Special Education Teacher Responses

Three SET responses aligned with appraisal supports and each aligned with a different item. First, for the item *providing standards for my performance*, one SET wrote, "Making sure that the evaluation system fits what we do. Our kids are on individualized programs so we should be too. Just following iObservation goals, etc., doesn't necessarily match what we do." Second, for the item *giving clear guidelines regarding my job responsibilities*, one SET suggested, "I think that it is important to communicate what is expected and when it is expected." Finally, the third response in this category aligned with the item *providing feedback about my performance.* The teacher wrote, "Having someone I know I can contact and receive feedback from in a timely manner is invaluable."

Summary of Open-Ended Responses

Nearly equal percentages of SEAs and SETs provided a response to the open-ended item. Similar to the ratings results that indicated that emotional and instrumental supports were perceived as being more important than informational and appraisal supports to retain SETs, a greater number of open-ended responses were also related to emotional and instrumental supports with many fewer responses related to informational or appraisal items.

As mentioned above, SEAs and SETs ranked the two items: *showing genuine concern for teachers' programs and students*, and *providing support when teachers become overloaded* in the top 25% for importance of SEA-provided supports in retaining SETs. Open-ended responses provided evidence of varying SET satisfaction with each of these supports. First, open-ended responses reflected that SETs were less satisfied with SEA-provided supports received for the instrumental item *providing support when teachers become overloaded.* And second, SETs were more satisfied with SEA-provided supports received for the emotional item *showing genuine concern for my program and students*. While there were substantially fewer comments for the last two support categories, the comments from SETs indicated satisfaction with informational supports but mixed levels of satisfaction with regard to appraisal supports from SEAs.

The next chapter provides a discussion of the findings, limitations, and implications for the results of this study, and describes the contributions of this study to the literature.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Overview

School districts nationwide are challenged with finding and retaining qualified teachers (McLeskey, Tyler & Flippin, 2004) particularly in the area of special education (Berry, 2012, Sutcher et al., 2016). In addition, recent studies suggest that shortages in SETs primarily result from insufficient retention of current SETs rather than insufficient entry into the field (e.g. Bettini et al., 2015; Cowan et al., 2016; Podolsky et al., 2016; Sutcher et al., 2016). Many factors impact teacher decisions to leave the profession but in their summaries of conclusions from the Council for Exceptional Children (2000) commissioned Bright Futures Report on the topics of identifying the barriers to delivery of high-quality special education programs and development of an action agenda, Coleman (2000) concluded that perceived lack of administrative understanding of and support for their work was a key factor contributing to the attrition of SETs. In her critical analysis of the literature for SET retention and attrition, Billingsley (2004a) summarized that work environment factors, including a lack of administrative support, impact job satisfaction, commitment, and eventual attrition.

A few studies conducted in the 1990s and early 2000s investigated administrators' perspectives on the supports that they provided to teachers (e.g. Coleman, 2000) and teachers' perspectives on those supports (e.g. Billingsley et al., 1995; Littrell et al., 1994), but none of the studies focused on supports provided by the central administrator who arguably may have the most direct responsibility for and/or control over supports provided to SETs, the district level special education administrator. The present study was designed to close this gap in the research by addressing three questions about the supports provided to SETs by SEAs. First, to what extent

is there alignment between the types of supports SEAs perceive to be most important in retaining SETs and those that special educators perceive to be most important? Second, how satisfied are SETs with the supports they currently receive from their SEAs? Third, what factors are associated with greater satisfaction among SETs with supports they receive from their SEAs?

In this chapter I summarize study results as they relate to these questions, examining the significance of the findings and describing how the results of this study fit within the context of the broader research literature. Next, I discuss limitations associated with the study. Finally, I identify some implications of the results for policy, practice and future research.

Special Education Administrator and Special Education Teacher Perceptions of the Importance of Administrator Provided Supports

The present study utilized a survey instrument that was adapted from Littrell et al. (1994) and that was based on House's (1981) framework for categorizing administrative supports. As part of the survey, SEAs and SETs from 38 Maine public school districts rated the importance of 23 administrative supports to the retention of SETs. Survey results yielded three major findings about the perspectives of SEAs and SETs on the importance of supports that SEAs provide to SETs.

First, SEAs rated emotional supports as more important to the retention of SETs than any of the other three types of supports (instrumental, informational, or appraisal). The perceived importance of emotional supports is a unique finding of the present study given that no studies to date have investigated SEAs' perceptions of the importance to retention of the supports they provide. At the same time, the finding that SEAs viewed emotional supports as more important than other types of support is consistent with a finding reported by Littrell et al. (1994) in their

study of general and special educators' perceptions of the importance and extent of receiving supports provided by their building principal. Specifically, both the SETs and general educators in that study rated emotional supports as the most important form of administrative support.

In the present study, an examination of the trends in the ratings of the 23 individual items between and within the support scales provided further description of SEAs' perspectives on the relative importance of supports to the retention of SETs. Consistent with the finding that the mean rating on the emotional support scale among SEAs was higher than the mean rating on any other scale, five of the top six items in terms of frequency of most important ratings were on the emotional support scale. Specifically, the emotional supports that SEAs perceived as *most important* included: (a) seeing their teachers as worthy of concern, (b) giving teachers a sense of importance, (c) noticing their efforts, (d) showing appreciation for what they do, and (e) being easy for teachers to approach. The sixth item in the top 25% in terms of frequency of *most important* ratings received was on the instrumental support scale: providing support when teachers become overloaded. Similarly, most open-ended comments provided by SEAs related primarily to either emotional or instrumental types of supports, with few comments pertaining to informational or appraisal supports. Comments that related to emotional supports focused on building relationships and maintaining open communication, while comments that related to instrumental supports focused on finding ways to reduce the non-instructional responsibilities of SETs or indicated practices currently implemented in their districts to support SETs in these duties. Although prior studies have not examined SEA perspectives on the supports they provide to SETs, the item-level results and open-ended responses addressed issues that have emerged in

many prior studies aimed at understanding factors that contribute to the attrition of SETs (e.g. Billingsley et al., 1995; Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Brownell et al., 1995; Cancio et al., 2013; Gersten et al., 2001; Littrell et al., 1994; Miller et al., 1999).

A second major finding of the present study pertained to perceptions of SETs regarding the importance of supports to SET retention. While SEAs rated emotional supports as more important than the other three support types to the retention of SETs, SETs rated both emotional and instrumental supports as significantly more important to retention than the other two types of supports, informational and appraisal supports, with no statistically significant difference in scale means between emotional and instrumental supports. At the same time, despite similar scale means for emotional and instrumental supports, item level results for SETs indicated a tendency to value instrumental supports over emotional supports. Four of the top six items in terms of *most important* ratings were on the instrumental support scale and two of the top six items were on the emotional support scale. Specifically, SETs attached greatest importance to four instrumental supports: (a) receiving support when they become overloaded, (b) receiving materials and resources needed to do their job, (c) receiving help during parent conflicts, and (d) having time for non-teaching responsibilities. The two emotional supports that were also among the top 25% of items in terms of frequency of most important ratings were (a) showing genuine concern for their program and students, and (b) having input into decisions that affect them.

As can be seen by comparing results for SETs to those reported above for SEAs, only two of the administrative supports that were most frequently rated as most important to the retention of SETs were also most frequently rated as most important by SEAs, one item on the emotional support scale (*showing genuine concern for teachers' program and students*) and one item on the instrumental support scale (*providing support when teachers become overloaded*).

Similarly, most open-ended comments provided by SETs related primarily to either emotional or instrumental types of supports, with few comments pertaining to informational or appraisal supports. Comments that related to instrumental supports focused on issues around the large amounts of paperwork, the amount of time needed to complete all of their responsibilities, and receiving support to deal with difficult parents. Comments that related to emotional supports focused on being involved in decision making or being respected enough to make their own decisions, being recognized and appreciated for what they do, and having an administrator who was available and accessible to staff. SET comments were generally of two types: (a) praise for their current SEAs for their efforts in supporting SETs, or (b) complaints that not enough was being done to support their needs.

The relative importance of emotional supports to both SETs and SEAs is somewhat consistent with Littrell et al.'s finding (1994), regarding supports provided by building principals. In that study, SETs' rated emotional supports as more important than the other three forms of support, followed by appraisal supports. In the present study, however, SETs rated instrumental supports provided by SEAs as equally important as emotional supports, and items that were most frequently rated as most important were more often on the instrumental than the emotional scale. The difference in results between the present study and Littrell et al.'s on the relative importance of instrumental supports may be due to the differences between the two studies in both teachers' role and support provider. Littrell et al.'s sample included both SETs and general education teachers, and their survey asked teachers to rate supports provided by building principals rather than SEAs. These two differences are important factors that could account for differences in findings because SETs have significantly different job designs and expectations than do general educators. Additionally, principal supports are quite different from

the supports that SEAs provide (Billingsley et al., 1995). For example, by definition of the job, principals are in the building daily and have more frequent and regular interactions with teachers than do the SEAs who are central administrators with offices that may be in an administration building or just one of many schools in the district. In addition, principals may have different expectations of staff than SEAs do (Billingsley et al., 1995), and they may have less knowledge of special education which limits their ability to provide instrumental supports such as helping SETs think through conflicts and confusions related to their particular job demands (Gersten et al., 2001). These factors could account for differences in findings between the present study and the one previous study that examined perceptions of supports provided by principals (Littrell et al., 1994).

The third major finding regarding the importance of supports to retention of SETs pertained to the *level* of importance ratings on each of the four scales for SEAs versus SETs. The mean importance rating on the emotional supports scale for SEAs was significantly higher than the SET mean importance rating on that scale. The magnitude of difference, $d = .64$, indicated practical as well as statistical significance. In contrast, the two groups did not differ in scale means on any of the other three scales. This result is consistent with the trend among SEAs to perceive emotional supports as more critical than other supports to retention, and for SETs to see instrumental supports as equally, if not more, important. Although prior studies have investigated support factors contributing to retention, they have not compared the perspectives of SEAs and SETs on the relative importance of different types of supports, so this finding makes a unique contribution to the research base.

Special Education Teacher Satisfaction with Present Administrator-Provided Supports

A second purpose of this study was to examine the level of SETs' satisfaction with supports provided by SEAs. Survey results yielded two major findings relevant to this purpose. First, satisfaction did not vary by support scale. That is, the mean level of SETs' satisfaction with SEA-provided supports was the same across all four support scales. With mean satisfaction scores that ranged from 2.75 to 2.78 across the four support categories (using a response scale of 1 – least satisfied, 2 – less satisfied, 3 – more satisfied, and 4 - most satisfied), mean teacher ratings fell slightly below the *more satisfied* category of response on overall satisfaction with administrative supports received.

An examination of the trends in the satisfaction ratings of the 23 individual items between and within the support scales provided further description of SETs' satisfaction with SEA supports. Specifically, I identified supports that fell roughly into the top and bottom 25% in the number of *most* and *least satisfied* ratings. Consistent with the finding that satisfaction means did not vary across the four support scales, the supports that were most frequently rated as *most satisfied* were evenly spread across scales. Two were emotional (*being easy to approach*, and *showing concern for their program and students*), two were instrumental (*providing help during parent conflicts* and *assisting with proper identification of students with disabilities*), and two were informational (*providing knowledge of policies and regulations*, and *allowing opportunities for professional development)*. Among the supports that were most frequently rated as *least satisfied*, three were emotional (*allowing input into decisions*, *noticing SETs' efforts*, and *showing appreciation*), two were instrumental (*providing support when overloaded*, and *allowing time for non-instructional responsibilities*), and one was informational (*providing SETs with opportunities to learn from other SETs*). Taken together, this suggests that a gap exists

between the importance that SETs place on SEA-provided supports and their satisfaction with those supports. Previous studies support this finding. For example, teachers' ratings for the extent of support provided by their principal, were lower than the importance ratings they provided across all four House (1981) dimensions (Littrell et al., 1994).

Second, results of paired samples *t*-tests indicated statistically significant differences between SETs' perceptions of the importance of supports and their satisfaction with supports across each of the four support types. For all four support types, SETs ranked the importance of each category of support greater than they ranked their satisfaction with each category of support. The finding that SETs rated satisfaction lower than their perceived importance of supports ratings is consistent with a finding reported by Littrell et al. (1994) in their study of educators' perceptions of importance and extent of receiving supports provided by their principal. Specifically, Littrell et al. identified a gap between the importance that educators (both SETs and general education teachers) associated with the different support dimensions and the amount of support that they perceived they were receiving from their principals with importance ratings being higher than extent of receiving these supports. At the item level, only two items that SETs rated as most important were also ranked as most satisfied, while three items that were ranked as most important were also ranked as least satisfied. As can be seen by comparing satisfaction results for SETs to those reported above for SETs' importance ratings, only two of the administrative supports that were ranked among the highest for importance also aligned with SET ratings of greatest satisfaction, one item on the emotional supports scale (*showing genuine concern for teachers' program and students*) and one item on the instrumental supports scale (*helping me during parent conflicts*). In contrast, three administrative supports that SETs ranked among the highest on importance, were ranked lowest on satisfaction; one item on the emotional

supports scale (*having input into decisions that affect me*), and two items on the instrumental supports scale (*providing support when I become overloaded* and *having time for non-teaching responsibilities*). The disjunction between the high level of importance that SEAs and SETs placed on emotional and instrumental supports, and SETs' rankings of those same types of supports as least satisfied is of particular importance. The disconnect between importance and level of satisfaction was also among the more prevalent themes in SETs' written comments. This indicates some tension between the feelings by both SEAs and SETs that these SEA-provided supports are very important, and yet, SETs are less satisfied with these supports.

Similar sources of dissatisfaction were also echoed in SETs' open-ended responses where they expressed frustration with not being listened to, not having enough time for non-instructional responsibilities, and having little to no support when those responsibilities became too great. Although few prior studies measured teacher satisfaction with specific supports, a survey conducted by Littrell et al. (1994) included teachers' ratings of the extent to which they received the same types of supports included on my survey. In their study of SETs' and general education teachers' extent of receiving principal supports, Littrell et al.'s (1994) findings provide somewhat similar insight that increased satisfaction and improved retention rates were associated with administrators who: (a) showed concern for teachers' program and students, (b) encouraged teacher participation in decision making, and (c) promoted a sense of the teachers' importance. The fact that the present study indicated SET dissatisfaction with being allowed input into decisions is an important factor that may contribute to a decision to leave the profession. Interestingly, one of the highest rated SET satisfaction items (*showing genuine concern for teachers' program and students*) was also among the highest for *most important* ratings by both SEAs and SETs and was supported by several SETs' open-ended responses that indicated

satisfaction with and praise to their SEAs for caring about them, their students, and their programs. Conversely, one of the lowest rated SET satisfaction items (*providing support when teachers become overloaded)* received one of the highest rankings on *most important* ratings by both SEAs and SETs. This finding appears to align with a previous study that concluded that while administrators perceive that they are offering support to their teachers, it may not always be the type of supports that teachers perceive as most important or the amount of support that teachers desire (Littrell et al., 1994).

Factors Associated with Special Education Teacher Satisfaction

To identify factors that might contribute to SET retention, I examined the relationship between SET satisfaction with SEA-provided supports received and four work-related factors: teaching experience, type of instructional program, caseload size, and interactions with administrators. I also investigated the relationship between satisfaction with supports received and intent to remain in the profession. Analyses yielded three major conclusions.

First, there was no relationship between satisfaction with supports and teaching experience (neither years in current position nor total years of experience), type of instructional program, or caseload size. That is, less experienced teachers were as satisfied with the administrative supports they received as more experienced teachers, teachers who taught in resource classroom programs, self-contained/life skills programs, emotional/behavioral programs, or other programs did not differ in their level of satisfaction with SEA provided supports, and teachers with smaller versus larger caseloads were equally satisfied with the supports they received from SEAs.

The trends reported above are generally new findings in the literature because prior studies have not directly examined the relationship between satisfaction with SEA-provided supports and work-related factors. At the same time, a small number of prior studies have investigated the relationship between leaving the profession and/or intent to remain in the profession and teacher experience (George et al., 1995; Miller et al., 1999), type of program (George et al., 1995), and caseload size (Billingsley et al., 1995; George et al., 1995; McLeskey et al., 2004; Morvant et al., 1995). Results of these studies have been mixed. The career intentions of SETs of students with emotional or behavioral problems were neither correlated with years of teaching special education nor with total years of teaching (George et al., 1995). However, in a study that examined factors related to the attrition of SETs in Florida, Miller et al. (1999) found that SETs with less experience were more likely to leave the profession. With regard to type of program, George et al. (1995) found that SETs of students with emotional or behavioral problems who teach in self-contained classrooms indicated intent to leave the field more often than resource room program type teachers.

With regard to the size of student caseloads, results of the present study indicated there were no statistically significant differences in satisfaction with administrative support between caseload categories or sizes. Previous researchers corroborated this finding indicating that no empirical studies have shown a relationship between the number of students on a caseload and attrition (McLeskey et al., 2004) and that no relationship existed between the caseload size of an SET of students with emotional disorders and intent to leave (George et al. 1995). While Morvant and Gersten (1995), in their study of urban SETS, didn't investigate the relationship between caseload size and SET satisfaction, they found that only half of the SETs in their study

felt their caseload size was manageable. Further, in a study of urban SETs who reported leaving teaching because of dissatisfaction, Billingsley et al. (1995) found that 33% of SETs indicated that their class size and/or caseload was too large. Billingsley et al. (1995) surmised that it may not be the size of the caseload that was problematic, but rather the diversity of caseloads that teachers are expected to manage.

A second major conclusion of the present study regarding factors that are associated with satisfaction was that there was a relationship between SET satisfaction and SEA interaction frequency and mode. Specifically, SETs who had interactions with their administrator at least once a week were more satisfied than those who interacted less often than once a week. In addition, there was a small, albeit marginally significant, positive correlation between "in person" interactions with SEAs and SET satisfaction. That is, SETs with higher incidences of "in-person" communication with their SEAs tended to be more satisfied with their supports than SETs with lower incidences of "in-person" communication. These findings regarding SET and SEA interactions represent unique contributions of this study to the literature. Although I was unable to locate any prior studies that have investigated the relationship between SET satisfaction with supports and SEA interaction frequency and mode of communication, Billingsley et al. (1995) examined SETs' perceptions of supports provided by both SEAs and building level administrators. Billingsley et al. (1995) found that a lack of regular communication with and direction from central office administrators (e.g. SEAs), and little recognition from their SEAs for the progress they made with students, caused SETs to perceive that their SEAs valued legal compliance over student progress. Additionally, many SETs

believed that SEAs were making decisions about their work without proper information and input. This feeling of remote management left many SETs feeling "misunderstood, undervalued, and powerless to effect change" (Billingsley et al., 1995, p. 9).

The third major conclusion to arise from analyses of the correlates of SET satisfaction was that SETs who reported an intention to remain in the profession for two years or less were significantly less satisfied with supports received than those who intended to remain longer. There was no significant difference in satisfaction between those in the 3-5 more years category versus those in the more than five years category. This finding is consistent with that of Cancio et al. (2013) who found that commitment to remain in the profession of SETs of students with emotional and behavioral disorders was related to satisfaction with supports provided by either their principal, assistant principal, SEA, or other supervisor. From a practical standpoint, this is a potentially important finding given that Gersten et al. (2001) reported a strong link between self-reported intent to leave and actually leaving the profession. Presently, the only direct estimate of the national shortage of teachers comes from the Learning Policy Institute's (LPI) seminal 2016 report *A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the United States* (Sutcher et al., 2016). Sutcher and colleagues analyzed several national data sources that track actual employment trends making these estimates more accurate than data obtained from predicted intentions of teachers that may or may not have come to fruition. The LPI estimated that the current shortage rate for all teachers, was nearly 8% nationally in 2012, and that first-year teacher turnover was 41%. The LPI reported that while it is important to recruit more teachers, those who are leaving the profession at alarming rates cause the better part of the demand for teachers. Furthermore, they reported that dissatisfaction was reported as an important reason for leaving the profession by 55% of teachers who left in the year after 2012. So

establishing a link between a modifiable set of factors, such as satisfaction with SEA-provided administrative supports and intent to leave the profession, represents an important contribution of the present study to the field.

Limitations for Research and Practice

The findings from the present study should be viewed with consideration of important limitations that could impact outcomes. Limitations related to the sample of SEAs and SETs who participated in the study, the ability to directly compare administrator and teacher perceptions, the reliability of self-reported perceptions, and the survey instrument used are all factors that may impact results. These limitations are discussed in the next section.

Sample Limitations

Participation rate. One limitation that could impact findings reported in this paper is the limited number of participants. Although SEA and SET response to the survey was within acceptable limits for a study of this type (26% and 25% respectively) a higher participation rate would strengthen confidence in the representativeness of the results and ability to generalize from them to the state of Maine as a whole as well as to special educators in other states. Additionally, the decision to only survey SETs whose SEAs responded to the survey limited the number of SETs invited to participate. The goal of this decision was to ensure that perspectives of the group of SETs who participated could be generally compared with the group of SEAs who participated so as to keep the district contexts constant. So, participation rates are one limiting factor in this study.

Participants. The decision to include only SEAs (directors of special education) in this study limited perspective. Maine school districts vary in the levels of special education administrator or supervisory personnel; however, most districts have at least one director of

special education. Thus the decision was made to include only the top SEA in each district. In many districts across Maine, SETs are supervised, supported, and guided by additional personnel including assistant directors of special education, special education coordinators, and building principals. While the input and interactions of these named personnel likely impact and influence SETs on a daily or weekly basis, I was not able to include their perceptions, nor was I able to obtain SETs' perceptions of the importance of the supports that these people provide. In large districts the role of SEAs is quite different and they may have very little interaction with the special education teaching staff- instead, delegating that responsibility to an assistant director or one of several coordinators across the district. My directions to SET respondents were to only consider the special education director as the administrator. Had they been able to respond based on any administrator with whom they had more frequent interaction or someone who provided greater supports to them, I may have obtained different results.

As with any survey, we cannot know how non-participants' views may differ from those who did participate in the survey. Participants who chose not to respond, whether they were SEAs or SETs, may have provided a different perspective of importance or satisfaction. Some SEAs may have been too busy to participate in the survey. Some SEAs may have feared that allowing their SETs to provide feedback would have reflected negatively on their performance. The timeframe of this study was another potential limitation. Because the surveys were administered near the end of the school year (a time that is typically known to be busy and stressful for educators) participants' responses may have been influenced by different emotions and work demands.

Measurement Limitations

The design of this study allowed me to broadly compare the responses of SEAs with the responses of SETs who participated. Although 93% of SETs identified their school district, given the small number of SETs representing some districts, I opted not to try to link SEA and SET responses. Therefore, the inability to directly compare SEA responses with their own SET respondents was a limitation in the study. Had I been able to link SEA and SET responses within districts, I could have examined the level of agreement within districts.

Reliability of Self-Reported Perceptions

As with any study that relies on the subjective self-reported views of participants, participants may not have responded truthfully, perhaps because they could not remember, or because they chose to represent their perceptions in a different light. Personal events or feelings of respondents may have clouded or enhanced perspectives. While all participants were assured that their responses would be either confidential (in the case of SEAs) or anonymous (in the case of SETs), some participants, particularly SETs, may have been wary to report dissatisfaction with their SEA-provided supports for fear that information may somehow become known to their administrators.

Factors Related to the Online Survey Platform

Finally, at least one feature of the online platform for the survey may have caused some participants confusion and prevented them from completing the entire survey. Eleven SETs and one SEA did not proceed beyond the demographic questions on the survey and thus were not able to provide their ratings of importance and satisfaction with SEA supports. I suspect this was the result of a lack of clarity in the online instrument that didn't effectively prompt respondents

to proceed to the next page of questions. While each page of the survey showed a small arrow for participants to click in order to proceed, the arrow was small and there was no written explanation of what to do in order to move forward in the survey.

Implications of Results for Practice

SETs in this study placed a high level of importance on emotional and instrumental supports. Analysis of item level supports revealed a tendency for SETs to place greater importance on instrumental supports. Based on these findings, SEAs should continue to give priority to emotional and instrumental supports for their SETs. However, given the finding that SEAs placed a higher value on emotional supports than did SETs, more work is needed to improve SEA understanding of SET views and levels of satisfaction. It will be important for SEAs to be aware that their SETs are often not satisfied with SEA-provided emotional and instrumental supports. Improved communication, including opportunities for SEAs to hear first-hand what their SETs value, will help facilitate this alignment. In particular, SEAs need to ensure that the specific types and levels of support desired by SETs are being provided.

Second, findings from this study indicate that SETs placed a high level of importance on an SEA who is genuinely concerned about SETs' programs and their students. When teachers feel the work they are doing with students is worthwhile to their administrators they can have confidence that administrators will do what is best, not only for the program but also for the children. Fortunately, the majority of SETs in this study reported being satisfied with this type of emotional support they currently receive from their SEA. One could infer that support of this nature will lead to increased satisfaction with their role and greater intention to remain in the profession.

Third, SETs in this study indicated a high level of importance for instrumental supports; and in particular, that an SEA should provide support to teachers when they become overloaded. The job of a SET includes not only the delivery of specially designed instruction to students with a wide range of needs, but also a myriad of additional responsibilities that require significant amounts of time and commitment that cannot be completed within the confines of a typical eight hour workday. SETs need, and want, SEAs who understand this challenge and intuitively provide instrumental supports to alleviate some of this pressure. This could be in the form of time, reduced caseloads, or increased clerical support personnel. As was indicated in the written comments from SETs, involvement by the SEAs in assisting with the completion of paperwork was greatly appreciated by SETs and allowed them to focus on their work with students. Whatever the remedy, SEAs would be advised to address this need soon, as the majority of SETs in this study indicated that they are not satisfied with the current level of instrumental support they receive.

This study also provides a more nuanced look at specific areas of SET satisfaction or dissatisfaction and the correlation between job satisfaction and intent to remain in the profession. As previously mentioned, a satisfied teacher is more likely to remain in the profession. SETs rated the following factors as important to their job satisfaction: help from administrators during parent conflicts, an administrator who is easy to approach, assistance in identifying students, and opportunities for professional development. Participants in this study were pleased with current levels of support in these areas. However, SETs also want to have input into decisions about their students and their programs, and more time to complete non-teaching responsibilities. In these respects, SETs in this study were not happy with the current level of supports received.

Based on the findings from this study there are several steps that SEAs can take to improve SET retention rates. First, since frequent interactions with their SEAs predict greater teacher satisfaction with supports, efforts to increase the frequency and to improve the quality of communication between SETs and their SEAs should be of primary importance. Additionally, SETs with higher incidences of "in-person" interactions with their SEAs tended to be more satisfied with their supports than SETs who reported lower incidences of "in-person" interactions with their SEAs; therefore, SEA efforts to provide more personal connections with SETs may help improve SET satisfaction and retention. An environment of mutual and frequent collaboration between SETs and their SEAs will be critical to identifying supports that SETs most value and to gauge their ongoing levels of satisfaction with these supports.

Second, SETs in this study reported that emotional and instrumental supports are the most important types of support that SEAs can provide. Therefore, SEAs should emphasize these types of support in their interactions with SETs. In particular, SETs in this study expressed dissatisfaction with the levels of support they received for completing non-teaching related tasks, including having sufficient time to complete all aspects of their role (instrumental supports). Additionally, most SETs expressed dissatisfaction with their SEAs' efforts to notice the work they do, to show appreciation for their work, and with the aforementioned opportunity to have input into decisions that affect them (emotional supports). The emotional support item, allowing teacher input into decisions that affect them, was ranked among the lowest in importance to retention by SEAs, yet among the highest in importance by SETs. Perhaps the best way for SEAs to support SETs in these concerns is to engage in frequent and open dialogue to obtain the perceptions of their SETs satisfaction with the level and type of administrative supports they

receive. As indicated in prior research, SEAs think they are providing support, but this support may not be the kind of support, or the level of support, that SETs value and desire.

Finally, given the evidence in the literature that SETs are more likely to be dissatisfied and leave the profession before their fifth year of service, more attention should be given to developing relationships and providing support in the early years of teaching. During their first few years of teaching, SETs may become overwhelmed with balancing instructional and non-instructional related tasks. In addition to maintaining regular interactions with staff and listening to their needs, SEAs would be well advised to pay particular attention to the needs of their newest staff members.

Implications of Results for Policy

Results from this study have several implications for education policy. Results from this study could be relevant for both local and state policymakers, and perhaps national policy makers. Given that SETs indicated a greater need for instrumental supports, especially for the paperwork and IEP meeting responsibilities that accompany their instructional role, policymakers should investigate ways to reduce paperwork for SETs, provide SETs with assistance in completing paperwork and case management tasks, and to assist SETs in IEP meeting expectations. State educational agencies could reconsider caseload limits such that SETs may be responsible for fewer students. This would more evenly spread the workload across greater numbers of teachers, thus improving individual student attention from teachers and reducing teachers' time spent doing non-instructional tasks.

Since money is often a big factor in all educational decisions, state policymakers could also explore increased funding for education – specifically special education. Increased funding may also be needed to help school districts hire sufficient administrative and teaching personnel

to meet the current needs for special education and to manage the paperwork. Given that school superintendents are often responsible for the supervision, evaluation, and professional growth of SEAs, it will be important to ensure that superintendents are aware of these findings so they can work to adjust budgets accordingly.

Programs that prepare SEAs for their role are essential to incorporating these findings into future practice. Both local and state policymakers may want to find ways to provide professional development to current administrators in special education to build awareness and capacity for providing important types of supports to SETs that will also help retain the current special education teaching force. Higher education programs that provide training to new and continuing SEAs could include attention to House's four categories of administrative support to improve administrators' awareness of the importance of this aspect of their professional role. Additionally, professional organizations that SEAs belong to are an avenue to increase SEA awareness of best practices to improve SET retention.

Implications of Results for Future Research

Future research should seek the perspectives of other personnel who supervise special educators by including assistant special education directors, principals, and special education coordinators. In some districts, the SEA is not the person who is most frequently interacting with, supporting, and guiding SETs. By including the additional supervising personnel named above, a broader perspective of support may be obtained. Further, a survey approach that allows for comparison of administrator and teacher responses within districts could identify a more clear picture of what some districts are doing to provide strong support systems and increased teacher satisfaction. This would provide valuable information to guide both district leaders and state level policymakers.

Another suggestion would be to develop a mixed method study implemented in districts with demonstrated successful support systems and high teacher satisfaction. This study could include surveys, interviews with individual teachers and administrators, and observations of interactions between administrators and their teachers. Gathering both snapshot data on perspectives as well as more in-depth data to understand the views and experiences of special educators could provide a deeper understanding of how districts support their teachers and some potential models to be shared with other districts. Additionally, a mixed methods study, designed as described above, could be implemented in districts with high and low retention rates to compare how these districts vary in the supports that are provided.

Significance of the Study

Previous studies have noted that the retention of qualified SETs is critical to providing special needs students with a quality education (e.g. Cowan et al., 2016; Podolsky et al., 2016; Sutcher et al., 2016). The provision of administrative supports to SETs has the potential to impact many factors that can increase retention (e.g. Coleman, 2000; Council for Exceptional Children, 2000) including SET satisfaction (Billingsley, 2004a). This study differed from previous studies by obtaining the perceptions of SEAs with regard to the importance of SEA-provided supports in retaining SETs and by also comparing them to the perceptions of SETs. The results of this study indicated that SEAs perceived emotional supports as being more important to the retention of SETs than other forms of support, while SETs perceived emotional and instrumental supports similarly, and as more important than other forms of support. There was alignment of the perceptions of the most important SEA-provided supports between SEAs and SETs on only two support items that were deemed most important by both groups.

There were varying levels of SET satisfaction with the current supports provided but overall, SETs were generally satisfied with most supports they received. Generally, SETs who tended to be satisfied with one type of support, also tended to be satisfied with other types of supports. Yet, some level of dissatisfaction with emotional and instrumental supports in particular were noted in SETs' ranking of support importance, and in some of the written comments. With regard to specific factors associated with greater SET satisfaction, I found that SETs who interacted with their SEA at least one time per week were more satisfied than SETs who interacted less frequently. SETs who experienced "in person" interactions with their SEA also tended to be more satisfied with SEA-provided supports than SETs who experienced other types of interactions. SETs who reported intent to remain in the profession for two or fewer years reported being less satisfied with supports than SETs who indicated intent to remain in the profession for more than two years. Length of service, caseload size, and teacher experience did not appear to impact satisfaction.

Generally, findings from studies conducted in the past two decades have not changed. Despite the comparative differences between this study and previous studies outlined above, the types of supports that SETs have identified as being important to their satisfaction with their job remain the same. Even though researchers have identified numerous factors that impact SETs' decisions to remain in the profession, these findings do not appear to have influenced policy and practice in improving the retention rates of SETs. Further exploration of these factors and dissemination of these findings is needed to guide educational policy and practice.

REFERENCES

A High Quality Teacher for Every Classroom. (n.d.) *SPeNSE Factsheet*. Retrieved 7/31/2019 from spense.org

Berry, A. B. (2012). The Relationship of Perceived Support to Satisfaction and Commitment for Special Education Teachers in Rural Areas. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, *31*(1), 3-14.

Berry, A. B., Petrin, R. A., Gravelle, M. L., & Farmer, T. W. (2011). Issues in Special Education Teacher Recruitment, Retention, and Professional Development: Considerations in Supporting Rural Teachers. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, *30*(4), 3-11.

Bettini, E. A., Cheyney, K., Wang, J., & Leko, C. (2015). Job Design: An Administrator's Guide to Supporting and Retaining Special Educators. *Intervention in School & Clinic*, *50*(4), 221-225.

Billingsley, B. S. (1993). Teacher Retention and Attrition in Special and General Education: A Critical Review of the Literature. *The Journal of Special Education*, 27. 137-174.

Billingsley, B. S. (2004a). Special Education Teacher Retention and Attrition: A Critical Analysis of the Research Literature. *Journal of Special Education, 38*(1), 39-55. Retrieved from https://library.umaine.edu/auth/EZproxy/test/authej.asp?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/62117073?accountid=14583

Billingsley, B. (2004b). Promoting Teacher Quality and Retention in Education. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 37*(5).

Billingsley, B., Carlson, E., & Klein, S. (2004). The Working Conditions and Induction Support of Early Career Special Educators. *Exceptional Children, 70*(3), 15-333. Retrieved from https://library.umaine.edu/auth/EZproxy/test/authej.asp?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/62123014?accountid=14583

Billingsley, B. S., & Cross, L. H. (1992). Predictors of commitment, job satisfaction, and intent to stay in teaching: A comparison of general and special educators. *Journal of Special Education, 25*(4), 453-71.

Billingsley, B., Gersten, R., Gillman, J., & Morvant, M. (1995). Working Conditions: Administrator Support. Working Paper #5.

Boe, E. E., Barkanic, G. & Loew, C. S. (1999). *Retention and Attrition of Teachers at the School Level: National Trends and Predictors*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education, Center for Research and Evaluation in Social Policy. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED436485)

Boe, E., Bobbit, S., & Cook, L. (1997). Whither didst thou go? Retention, Reassignment, Migration, and Attrition of Special and General Education Teachers from a National Perspective. *Journal of Special Education, 30*(4), 371-89.

Boe, E., Cook, L. H., & Sunderland, R. J. (2008). Teacher Turnover: Examining Exit Attrition, Teaching Area Transfer, and School Migration. Retrieved from http://repository.upenn.edu/gse_pubs/184

Brownell, M. T. & Smith, S. W. (1993). Understanding Special Education Teacher Attrition: A Conceptual Model and Implications for Teacher Educators. *Teacher Education and Special Education. 16*, 370-382.

Brownell, M. T., Smith, S. W., McNellis, J., & Lenk, L. (1995). Career Decisions in Special Education: Current and Former Teachers' Personal Views. *Exceptionality*, 5, 83-102.

Brownell, M. T., Smith, S. W., McNellis, J. R., & Miller, M. D. (1997). Attrition in Special Education: Why Teachers Leave the Classroom and Where They Go. *Exceptionality, 7*(3), 143-55.

Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, Special Education Teachers, on the Internet at https://www.bls.gov/ooh/education-training-and-library/special-education-teachers.htm (visited February 10, 2018).

Cancio, E. J., Albrecht, S.F., & Johns, B.H. (2013). Defining administrative support and its relationship to the attrition of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Education and Treatment of Children, 36*, 71-94.

Coleman, M. R. (2000). *Bright Futures for Exceptional Learners: Technical Report. Conditions for Special Education Teaching: CEC Commission Technical Report.* (). Retrieved from ERIC Retrieved from https://library.umaine.edu/auth/EZproxy/test/authej.asp?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/62230481?accountid=14583

Council for Exceptional Children. (2000). *Bright Futures for Exceptional Learners: An Action to Achieve Quality Conditions for Teaching and Learning*. Reston, VA: Author.

Cowan, J., Goldhaber, D., Hayes, K., & Theobald, R. (2016). Missing Elements in the Discussion of Teacher Shortages. *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 45 No 8, pp.460- 462.

Cross, L. H., & Billingsley, B. S. (1994). Testing a model of special educators' intent to stay in teaching. *Exceptional Children, 60*(5), 411-21. Retrieved from https://library.umaine.edu/auth/EZproxy/test/authej.asp?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/62809901?accountid=14583

Darling-Hammond, L., & Sclan, E. M. (1996). Who Teaches and Why: Dilemmas of Building a Profession for Twenty-first Century Schools. In J. Sikula, T. J., Buttery & E. Guyton (Eds)., Handbook of Research on Teacher Education (2nd. ed., pp. 67-101). New York: Simon & Schuster.

Embich, J. L. (2001). The Relationship of Secondary Special Education Teachers' Roles and Factors that Lead to Professional Burnout. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 24*, 58-69.

Fish, W., & Stephens, T. (2010). Special Education: A Career of Choice. *Remedial and Special Education, 31*(5), 400-407.

George, N., George, M., Gersten, R., & Grosenick, J. (1995). To leave or to stay? An exploratory study of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Remedial and Special Education*, *16*(4), 227-236.

Gersten, R. Keating, T., Yovanoff, P., & Harniss, M. (2001). Working in Special Education: Factors that Enhance Special Educators' Intent to Stay. *Council for Exceptional Children, 67*(4), 549-567.

House, J. S. (1981). Work Stress and Social Support. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Kaff, M. (2004). Multitasking is Multitaxing: Why Special Educators are Leaving the Field. *Preventing School Failure, 48*(2), 10-17.

Lashley, C., & Boscardin, M.L. (2003). *Special Education Administration at a Crossroads: Availability, Licensure, and Preparation of Special Education Administrators*. (COPSSE Document No. IB-8). FL: University of Florida, Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education.

Littrell, P. C., Billingsley, B. S., & Cross, L. H. (1994). The Effects of Principal Support on Special and General Educators' Stress, Job Satisfaction, School Commitment, Health, and Intent to Stay in Teaching. *Remedial and Special Education, 15*(5).

Maine Department of Education, Database. Retrieved July 2016, from https://www.maine.gov/doe/data-reporting.

Maine Department of Education, Database. Retrieved July 2018, from http://www.maine.gov/doe/specialed/.

Maine Department of Education, Data Warehouse. Retrieved July 2018, from https://www.maine.gov/doe/data-reporting/reporting/warehouse

McLeskey, J., Tyler, N.C., & Flippin, S.S. (2004). The Supply of and Demand for Special Education Teachers: A Review of Research Regarding the Chronic Shortage of Special Education Teachers. *The Journal of Special Education, 38*, 5-21.

Miller, M. D., Brownell, M. T., & Smith, S. W. (1999). Factors That Predict Teachers Staying in, Leaving, or Transferring from the Special Education Classroom. *Exceptional Children, 65*(2), 201-218.

Morvant, M., & Gersten, R. (1995). Attrition/retention of urban special education teachers: Multi-faceted research and strategic action planning. *Final Performance Report*, *Volume 1*. [Chapter Three and Chapter Four] Retrieved from ERIC. (ED389154)

Nance, E., & Calabrese, R.L. (2009), Special education teacher retention and attrition: the impact of increased legal requirements. *Journal of Educational Management, 23*, 5, pp. 431-440.

Overton, T. (2003). Key Aspects of Teaching and Learning in Experimental Sciences and Engineering. In H. Fry, S. Ketteridge, & S. Marshall (Eds.). *A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* (2nd ed. Pp. 255-277). London: Routledge Falmer.

Podolsky, A., Kini, T., Bishop, J., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2016). *Solving the Teacher Shortage: How to Attract and Retain Excellent Educators*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

Qualtrics software Version of Qualtrics. Copyright (www.qualtrics.com)

Salvia, J., & Ysseldyke, J. (2004). Assessment in Special and Inclusive Education. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Singh, K. & Billingsley, B. (1996). Intent to Stay in Teaching: Teachers of Students with Emotional Disorders versus other Special Educators. *Remedial and Special Education, 17*, 37-47.

Sutcher, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2016). *A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U.S*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

Tickle, B. R., Chang, M., & Kim, S. (2011). Administrative support and its mediating effect on US public school teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education: An International Journal of Research and Studies, 27*(2), 342-349. doi:http://dx.doi.org.prxy4.ursus.maine.edu/10.1016/j.tate.2010.09.002

U.S. Department of Labor (2018)

Whitaker, S. D. (2000). Mentoring beginning special education teachers and the relationship to attrition. *Exceptional Children, 66*(4), 546-66. Retrieved from https://library.umaine.edu/auth/EZproxy/test/authej.asp?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/62337329?accountid=14583

APPENDIX A: EMAIL RECRUITMENT FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS

April 25, 2018

Dear Fellow Administrator,

I am a candidate for the Ph.D. in Education at the University of Maine and an assistant director of special services in RSU#22. As a special education administrator, I am aware of the tremendous challenges that we face in the recruitment and retention of qualified special education teachers. Research indicates that administrative support plays a significant role in helping special educators to feel committed, less stressed, and less likely to leave the profession.

I am seeking your perspective on the importance of different forms of administrative supports that may help to retain special educators. You are invited to participate in an online, confidential survey that will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

To begin, click on the link below for the informed consent, to learn more about this study, and to complete the survey. Thank you for your time!

[Insert Link]

Regards,
Mary Ellen Seymour
Doctoral Candidate
University of Maine

Informed Consent for Special Education Administrators

You are being invited to participate in a research project being completed by Mary Ellen Seymour, a candidate for the Ph.D. in Education at the University of Maine. I have obtained your email address from the Maine Department of Education online database of Maine special education directors. My Faculty Co-sponsors are Janet Spector, Associate Professor Emerita, and Janet Fairman, Associate Professor, both in the College of Education and Human Development, University of Maine.

The purpose of this research is to obtain and compare the perspectives of special education directors and special education teachers on the importance of different forms of administrative supports in retaining special educators. The results of this research will be shared in a written dissertation and presented orally in a dissertation defense. Research indicates that administrative support plays a significant role in helping special educators to feel committed, less stressed, and less likely to leave the profession. As a special education administrator and researcher, I want to better understand the impact of administrative supports on teachers' decisions to remain in the field of special education.

What Will You Be Asked to Do?
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to respond to an online, confidential survey that will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. The survey is designed to gather administrators' perceptions of the relative importance of different administrative supports in retaining special education teachers. In addition to a few questions about you and your position, the survey questions ask you to rate your opinion about the importance of specific supports in retaining special educators using a scale from *Least Important* to *Most Important*. Sample statements to rate your perception of importance include:

- Providing teachers with materials and resources needed to do their job
- Giving teachers clear guidelines regarding their responsibilities
- Providing frequent feedback about teaching performance

If you complete the survey, I will also invite special education teachers in your district to participate in a parallel, confidential, online survey.

Risks
Except for time and inconvenience in completing the survey, there are no risks to participation in this study.

Benefits
There are no direct benefits to you or your district for participating in this study. However, findings from this study may be of benefit in informing researchers and administrators about the importance of administrative supports in retaining special educators. By comparing the supports that special educators and administrators believe are important in special education teacher retention, administrators may be better able to provide supports that will be most valued by special educators.

Confidentiality
Your responses will be confidential. I will remove your district's name from the survey and replace it with a code number. A paper key linking district names and codes will be kept separate from the data in a locked file cabinet and will be destroyed no later than September 2018. Survey results will be kept on a password-protected computer. Research findings will be shared through a written dissertation and an oral dissertation defense, and they may be shared at conferences or in a research journal. Your district's name will not be linked to survey responses and the names of participating school districts will not be included in any reports, publications or presentations.

Voluntary
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to take part in this study, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

Contact Information
If you have any questions about this study, please contact my advisors, Dr. Janet Spector, at spector@maine.edu or Dr. Janet Fairman, at janet.fairman@maine.edu or by telephone at (207) 581-2475. You may also contact me, Mary Ellen Seymour, with questions about this study at mary.bowden@maine.edu or by telephone at (207) 391-2945

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Compliance, University of Maine, (207) 581-1498 or (207) 581-2657 (or email umric@maine.edu).
To begin the survey, click this link [Insert Link].

APPENDIX B: EMAIL RECRUITMENT FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

May 1, 2018

Dear Valued Special Educator,

I am a candidate for the Ph.D. in Education at the University of Maine, a former special education teacher, and I am currently the assistant director of special services in RSU#22. Through my experiences, I am aware of the tremendous challenges that we face as special educators and the factors that impact our intentions to remain in the field of special education. Research indicates that administrative support plays a significant role in helping special educators to feel committed, less stressed, and less likely to leave the profession.

I am seeking your perspective on the importance of different forms of administrative supports that may help to retain special educators, along with your satisfaction with the supports you currently receive. You are invited to participate in an online, confidential survey that will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

To begin, click on the link for the informed consent, to learn more about this study, and to complete the survey. Thank you for your time!

[Insert Link]

Regards,
Mary Ellen Seymour
Doctoral Candidate
University of Maine

Informed Consent for Special Education Teachers

You are being invited to participate in a research project being completed by Mary Ellen Seymour, a candidate for the Ph.D. in Education at the University of Maine. I have obtained your email address from your school district's website. My Faculty Co-sponsors are Janet Spector, Associate Professor Emerita, and Janet Fairman, Associate Professor, both in the College of Education and Human Development, University of Maine.

The purpose of this research is to obtain and compare the perspectives of special education directors and special education teachers on the importance of different forms of administrative supports in retaining special educators. The results of this research will be shared in a written dissertation and presented orally in a dissertation defense. Research indicates that administrative support plays a significant role in helping special educators to feel committed, less stressed, and less likely to leave the profession. As a special education administrator and researcher, I want to better understand the impact of administrative supports on teachers' decisions to remain in the field of special education along with your satisfaction with the current level of supports you receive.

What Will You Be Asked to Do?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to respond to an online, confidential survey that will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. The survey is designed to gather your

opinions about the relative importance of different administrative supports in retaining special education teachers. In addition to a few questions about you and your position, the survey questions ask you to rate your opinion about the importance of specific supports in retaining special educators using a scale ranging from *Least Important* to *Most Important*. Sample statements to rate your perception of importance include:

- Providing me with materials and resources needed to do my job
- Giving me clear guidelines regarding my responsibilities

Risks

Except for time and inconvenience in completing the survey, there are no risks to participation in this study.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits to you or your district for participating in this study. However, findings from this study may be of benefit in informing researchers and administrators about the importance of administrative supports in retaining special educators. By comparing the supports that special educators and administrators believe are important in special education teacher retention, administrators may be better able to provide supports that will be most valued by special educators.

Confidentiality

Your responses will be confidential. I will remove your district's name from the survey and replace it with a code number. A paper key linking district names and codes will be kept separate from the data in a locked file cabinet and will be destroyed no later than September 2018. Survey results will be kept on a password-protected computer. Research findings will be shared through a written dissertation and an oral dissertation defense, and they may be shared at conferences or in a research journal. Your district's name will not be linked to survey responses and the names of participating school districts will not be included in any reports, publications or presentations.

Voluntary

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to take part in this study, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this study, please contact my advisors, Dr. Janet Spector, at spector@maine.edu or Dr. Janet Fairman, at janet.fairman@maine.edu or by telephone at (207) 581-2475. You may also contact me, Mary Ellen Seymour, with questions about this study at mary.bowden@maine.edu or by telephone at (207) 391-2945.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Compliance, University of Maine, (207) 581-1498 or (207) 581-2657 (or email umric@maine.edu).

To begin the survey, click this link [Insert Link].

APPENDIX C: PUBLISHING PERMISSION FROM SAGE PUBLISHING

Copyright Clearance Center RightsLink®

Home | Account Info | Help

SAGE Publishing

Title:	The Effects of Principal Support on Special and General Educators' Stress, Job Satisfaction, School Commitment, Health, and Intent to Stay in Teaching
Author:	PEGGY C. LITTRELL, BONNIE S. BILLINGSLEY, LAWRENCE H. CROSS
Publication:	Remedial and Special EducationÂ
Publisher:	SAGE Publications
Date:	09/01/1994

Logged in as:
Mary Ellen Seymour
LOGOUT

Copyright © 1994, © SAGE Publications

Gratis Reuse

Permission is granted at no cost for use of content in a Master's Thesis and/or Doctoral Dissertation. If you intend to distribute or sell your Master's Thesis/Doctoral Dissertation to the general public through print or website publication, please return to the previous page and select 'Republish in a Book/Journal' or 'Post on intranet/password-protected website' to complete your request.

BACK | CLOSE WINDOW

APPENDIX D: SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATOR SURVEY

Introduction

Administrator Survey of Administrative Supports and Special Education Teacher Retention

Mary Ellen Seymour, a doctoral candidate at the University of Maine, is completing this study to obtain the perspectives of special education teachers and special education administrators with regard to their perceptions of the importance of various administrative supports in retaining special education teachers. Your responses will remain confidential and no district names will appear in any printed or oral presentations of this data.

Please ensure that you have read the Informed Consent before deciding to participate in this study and before completing this survey.

Demographics

What is the name of your school district, RSU, AOS, or SAD?

What is your ethnic background?

- ○ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ○ Asian
- ○ Black or African American
- ○ Hispanic
- ○ White
- ○ Other

What is your gender?

- ○ Female
- ○ Male

How long have you served as a special education administrator?

- ○ This is my first year
- ○ 2 to 5 years
- ○ 6 to 10 years
- ○ More than 10 years

For which teaching levels do you currently serve as special education administrator (check all that apply)?

- ☐ Elementary School

Importance of Supports

I am interested in knowing your perception of the relative **importance** of each of the following administrative supports **in retaining special educators**. There are no right or wrong answers!

	Importance in Retaining Special Educators			
	Least Important	Less Important	More Important	Most Important
Providing teachers with materials and resources needed to do their job	○	○	○	○
Providing standards for teachers' performance	○	○	○	○
Providing opportunities for teachers to learn from fellow special ed teachers	○	○	○	○
Allowing teacher input into decisions that affect them	○	○	○	○
Providing teachers with information on up-to-date instructional & behavioral techniques	○	○	○	○
Being easy for teachers to approach	○	○	○	○
Giving teachers clear guidelines regarding their job responsibilities	○	○	○	○

☐ Middle School/Junior High School

☐ High School

How many special education teacher positions do you estimate your district will need to replace/fill in the fall of 2018.

To what extent has the retention of qualified special education teachers been an issue in your district?

○ Almost every year

○ Most years

○ Some years

○ Almost never

During the current school year, were you able to hire fully qualified, certified special education teachers for all vacancies in your programs?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Not applicable (no vacancies)

Providing suggestions to teachers to improve instruction	○	○	○	○
Providing teachers with knowledge of current legal policies and administrative regulations	○	○	○	○
Providing frequent feedback about teaching performance	○	○	○	○
Noticing teachers' efforts	○	○	○	○
Helping teachers solve problems and conflicts that occur	○	○	○	○
Offering constructive feedback after observing teaching	○	○	○	○
Providing opportunities for teachers to attend workshops or conferences	○	○	○	○
Showing appreciation for teachers' work	○	○	○	○
Identifying resource personnel for specific problems teachers are unable to solve	○	○	○	○
Supporting teachers on reasonable decisions	○	○	○	○
Providing time for various non-teaching responsibilities (e.g. IEP meetings or completing paperwork)	○	○	○	○
Showing genuine concern for teachers' program and students	○	○	○	○
Assisting teachers with proper identification of students with disabilities	○	○	○	○
Giving teachers a sense of importance that they make a difference	○	○	○	○
Helping teachers during parent conflicts, when necessary	○	○	○	○
Providing support when teachers become overloaded	○	○	○	○

Final Thoughts

Is there anything else you would like to add about the importance of administrative supports in retaining special educators?

APPENDIX E: SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER SURVEY

Teacher Survey of Administrative Supports and Special Education Teacher Retention

Mary Ellen Seymour, a doctoral candidate at the University of Maine, is completing this study to obtain the perspectives of special education teachers and special education administrators with regard to their perceptions of the importance of various administrative supports in retaining special education teachers. Your responses will remain confidential and no district names will appear in any printed or oral presentations of this data.

Please ensure that you have read the Informed Consent before deciding to participate in this study and before completing this survey.

Demographics

What is the name of your school district, RSU, AOS, or SAD?

What is your gender?

- ○ Female
- ○ Male

What is your ethnic background?

- ○ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ○ Asian
- ○ Black or African American
- ○ Hispanic
- ○ White
- ○ Other

Including this current year, how many years have you been in your present position?

Including this current year, how many years teaching experience have you had?

Please select the type of teaching certificate you currently hold from the drop-down menu below. If you hold more than one certificate, choose the certificate type related to your current teaching position.

At which grade levels do you currently teach (select all that apply)?

- [ ] Elementary
- [ ] Middle/Junior High
- [ ] High School
- [ ] Other

How many students are currently on your caseload?

Which of the following best describes your classroom program?

- ○ Resource
- ○ Self-Contained/Life skills
- ○ Emotional/Behavioral
- ○ Other

How long do you think you will continue to work as a special education teacher?

- ○ I plan to leave at the end of this school year
- ○ 1-2 more years
- ○ 3-5 more years
- ○ More than 5 years

At this point in time, what would be the most likely reason for you to leave your current position?

- ○ Take a similar special education position in another school or district
- ○ Take a different kind of special education position
- ○ Move into a general education teaching position
- ○ Move into an administrative position
- ○ Leave teaching for another career
- ○ Leave the job market
- ○ Retirement

Perceptions of Administrative Supports

I am interested in knowing your perception of the relative **importance** of each of the following administrative supports **in retaining special educators**. There are no right or wrong answers! Additionally, in the second column, please indicate your satisfaction with the current supports you receive.

	Importance of Support				Satisfaction with Current Supports			
	Least Important	Less Important	More Important	Most Important	Least Satisfied	Less Satisfied	More Satisfied	Most Satisfied
Giving clear guidelines regarding my job responsibilities	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Offering constructive feedback after observing my teaching	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Allowing input into decisions that affect me	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Giving me a sense of importance that I make a difference	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Providing materials and resources needed to do my job	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Providing standards for my performance	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Providing knowledge of current legal policies and administrative regulations	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Providing information on up-to-date instructional & behavioral techniques	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Providing opportunities for me to attend workshops or conferences	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Providing frequent feedback about my performance	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Identifying resource personnel for specific problems I am unable to solve	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Noticing my efforts	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Assisting me with proper identification of students with disabilities	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Providing suggestions to me to improve instruction	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Showing appreciation for my work	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Providing opportunities to learn from my fellow special ed teachers	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Being easy to approach	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Helping me during parent conflicts, when necessary	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Providing me with time for various non-teaching responsibilities (e.g. IEP meetings or completing paperwork)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Helping me solve problems and conflicts that occur	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Supporting me on reasonable decisions	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Providing me with support when I become overloaded	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Showing genuine concern for my program and students	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Final Thoughts

Please indicate how often you typically interact with your special education administrator.

- ○ Daily
- ○ 2-4 times a week
- ○ Once a week
- ○ 1-2 times a month
- ○ Less than monthly

Please indicate how frequently you interact with your special education administrator in the ways listed below where 1= the most frequent way you interact and 4= the least frequent way you interact. (click and drag to move order)

- In person
- By telephone
- By email/electronic communication
- By letter/interoffice mail

Is there anything else you would like to add about the importance of administrative supports in retaining special educators?

TABLE E.1

Content of Open-Ended Responses that Fell Outside of the SEA's Role for Support

Open-ended Response Attribute	Admin	Teacher
Differences in General Education vs. Special Education and School Culture	5	4
Role of Building Administration	1	6
Impact of District Resources/Budget	0	3
Lack of New Recruits to the Profession and College Preparation/Training	4	0
Importance of Peer Support	2	1
Importance of Other Personnel (e.g. Instructional Strategist Support Person)	0	4
Sustainability of Multiple Role Expectations for Teachers and Administrators (i.e. burnout)	0	5
Miscellaneous	4	5

TABLE E.2

Frequency of the 'Most Important' Ratings for all 23 Items by Subscale

Scale Item	Administrator Ratings *F* (%) (*n* = 38)	Teacher Ratings *F* (%) (*n* = 109)
Emotional		
Allowing teacher input into decisions that affect them	10 (26)	**65 (59)**
Giving teachers a sense of importance that they make a difference	**30 (79)**	51 (46)
Noticing teachers' efforts	**30 (79)**	46 (42)
Showing appreciation for teachers' work	**32 (84)**	49 (44)
Being easy for teachers to approach	**31 (82)**	58 (53)
Showing genuine concern for teachers' program and students	**30 (79)**	**75 (68)**
Supporting teachers on reasonable decisions	15 (39)	52 (47)
Instrumental		
Providing teachers with materials and resources needed to do the job	23 (60)	**59 (54)**
Assisting teachers with proper identification of students	17 (45)	33 (30)
Helping teachers during parent conflicts	26 (68)	**66 (60)**
Providing time for various non-teaching responsibilities (i.e. paperwork)	18 (47)	**73 (66)**
Helping teachers solve problems and conflicts that occur	22 (58)	37 (34)
Providing support when teachers become overloaded	**27 (71)**	**59 (54)**
Informational		
Providing teachers with knowledge of current legal policies and regulations	10 (26)	34 (31)
Providing teachers with information on instructional and behavioral techniques	23 (60)	36 (33)

TABLE E.2 continued

Providing opportunities for teachers to attend workshops or conferences	14 (37)	22 (20)
Identifying resource personnel for specific problems teachers are unable to solve	15 (39)	34 (31)
Providing suggestions to teachers to improve instruction	19 (50)	28 (25)
Providing opportunities for teachers to learn from fellow special education teachers	16 (42)	29 (26)
Appraisal		
Giving teachers clear guidelines regarding their job responsibilities	21 (55)	37 (34)
Offering constructive feedback after observing teaching	16 (42)	32 (29)
Providing standards for teachers' performance	8 (21)	16 (14)
Providing frequent feedback about teaching performance	12 (32)	22 (20)

Note: items in bold indicate ratings in the top 25% for frequency (n = 6 for each group).

TABLE E.3

Frequency of the SET Satisfaction Ratings for all 23 Items by Subscale

Scale Item	More or Most Satisfied *F* (%) (*n* = 109)	Less or Least Satisfied *F* (%) (*n* = 109)
Emotional		
Allowing input into decisions that affect me	53 (48)	**55 (50)**
Giving me a sense of importance that I make a difference	71 (64)	37 (34)
Noticing my efforts	68 (62)	41 (37)
Showing appreciation for my work	71 (64)	38 (35)
Being easy for me to approach	**78 (71)**	31 (28)
Showing genuine concern for my program and students	71 (64)	37 (34)
Supporting me on reasonable decisions	**78 (71)**	29 (26)
Instrumental		
Providing me with materials and resources needed to do the job	62 (56)	46 (42)
Assisting me with proper identification of students	**91 (83)**	17 (15)
Helping me during parent conflicts	**90 (82)**	19 (17)
Providing time for various non-teaching responsibilities (i.e. paperwork)	41 (37)	**68 (62)**
Helping me solve problems and conflicts that occur	72 (65)	34 (31)
Providing support when I become overloaded	55 (50)	**54 (49)**
Informational		
Providing me with knowledge of current legal policies and regulations	**86 (78)**	22 (20)
Providing me with information on instructional and behavioral techniques	67 (61)	40 (36)

TABLE E.3 continued

Providing opportunities for me to attend workshops or conferences	**76 (69)**	33 (30)
Identifying resource personnel for specific problems I am unable to solve	60 (54)	**47 (43)**
Providing suggestions to me to improve instruction	64 (58)	45 (41)
Providing opportunities for me to learn from fellow special education teachers	56 (51)	**53 (48)**
Appraisal		
Giving me clear guidelines regarding their job responsibilities	72 (65)	37 (34)
Offering constructive feedback after observing my teaching	69 (63)	40 (36)
Providing standards for my performance	**76 (69)**	32 (29)
Providing frequent feedback about my teaching performance	62 (56)	**47 (43)**

Note: items in bold indicate ratings in the top 30% for frequency of more or most satisfied (n = 7) and in the top 25% for frequency of less or least satisfied (n = 6).

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Mary Ellen Seymour was born and raised in Penobscot County, Maine and is a graduate of Brewer High School. She attended Husson University in Bangor, Maine and graduated in 1995 with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration. She earned a Master of Arts in Special Education in 2007 at the University of Maine.

Mary Ellen has been employed as a Special Education Teacher in Brewer, Maine. She is presently the Assistant Director of Special Services for Maine RSU#22. Mary Ellen is a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Prevention and Intervention from the University of Maine in December 2019.