ILLINOIS ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE TEACHER EVALUATION PROCESS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Organization and Leadership in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2013

Urbana, Illinois

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Abstract

The purposes of this study were: (a) to determine the perceptions of elementary school principals regarding the effectiveness of their existing teacher evaluation processes and supervisory practices for special education teachers, and (b) to determine principals’ ability to self-assess their efficacy in supervising and evaluating special education teachers. The guiding questions for this study were: “What are the perceptions of elementary principals regarding the process and tools used to evaluate and supervise special education teachers?” and “Do these perceptions vary based on the academic training principals have in special education?” An online survey was created and distributed to all public, elementary school principals, serving grades within the preK-6 grade range, in the state of Illinois. Participants were asked to self-assess their ability to provide feedback to special education teachers regarding their unique job responsibilities. Of the 1,551 possible respondents, 330 responses were returned, providing a 21.3% return rate. Independent t-tests were conducted to determine statistical significance in responses based upon the respondents’ special education teacher certification.

Findings indicated that regardless of special education certification status, respondents did not have significantly different perceptions of their district teacher evaluation systems when rating their models’ effectiveness in providing professional growth opportunities, ensuring teacher accountability, or promoting student growth. Over 8 in 10 (83.9%) reported that their current teacher evaluation systems did not differentiate between the professional responsibilities of general and special education teachers.

Respondents also rated the extent to which they believed their district teacher evaluation process should include the unique job performance indicators for special educators, with all respondents reporting a fairly neutral response. Overall, respondents reported that they evidenced
a “good” ability to provide feedback to general education teachers, but respondents with special education certification rated their ability to provide feedback to special education teachers at a statistically significant higher level than did respondents without this certification. Respondents also rated their ability to provided feedback to special education teachers on several skills within seven professional standards identified by the Council for Exceptional Children. Specifically, respondents were asked to rate their ability to provide feedback to special education teachers in the areas of instructional responsibilities, management of behavior, support procedures, parent relationships, advocacy, professional development, and working with other professionals. Respondents with special education certification reported a statistically significant stronger ability to provide feedback in these areas to special education teachers than did respondents without special education certification. Finally, respondents identified ways in which their district supervision/evaluation processes could be improved to more fully address the unique job responsibilities of special education teachers. The two primary suggestions were an overall change in the evaluation process and a revised evaluation instrument that would address the performance expectations of special education teachers.
Dedicated to my family
Pete, Michael and Alexandra, you have been my inspiration and greatest support.
I hope to be able to someday give you as much as you have given me.
~all my love
Acknowledgments

Writing this dissertation has taken me a great deal of time, more than most students. Through the course of my studies, I have been married, had two children and received four job promotions. Because of my family and friends, both at school and at home, I have never lost sight of the desire to complete this dissertation. Words of encouragement, smiles, and constant, unwavering support have allowed me to complete this project without regret. I am grateful to everyone who has helped me along the way, and while my name is on this paper, it has not been a sovereign journey.

I am indebted and incredibly grateful for the support, direction, encouragement and knowledge that Dr. Don Hackmann, my advisor and research chair, has shown me through this very long journey. You never gave up on me and always provided words of encouragement, just at the right moment. Without your guidance and support, I would not have completed this project. I will always be appreciative for your support and patience as I learned how to write a dissertation.

To the other members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Linda Sloat and Dr. Richard Hunter, I am grateful for your willingness to withstand and support me during this extensive process. Your encouragement has been appreciated. To Dr. Lisa Monda-Amaya, I hope that this dissertation work is reflective of the passion I have for special education, developed in your department when I was an undergraduate. The special education training and knowledge I received from the University of Illinois is unmatched. I am grateful for the rigor and pedagogical skills instilled in me as a young educator. Thank you to you and the U of I special education department for giving me such a strong educational foundation.
Throughout this process, I have continued to work in public education in District 39. Hired as a special education teacher in 1995 and successively progressed as a special education coordinator, assistant principal and now elementary principal, I am grateful for the opportunities afforded to me. Dr. Ray Lechner, superintendent, has been a source of encouragement and passion for completing this dissertation. His belief in my abilities as a leader in education has allowed my career to progress quickly. Thank you for taking a chance on me.

Without understanding friends, this would have been a very lonely journey. I appreciate the gentle reminders and friendly weekly check-ins from Debbie Cooper. I was able to complete this before you officially retired. Thank you for your ongoing friendship. Evelyn Walton, you taught me how to teach with my heart and soul. To Sharon Yates and Chrys Sroka, friends since first grade, this is one more event we have been through together, and I would not have it any other way! Dr. Margaret Clauson, you reached your goal years ago, but I would not have gotten here without you. Your constant support, advice and shoulder will always be appreciated. So happy to celebrate with you!

My family has received the brunt of my emotions and absence during this process. To Eric, Marianne, Brett, Rob, Leslie, Julia, Jacob, Grace and Kate, your daughter/sister-in-law/aunt will be in better spirits now that I am not facing dissertation work every weekend. I am looking forward to getting to more soccer games and dance recitals now that I will have less writing to do. To my sister, Heidi, you have always inspired me to do my very best, even as a little sister. Thank you for watching the kids so often so that I was able to write. Whether you were in Champaign with the kids or at mom and dad’s helping babysit, I am grateful for all the time, love and care you have given me over the years.
To my parents, Russ and Linda Raymond, my work ethic and desire to be my very best at all that I do comes from you. Thank you for teaching me the value of education and doing everything within your power to allow me to achieve all of my personal and professional goals. Your willingness to drive with me to U of I for class when I was pregnant and after having had the children, is so appreciated. I NEVER would have been able to do this without your daily help and encouragement.

Michael and Lexie, your mom is back. I have tried hard not to let the writing of this dissertation interfere with our family. However, I know it has. I hope that one day you will understand how important it is to set a goal and to see it through regardless of how hard life can be. There is no greater sense of accomplishment than completing something that you think is impossible.

Pete, you have been my source of encouragement and drive at home. I may not have always wanted to hear what you were telling me, but I listened. I did not give up, regardless of how much I wanted to. Thank you for believing in me as a student, educator, and mom. You have been my light for the last 23 years, and I am hoping for many more years together. Thank you and all my love, always.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Observing and evaluating teachers is an important responsibility for administrators in school systems, because it facilitates decisions about continued employment and ongoing professional growth (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; McQuarrie & Wood, 1991; Stronge, 1997). However, many teacher evaluation models currently being used are not fully adequate in promoting these outcomes, particularly with special education teachers. Until very recently, many school systems continued to use antiquated evaluation models rooted in instructional practices that were deemed acceptable in the 1970s but do not embrace current teaching and learning methods (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). There have been significant changes in educational philosophy, curriculum standards, expectations for student learning, instructional practices, and assessment methods in the past few decades. Within the last few years, the process for evaluating teachers has received critical attention by policymakers in Illinois. With the enactment the Illinois teacher-evaluation law, Performance Evaluation Reform Act (2010; PERA 2010), sweeping changes to the evaluation process for Illinois educators was enacted in January, 2010. Although the reform mandates will not be fully implemented throughout all school districts the state until 2016, planning and redesigning of evaluation systems are currently in process in Illinois. The most significant change to the teacher evaluation requirements is the addition of student growth and learning measures, which must be a significant component of the summative evaluation of each teacher (Illinois General Assembly, 2010). The information from this study should be considered baseline data from which to assess the outcomes of the newly established teacher evaluation systems being created under the guidelines and requirements of PERA. In addition, Illinois Senate Bill 7, enacted in June 2011, provides criteria indicating how
teacher performance ratings, as established by PERA, are connected to layoffs, teaching assignments, and tenure decisions (Illinois General Assembly, 2011). Through PERA and Senate Bill 7, educators in Illinois school systems must review current teacher evaluation plans to ensure legal compliance.

**Teacher Evaluation**

Although the process of evaluating and supervising elementary and secondary teachers dates back to the establishment of schoolhouses in the late 1600s (Tracy, 1995), teacher evaluation was not implemented in earnest until 1915 (Medley, 1977). Evaluation models initially were designed simply to inspect teacher performance and were not focused on effective instructional practices, and the process has evolved over the past 100 years to reflect current methodologies in teaching and learning. During the last 25 years, there has been a significant shift in philosophy related to effective instructional practices (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). The traditional approach to classroom pedagogy was rooted in behaviorism that emphasized direct instruction and basic skill acquisition, but in recent times classroom methods have shifted to constructivist approaches that incorporate critical thinking, problem solving, and collaborative learning (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). This shift in instructional philosophy has had an influence on the concept or definition of “good teaching” (Danielson & McGreal, 2000).

Although teaching and learning practices have evolved, the overall purposes of teacher evaluation have remained basically unchanged. The two primary purposes of teacher evaluation are professional development and quality assurance or accountability (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; McQuarrie & Wood, 1991; Stronge, 1997). As was noted previously, student
growth/learning also is required to be a significant factor in the evaluation process of Illinois public school teachers by 2016 (Senate Bill 315; Public Act 96-0861).

Teacher accountability, professional development needs, and student growth are observed and assessed during the formative and summative phases of the evaluation process. During the formative phase, described as the process of supervision, the principal is to provide continuous, supportive, and nonjudgmental feedback to the teacher about identified areas of strength and areas in need of improvement (McQuarrie & Wood, 1991; Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 1995). This formative process is intended to encourage the professional growth and development of the teacher, with the stated goal of improving student learning. At the conclusion of the evaluation cycle, the principal completes the summative evaluation instrument, providing evaluative feedback to the teacher regarding his or her performance. The summative phase represents the school system’s legal obligation to reach an employment decision concerning the continued employment status of the teacher (McQuarrie & Wood, 1991). These formative and summative elements comprise the basic components of the typical teacher evaluation process.

Special Education and Teacher Evaluation

The teacher evaluation process, including the established purposes, also must be applied to special education teachers. When considering special education teachers and their evaluation process, it is necessary to review the laws and expectations associated with special education. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142) was enacted to ensure that all children in the United States with disabilities have access to a free, appropriate public education that includes special education and related services (Murdick, Gartin, & Crabtree, 2007). This legislation was revised in 1990 and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities
Education Act (IDEA), with subsequent revisions throughout the last two decades (Murdick et al., 2007).

Since 1975 federal law has mandated that students with special needs be educated in the “least restrictive environment” (IDEA, 1997). This fundamental principle has called for school systems to educate students with disabilities in learning environments with their non-disabled peers, to the maximum extent possible. Typically, this determination means that students with disabilities are assigned to general education classrooms alongside their general education classmates. As school officials began considering the general education classroom for students with disabilities, the practice of inclusion was conceived. Inclusion is the consideration and implementation of necessary accommodations and supports so that students with special needs can access general education (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2000). The revision of IDEA (1997) stressed the importance of inclusion. As a result of the emphasis being placed on access to general education, Individualized Education Plan (IEP) teams were required to consider possible avenues for students with disabilities to participate in learning activities with their non-disabled peers. Turnbull and Turnbull (2000) have defined general education as “a broad classification, requiring integration/inclusion in at least three school environments: the regular class, extracurricular activities, and other non-academic activities such as recess, meal-times, transportation, dances and the like” (p. 247). As a result of the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms, special education teachers now have expanded responsibilities beyond pullout programs that simply address the instructional needs of students with disabilities in self-contained special education classrooms.

The 2004 revision of IDEA and the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 set the stage for an approach to special education eligibility and school improvement called
Response to Intervention (RTI) (Cummings, Atkins, Allison & Cole, 2008). IDEA 2004 and NCLB require improved outcomes for all students through the use of scientifically based instructional methods (Cummings et al., 2008). As a result, the implementation of the RTI process supports the desired outcomes of these two legislative acts. Response to Intervention is a “general education initiative that takes place prior to evaluation for special education.” (Hazelkorn, Bucholz, Goodman, Duffy, & Brady, 2011, p. 17). Hazelkorn et al. describe RTI as a three-tiered approach, with the first two tiers implemented by general education teachers using research-based instruction and the third tier involving special education personnel. The academic interventions become progressively more intensive as students move through the tiers (Hazelkorn et al., 2011). The role of the special education teacher in the RTI process is continuing to evolve. Cummings et al. (2008) noted that “special education teachers, with their knowledge of assessment, instruction and individualized interventions, are uniquely positioned to impact and assist schools” (p. 24). Furthermore, the Council for Exceptional Children (2008) articulated their position on RTI and specifically the role of the special education teacher as a team member in the problem-solving process for tiers one and two, with having a direct and active role in tier three. The implementation of the RTI process arguably has expanded the role of the special education teacher. Although there are some guiding beliefs as to what the role of the special education teacher should be, it is changing and evolving as the RTI process becomes better defined and established.

Because special education teachers now have a more diverse, integrated role within the school, the school principal rather than a special education administrator often is responsible for their supervision and evaluation. When school principals are assigned to evaluate special education teachers, they often do so through existing teacher evaluation processes developed
within their districts, even though these systems typically have been designed for non-special education teachers. Little guidance can be taken from the state, because Illinois statutes related to the evaluation of certified staff contain no specific provisions for special education teachers (PERA, 2010). As is true with all educators, in order to grow as professionals, special education teachers need administrative feedback and support, as well as the opportunity to participate in professional growth opportunities that are targeted to their unique job responsibilities.

Despite the fact that school districts may develop different job descriptions for general education and special education teachers, some scholars assert that there should be no differentiation in supervisory approaches for these two groups. For example, Danielson (2007) claimed that classroom-based special education teachers should be evaluated using her four frameworks for teaching because their primary responsibility is instructing students in a large-group setting, and thus their work expectations are similar to those of regular education teachers. However, the term “special education” encompasses a broad classification of teachers who work with students with an array of disabilities, including learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, mental retardation, and pervasive developmental disorders. As a result of the wide variety of students with special needs, the responsibilities of a special education teacher can differ dramatically based on the students for whom he/she is responsible. For the purpose of this study, special education teachers were not defined by the types of students they teach. A special education teacher was assumed, by definition, to have worked with one or many of these different educational needs. An evaluation model that universally embraces both general and special education teachers may not fully acknowledge job-specific duties of special education teachers, particularly as it relates to ensuring the school district addresses IDEA mandates. Danielson (2007) did acknowledge that all teachers of students with Individualized Education
Plans (IEPs) “must attend more carefully than others to maintaining accurate records . . . because they are required by law” (p. 109). As a result, Danielson (2007) delineates specified evaluation rubrics for professionals who have very unique teaching responsibilities (i.e. speech pathologists, social workers, psychologists, and self-contained special education teachers). Danielson does note that special education teachers who are assigned to general education classrooms or who teach in a variety of settings should be evaluated using the same rubric as their general education peers. Because of the IDEA responsibilities unique to special educators, it is critical for building administrators to observe and discuss special educators’ performances on skills that have legal guidelines. Failure to address the IDEA duties of the special education teacher could have devastating effects on a school and school district.

Responsibilities specific to special education teachers and their involvement on the teacher evaluation process have not been sufficiently addressed in the literature. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC, 2009) has developed a common core and specialty areas of knowledge and skills for special educators. Some of these areas include instructional responsibilities, management of student behavior, support procedures, parent relationships, advocacy, professional development, and working with other professionals. Arguably, teacher evaluation systems for special education teachers could incorporate these areas of competency into special education teacher job descriptions and utilize them when evaluating special education teachers. Because of the mandates stipulated in the IDEA, special education teachers have numerous responsibilities that extend beyond the school district’s expectations for general education teachers. Depending on the philosophy of the district, expectations of the school, and individual learning needs of students, a special education teacher may co-teach with a general education teacher in a general education classroom, with students with disabilities instructed
alongside students with no identified disabilities. The special education teacher also may provide
daily “pullout” instruction for a student struggling in various academic areas whose Least
Restrictive Environment is not in the general education classroom. In addition to classroom
teaching responsibilities, special educators also are required to maintain accurate and current
data collection for their students and assume primary responsibility for developing and
monitoring students’ IEPs. Creating and maintaining detailed files for each special education
student and maintaining communication with parents regarding the special needs of their
children also are expected of special education teachers. This regular and ongoing
communication is in addition to adhering to meeting and evaluation timelines and facilitating
formal and informal meetings with all IEP team members for each special education child.
Finally, in the state of Illinois, at least half of the professional development activities that are
required for special teaching certificate renewal (special education teachers) must be relevant and
related to special education (Illinois Administrative Code, §25.805(a)(1), 2012). The intent of
this requirement is that special education teachers remain current not only on research-based
instructional methodologies but also any changes implemented in special education law.
Arguably, the unique expectations and job requirements of special education teachers require a
teacher evaluation system that ensures that school principals address these expectations for
special education teachers.

The paucity of literature on evaluation practices for special education teachers supports
the notion that principals typically do not differentiate the evaluation process for special
education teachers. This lack of empirical research may be due to two factors: research in
supervisory practices focuses primarily on general education, and the context for special
education supervision provides significant challenges for conducting research studies (Swan,
1998). More information regarding the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation process for special education teachers is necessary to determine if they are receiving adequate support and guidance from their school principals.

Statement of the Problem

Special education teachers have unique responsibilities that are job-specific to their roles within their schools, and there is little research to suggest differentiated evaluation systems are being used to assess the unique, required responsibilities of special education teachers. The CEC (2009) identified some of their unique responsibilities, including the following: creating and maintaining Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), collecting and reporting on student progress toward IEP goals, conducting authentic and individualized assessment, and maintaining mandated special education deadlines for annual reviews and reevaluations. As a result, these responsibilities of special education teachers need to be closely monitored due to established legal obligations. School districts can be legally liable if students with special needs are not afforded all of their educational rights that are mandated under IDEA.

Additionally, the school principal typically is the primary evaluator for special education teachers, particularly at the elementary building level. The combined influence of special education teachers providing more inclusionary support and declining support from special education cooperatives and district-level special education administrators is necessitating that school principals are assigned to be the primary evaluators of special education teachers within their buildings. Principals have a duty to serve as the instructional leaders for all students within their schools, including those with disabilities (Boscardin, 2005). Pazey and Cole (2013) defined an instructional leader as a school administrator who is well versed in evidence-based practices,
both in general and special education. However, unlike general and special education teachers who are required to receive 20% and 50%, respectively, of their professional development in special education in order to renew their teaching licensure, building administrators currently are not required to engage in continuous professional development in special education practices as a condition of licensure renewal (Illinois Administrative Code, §25.805(c-d), 2012). Thus, even though building administrators may be assigned to evaluate special education teachers, they are not required to remain current on special education laws and on the performance expectations of special education teachers. The effectiveness of the evaluation process for special education teachers could be affected by the extent of principals’ knowledge of special education practices and procedures.

Although IDEA legislation clearly delineates educational rights for students with disabilities, existing teacher evaluation models currently do not appear to hold special education teachers accountable for responsibilities that extend beyond their classroom instructional practices. The teacher evaluation literature that does exist, including both empirical research and practitioner-focused literature related to best practices in supervision and evaluation, takes a global perspective to this process. Therefore, despite the expanded responsibilities of special education teachers, general and special education teachers typically are treated in identical ways. No formal processes are in place to provide professional development and accountability regarding job-specific responsibilities of special education teachers through the evaluation process.

The problem is that the empirical research on teacher evaluation does not address principals’ current supervision and evaluation practices specific to special education teachers. Additionally, the research does not examine the differences in supervisory processes of school
administrators, based upon the extent of principals’ academic training in special education. Despite the uniform treatment of general and special education teachers in school districts’ evaluation processes, some principals may elect to develop informal mechanisms to differentiate between these two teacher groups when engaging in their supervisory duties. Perhaps principals with secure knowledge of special education practices and procedures perceive the evaluation process for special educators differently than do principals without in-depth special education knowledge and therefore are more adept at differentiating supervision and evaluation practices for their special education teachers. Others may view the differences in job responsibilities as inconsequential and may use identical supervisory practices with both groups. It is unclear whether principals perceive this issue to be a cause for concern, as they work to promote special education teachers’ professional growth. Due to this dearth of empirical research, school principals have little informed guidance as to how to incorporate the unique responsibilities of special education teachers within their district evaluation processes.

Although public schools at all organizational levels provide support to students with disabilities, the vast majority of students with disabilities are identified and placed into special education services at the pre-elementary and elementary levels. Consequently, this study focused on elementary principals, due to the fact that these initial placements typically occur within these grade levels.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purposes of this study were: (a) to determine the perceptions of elementary school principals regarding the effectiveness of their existing teacher evaluation processes and supervisory practices for special education teachers, and (b) to determine principals’ ability to
self-assess their efficacy in supervising and evaluating special education teachers. The guiding questions for this study were: “What are the perceptions of elementary principals regarding the process and tools used to evaluate and supervise special education teachers?” and “Do these perceptions vary based on the academic training principals have in special education?”

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent do elementary school principals perceive their evaluation systems are effective in addressing the unique job responsibilities of their general education and special education teachers?

2. To what extent do elementary school principals perceive that their evaluation systems differentiate between the responsibilities of general and special education teachers?

3. To what extent do elementary school principals believe the evaluation/supervision process should include unique performance indicators of special education teachers and to what degree are they able to provide feedback?

4. To what extent do elementary principals perceive that they are proficient in providing feedback to special education teachers on various aspects of their responsibilities?

5. In what ways can the supervision/evaluation process be improved to more fully address the unique job responsibilities of special education teachers?

Personal Interest

My interest in this study stems from my experiences as a special education teacher and school administrator. As an undergraduate student at the University of Illinois, I studied special education for students with moderate and severe disabilities. Subsequently, I worked for six years as a special education teacher before becoming a special education coordinator. As a special education coordinator, I had the opportunity to work with administrators, teachers, and families of students with disabilities at the elementary, middle, and junior high levels.
When I became an assistant principal, I had my first opportunity to evaluate teachers. The principals with whom I worked did not have special education training, and because of my background, I often was assigned to evaluate all of the special education staff within the school. Very quickly I began to question some of the techniques and strategies that special education teachers were employing. The principals and I engaged in lengthy, often intense conversations about the concerns I had raised regarding the instructional and procedural skills of veteran special education teachers. These concerns were areas that had not been considered by the principals in their previous supervisory experiences with the special education teachers. I questioned whether I was too critical of the special education teachers because of my special education training and teaching experiences, but I also wondered whether my principals may not have expected enough of the special education teachers, due to their lack of understanding of special education laws and procedures.

Having engaged in the evaluation process now for over eight years with both special and general education teachers as well as my own studies relating to teacher evaluation, I realize my personal and professional biases in evaluating special education teachers. Although my school district’s current evaluation process and tools do not directly necessitate observation feedback regarding instructional practices for students with special needs, IEP data collection strategies, accuracy in paperwork, or a teacher’s ability to collaborate with a professional team, these are areas I consider to collect evidence and share suggestions for improvement with special education teachers. I expect special education teachers to be able to design and effective lessons. However, the unique job responsibilities of special educators, including knowledge of IDEA provisions and procedures, are critical elements of their positions, which may not be fully captured within the generic teacher evaluation rubric used for all educators. Without my training,
experience and knowledge of special education practices, I would not know to assess these areas, let alone how to provide guiding and supportive feedback in these specific areas for special education teachers. Based upon my personal experiences, in my dissertation research, I was interested in examining whether principals who have training in special education practices and processes are better prepared to assess the performance of special education teachers and to provide feedback to them, compared to principals who do not have this training.

**Significance of Study**

Students with special needs have been required to be educated in U.S. public schools for over three decades, beginning with the enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) in 1975. The number of students identified as needing special education services has more than doubled in the last 35 years. During the 1976-77 school year, approximately 3.6 million children received special education services, and this number increased to 6.4 million during the 2009-10 school year (NCES, 2011). The expansion in the numbers of special education students, in combination with more carefully defined special education legislation, requires special education teachers and administrators to be vigilant in accurately and appropriately providing services to students with special needs.

Students with special needs are being educated within their home school. Teachers who are uniquely trained in methodologies to best support students with special needs have become part of school faculties and required to follow guidelines established for all certified staff. The teacher evaluation process is just one of the mandated processes for the special education teacher. Further analysis of the perceived effectiveness of the teacher evaluation process for special education teachers is necessary to determine if the process addresses the unique
professional growth needs of this group of teachers and whether principals believe they are effective in supervising and evaluating special education teachers.

One important outcome from this study was to identify information school principals need in order to best support the professional needs of their special education faculty members. Many teacher evaluation systems are rooted in the underpinnings of best teaching practices from the 1970s (Danielson & McGreal, 2000), which may not necessarily be reflective of best instructional practices for special education teachers. Although many teachers have begun to implement constructivist approaches in their classrooms, teacher evaluation systems have not moved as quickly to incorporate varied teaching and learning strategies into their supervisory models. Additionally, exemplary practices for instruction in special education also need to be considered. As school districts begin to examine their teacher evaluation systems, information gathered from this study regarding the experiences of special education teachers and elementary building principals may assist in the identification of effective supervisory practices for special education teachers.

Not only is there a need for teacher evaluation systems to address the professional development needs of teachers but the accountability of teachers also is an important factor when considering the evaluation process. Although there are no unique provisions in the Illinois School Code (2012) for evaluating special education teachers, there are unique legal responsibilities of special education teachers that need to be addressed that are mandated under IDEA provisions, which typically are not experienced by general classroom teachers. The heart of special education policy and true intent of the law mandates that school administrators have a basic knowledge of special education practices and laws (Pazey & Cole, 2013). Administrators who supervise special education teachers are in a unique supervisory position because of the
federal and state legal requirements associated with special education services and the school system’s responsibility to ensure compliance with all special education mandates (Danielson, 2007; Swan, 1998). Therefore, teacher evaluation plans must provide a mechanism to assess whether special education teachers are addressing the legal obligations inherent in their positions. Some of these obligations may include adherence to annual review and reevaluation timelines, timely parental communication, and the use of sound research-based instructional methods (IDEA, 1997).

Despite these additional and unique responsibilities, there have been relatively few empirical investigations into the teacher evaluation process related to the unique responsibilities of special education teachers. This omission poses a significant problem for school leaders and teachers because the performance of special education teachers can have legal ramifications on the functions of the school and district (i.e., due process hearings, mediation, and lawsuits). The legal obligations of special education teachers must be met in order to avoid due process hearings and lawsuits. Beyond the substantive and procedural legal obligations, the quality with which IEPs and student evaluations are initiated, implemented, presented, and monitored are critical components of the job expectations of special education teachers. Failure to address the job-specific responsibilities of special education teachers through the teacher evaluation process leaves building administrators, schools, and districts vulnerable to potential litigation and strained parent/community relations.

This study also was designed to examine administrators’ perceptions of how effectively current evaluation processes address the professional development needs and accountability of special education teachers. With regard to professional development, opportunities for growth have a direct influence on special educators’ commitments to their profession and an indirect
effect on teachers’ intent to leave the profession (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001). Given the intense demand for highly qualified special education teachers and an apparent link between professional development and job satisfaction, the professional development of special education teachers cannot be ignored (Billingsley, 2004). Additionally, when reviewing the accountability component of the teacher evaluation process, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, 2002) and resulting consequences of not making Adequate Yearly Progress for students with special needs provides an even greater rationale for addressing the learning progress of students with special needs. Meaningful conversations about students and their academic progress between special education teachers and building administrators are critical in light of both NCLB and IDEA mandates.

Finally, this study examined whether principals’ perceptions of the evaluation process varied based upon their knowledge of special education procedures and processes. The results from this study were consistently analyzed by looking at the total respondents, respondents with special education teaching certification, and respondents without special education certification.

**Assumptions of the Study**

It is assumed that the elementary principals responded honestly when asked if they were the administrators directly responsible for evaluating the special education teachers within their schools. The response to this question was critical, as only those respondents that indicated they were responsible for evaluating the special education teachers in their schools were allowed to complete the survey. The elementary principals completing the questionnaire should have had current knowledge of the teacher evaluation process they utilized. Additionally, it is assumed that the respondents completing the questionnaires will respond honestly and candidly.
Delimitation/Parameters of Study

In order to address the research question effectively, specific parameters for this study were established. First, the questionnaire was designed specifically for elementary building principals. This study only sought to identify the perceptions of the building principal regarding the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation process and tools for special education teachers. The next delimitation of this study focused on the population of respondent participants. While all 1,551 elementary school principals were invited to participate in the online questionnaire, only 330, or 21%, of the population responded. Because the entire population was included rather than selecting a sample, generalization of the findings should be easily generalized to the entire elementary principal population. However, given the 21% response rate, generalization of findings should be considered and applied carefully. Finally, the questions presented on the questionnaire had limited opportunities for open-ended responses. The purpose for this delimitation is for statistical data analysis. The potential for accurate statistical analysis is achieved when responses to questionnaire items are quantifiable.

Limitations

Given the design and stated delimitations, there were limitations within this study. Because this study utilizes survey research methods and there were no follow-up focus groups or interviews, the data collected from the questionnaire was dependent on the respondents’ commitment to respond honestly and accurately. Finally, the questionnaire was distributed electronically via an email invitation to participate in the study. If building principals did not have easy access to technology or were uncomfortable with completing online surveys,
respondents may have been less likely to participate. The identified limitations of this study could have had an influence on the data that was collected and the subsequent analyses.

**Definition of Terms**

The following working definitions were used for this study.

**Elementary school**
For the purposes of this study, an elementary school was defined as any public school in Illinois that: educates children in grades prekindergarten through sixth grade (PK-6) and serves at least three grades within the K-6 level.

**Inclusion**
The practice of schools serving a wide range of students in which the trinity of a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), and best practices guides the education of learners with exceptionalities (Crockett, 2002).

**Special education teacher**
A teacher working in an Illinois public school with an Illinois Learning Behavior Specialist endorsement and whose primary responsibility is to teach students who have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), regardless of their specified disability.

**Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

The remainder of this study is organized as follows: Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature related to the history of teacher evaluation, legal parameters of the evaluation process at the federal and state level, the identified purposes of teacher evaluation, the changing philosophy of teacher evaluation as it relates to student learning and teacher accountability, and the unique needs of special education teachers in the evaluation process. Chapter Three delineates the research study design and methodology used including a description of the population sampled in this study. Chapter Four presents, analyzes, and interprets the findings
from the study. Chapter Five provides a summary of the study, presents conclusions and inferences, and provides recommendations for further research.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

Following the release of *A Nation at Risk* in the early 1980s (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983), the educational community entered into an era of accountability that has been sustained for nearly three decades. As part of this accountability movement, the concept of a systemized approach to teacher evaluation was born, in an effort to improve classroom teaching effectiveness. This approach was rooted in the philosophy that the role of a teacher can be scientifically and objectively broken down into observable behaviors. Teacher evaluation systems were adopted by many school districts during this time, with an emphasis on observable teaching behaviors and a clinical model of supervision that was grounded firmly in a behaviorist approach to teaching that was established in the 1970s (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). More recently, with a mandate to place “highly qualified” teachers into every classroom, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, 2002) has placed an even greater emphasis on ensuring teacher quality. This spotlight on teacher quality came from research findings that “educators have the greatest influence on student achievement through the quality of instruction provided” (McQuarrie & Wood, 1991, p. 91). Arguably, as school systems have been required to employ highly qualified teachers and ensure that they are proficient with ensuring content mastery for every student, effective teacher evaluation practices have become increasingly important. Yet, despite the enhanced emphasis on student learning, teacher evaluation systems and administrative supervisors generally remain focused on the act of teaching, rather than on the process of student learning. Currently, 30 states require student achievement to be a component of the teacher evaluation process. Twenty of these 30 states require student achievement to be a significant factor in the final judgment of a teacher’s
performance as reported in the National Council on Teacher Quality, State of the State’s report (NCTQ, 2012).

The initial stage of the education accountability movement occurred in the 1970s, at a time when educators were struggling to understand and identify best teaching practices for children with disabilities. In 1975 the United States Congress enacted Public Law 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, which mandated that public schools throughout the nation must educate students with disabilities. This statute required school districts to employ teachers with specialized training to instruct and work with children with disabilities. These special education teachers were incorporated into school systems and supervised under the school districts’ traditional teacher evaluation models. Through the evolution and advancement of special education instruction and support, general and special educators have become more informed about the special learning needs of all students; yet, many of the nation’s teacher evaluation systems have not been revised to reflect new understandings of how students learn (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Some scholars have argued that teacher evaluation systems in most school districts are antiquated and based on outdated models of learning (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Elmore, 1995), particularly as these models relate to the professional responsibilities of special education teachers. There is relatively little empirical research to indicate that current teacher evaluations systems incorporate the current learning theories in the field of special education or embrace the responsibilities associated with being a special educator.

This chapter provides a review of the relevant literature regarding the supervision and evaluation process for special education teachers. The review begins with a general overview of teacher evaluation that includes a historical development of teacher evaluation systems, the
purposes of teacher evaluation as defined by the literature, and the requirements of teacher
evaluation, both for general education and special education teachers. The second section focuses
on the change in accountability occurring in the field of education. As a result of the increased
accountability for educators, teaching and learning practices have changed. It is necessary to
identify the changes in teaching and learning practices in order to best support teachers through
the supervision and evaluation process. This section concludes with a focus on current learning
and teaching practices in special education. The third section identifies current exemplary
practices in teacher evaluation. Specifically, literature linking teacher evaluation processes to job
descriptions of special education teachers and performance criteria is reviewed.

**Historical Development of Teacher Evaluation Systems**

Teacher accountability for educating children is a long-standing responsibility in the
United States. The responsibility for supervising classroom teachers began with members of the
local community who assumed this role and has evolved to a defined, structured process that is
conducted by school administrators who have been trained in the processes of supervising and
evaluating teachers. Although there have been changes in teachers’ job descriptions and
supervisory practices over the past few centuries, current teacher evaluation processes generally
are not aligned with evidence-based practices in student learning and instruction.

Since the establishment of American public schools, teacher effectiveness and
accountability have been concerns for the citizenry of local communities. According to Tracy
(1995) the historical development of teacher evaluation processes in the United States can be
described in seven distinct phases. During the initial phase, community accountability, which
occurred from the mid-1600s through the early 1800s, various members of the local community
assumed responsibility for evaluating the effectiveness of teachers. Visiting committees periodically inspected the schools to ensure that appropriate curricular content was being addressed and that teachers were employing appropriate instructional methodologies. Committee members intervened directly with the teacher and students if standards were not being met (Tracy, 1995). The second phase, professionalization, extended throughout most of the 1800s. During this period, supervisors began to emerge as professionals who provided oversight to teaching. The supervisor’s role gradually transformed from ensuring that the community’s morals were being instructed properly to the supervisor becoming an educational specialist who possessed expertise in subject area content and teaching skills. The third phase was the scientific phase, occurring from the early 1900s through 1920. Scientific principles of business management were applied to teaching, including implementing components of the “factory model” to schools, complete with such organizational elements as control, accountability, and efficiency (Tanner & Tanner, 1987). During this period it also became important to identify traits of effective teachers (Ellett, 1997). The earliest documentation of official evaluation instruments emerged in 1915 (Medley, 1977), demarking a period in which teacher evaluation became more formalized and structured.

The fourth phase, human relations, occurred from the 1930s through the early 1940s, as supervisors shifted from viewing teaching through the application of scientific principles to a human relations perspective that focused on the individuals within the school organization, with the supervisor’s primary goal to support the teacher’s professional needs (Tracy, 1995). The next two phases were reactionary to the previous phase. The fifth phase (occurring the late 1940s through early 1960s) was marked by a return to the scientific phase, and the sixth phase (occurring in the mid-late 1960s through the mid-1980s) was classified as the second wave of
human relations phase (Tracy, 1995). The resurgence of these areas of emphasis resulted from educators’ attempts to balance necessary technical skills with teacher autonomy and flexibility in applying these skills. The 1960s and 1970s were marked by extensive research into effective instructional methods, which prompted corresponding and dramatic changes in teacher evaluation models (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). This era resulted in the development of numerous objective observation instruments and methodologies for conducting classroom observations (Ellett, 1997). A significant outcome of this classroom-based observation research was the inception of a process-product paradigm, which attempted to identify linkages between effective teaching behaviors and improved student achievement (Ellett, 1997). Objective teacher evaluation instruments developed and implemented during this period led to the initiation of studies seeking to identify teacher behaviors that were linked directly to student acquisition of basic skills (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Building upon the research of Scheurman (1998), Hunter (1990), Rosenshine (1986), and Kamii (1979), educators concluded that direct-instruction methods, rooted in behaviorist approaches, were most effective in promoting student learning and teacher evaluation models were adjusted to focus on direct instruction. As a result, observation and evaluation instruments became a highly prescriptive means by which teachers were assessed using established checklists to determine their adherence to closely regimented lesson plans and direct-instruction methods (Danielson & McGreal, 2000).

The current, and seventh, phase focused on human development. Specifically, supervision today addresses adult learning phases and teacher professional development. This phase of supervision combines concern for a teacher’s personal needs along with the concern for organizational productivity. Due to research advances into the cognitive sciences, the field of education began to move beyond behaviorist philosophies of instruction and learning to
constructivist approaches, which emphasized the engagement of students in critical thinking, problem solving, and collaborative learning. The constructivist approach to learning and instruction has had a significant influence on educators’ concepts of effective teaching (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). In the process, educators began to understand that, although effective instructional methods are a vital component of classroom practice, student learning is the most important element in the classroom. Therefore, teacher evaluation systems now must address student learning (Danielson, 2001). Until recently, despite a growing research base regarding effective educational practices that promote improved student learning, teacher evaluation systems have failed to keep pace with these changing classroom expectations and continue to maintain their traditional focus on examining instructional practices rather than collecting evidence of student learning. Consequently, teacher evaluation systems currently being used in most school systems vary little from those that were established in the 1970s (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). However, recent state legislative acts are requiring sweeping changes in teacher evaluation across the nation. As of September 2012, at least 30 states new require student growth as a significant factor in the teacher evaluation process (NCTQ, 2012).

Teacher evaluation systems initially were developed in response to the public’s desire for educational accountability, as well as to ensure that students were inculcated in established community morals (Tracy, 1995). As school systems have become more complex and effective teaching and learning practices have been identified, supervisory approaches that focus only on instructional strategies are insufficient for effective teacher evaluation. Effective supervisors need knowledge of curriculum, appropriate instructional methods, and effective classroom assessment strategies. According to Elmore (1995), “the lack of closure between policy and practice is a recurring problem that reveals a deep incapacity of schools to engage in cumulative
learning over time directed at tangible results for students” (p. 357). Elmore provided a rationale for a model of teacher evaluation that would shift the emphasis from an inspection of teacher behaviors to actual student performance as an indicator of effective instruction. The chasm between exemplary instructional practices and current teacher evaluation practices warrants considering a revision of the teacher evaluation process.

**Purposes of Teacher Evaluation**

Since its inception, the primary focus on teacher evaluation has been on teacher accountability. As the process of evaluating teachers has evolved, professional development needs of teachers also have become an important outcome of the process. An effective process for evaluating teachers should recognize, cultivate, and develop effective teaching and learning practices (Danielson, 2001).

Teacher evaluation serves multiple purposes. Generally, researchers agree that an important purpose of the evaluation process is for the enhancement of classroom practices that improve student learning, through the identification of instructional strengths and weaknesses (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Peterson, 2004; Veir & Dagley, 2002). Teacher evaluation also should screen out unqualified personnel, provide constructive feedback to individual educators, recognize and reinforce exceptional service, provide guidance for staff development practices, create evidence that will withstand professional and judicial scrutiny, support in terminating incompetent or unproductive personnel, and coalesce teachers and administrators in collective efforts to effectively educate students (Haefele, 1993).

Although the benefits of teacher evaluation systems are numerous, researchers generally focus on two primary purposes: professional development and quality assurance, which also can
be respectively described as the formative and summative purposes of teacher evaluation (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; McQuarrie & Wood, 1991; Stronge, 1997). These purposes are often contradictory, and, as a result, neither objective typically is completely addressed (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; McQuarrie & Wood, 1991). In the formative process of teacher evaluation, typically described as supervision, the purpose of teacher evaluation is not to form judgments about the professional educator who is under review (McQuarrie & Wood, 1991). During the supervisory phase, teachers should be supported as professionals, as they reflect upon, experiment with, adapt, and refine their classroom practices (McQuarrie & Wood, 1991). Ultimately, a judgment must be made regarding their performance, which is the summative portion of the evaluation system.

**Requirements of Teacher Evaluation**

The purposes of teacher evaluation must be considered in conjunction with the legal parameters that provide the overarching framework for teacher evaluation systems. School districts develop teacher evaluation systems based on federal, state, and local regulations. Although each school district has the autonomy and authority to regulate the evaluation process for its local schools, the practices and process for evaluating teachers must adhere to state and federal regulations.

When analyzing the legal requirements in teacher evaluation, Tucker and Kindred (1997) noted that the Fourteenth Amendment due process clause of the U.S. Constitution involves the foundational principle of fairness in the evaluation process. Procedural due process is defined as the process of decision making and substantive due process as the product of that decision making (Tucker & Kindred, 1997). Almost every public school district has a formal evaluation
process that is regulated by state law (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). According to Veir and Dagley (2002), 42 of the 50 states in 2002 had enacted legislation regulating the evaluation of classroom teachers, and 36 either required or permitted the use of a locally developed teacher evaluation system. Of the states with mandated processes, 15 required supervisors to complete a summative evaluation for each teacher, consisting of a written document specifying deficiencies or weaknesses identified in the evaluation process. These states, including the state of Illinois, leave both the process (evaluation procedures) and the product (the evaluation instrument) within the discretion of a local school board to develop and implement (Veir & Dagley, 2002). Within the state of Illinois, the PERA (2010) and Senate Bill 7 (2011) legislation have forced Illinois school district officials to revise their teacher evaluation processes to ensure compliance with recent requirements. Between 2011 and mid-2012, 15 states made changes to their teacher evaluation or teacher tenure policies (NCTQ, 2012). Legal requirements are now forcing states to, at a minimum, review current teacher evaluation practices. For many states, this is resulting in changes to processes for educators, including evaluation.

Although local school district officials shoulder much of the responsibility to develop their local teacher evaluation systems, it is important to note that state statutes typically specify regulations that must be closely followed. Prior to January of 2010, teacher evaluation procedures and requirements were prescribed in the Illinois School Code 105ILCS 5/24A-1 through 105 ILCS 5/24A-8. The general requirements for teacher evaluation included a formal evaluation of tenured teachers every other year that resulted in a three-category job performance rating of “excellent,” “satisfactory,” or “unsatisfactory.” Probationary teachers, or non-tenured teachers, needed to be formally evaluated until they reached tenure status. These, among other general parameters, were required to be implemented in all Local Educational Agencies (LEAs).
LEAs were permitted to establish systems of evaluation with more requirements, but they had to ensure compliance with state mandates within their teacher evaluation system.

In January 2010, the governor of Illinois signed the Illinois teacher-evaluation law, Performance Evaluation Reform Act 2010 (PERA 2010). PERA has had a significant impact on the teacher evaluation process and procedures in Illinois. Among other mandates, PERA requires evaluations of teachers and building administrators to include data and indicators of student growth as a “significant factor.” PERA also states that teachers and building administrators must be evaluated based on a 4-category rating system of “excellent,” “proficient,” “needs improvement,” or “unsatisfactory.” Formal and informal observations must be conducted as part of the evaluation process. Finally, anyone conducting teacher (or administrator) evaluations must complete Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) approved prerequisite training before conducting evaluations in 2012-2013 school year, according to PERA.

In June 2011 the Illinois governor signed Senate Bill 7 (Illinois General Assembly, 2011, June). Senate Bill 7 addressed, among other things the acquisition of tenure, reductions in force/layoffs, recall rights, and a system for dismissing tenured teachers. Although the evaluation reform act provided more requirements for LEAs, there still remains flexibility in local implementation of teacher evaluation plans. Local school district boards can highlight and emphasize those professional indicators that they perceive as valued within their local communities. As a result, local school boards must establish the evaluation process, teacher performance criteria, procedures, and formative and summative instruments. School boards and legislatures “are given the great task of determining legally viable methods of evaluating teachers, taking appropriate and reasonable steps to improve teaching performance, and ultimately moving toward termination based on ineffective classroom performance” (Veir &
Dagley, 2002, p. 4). The procedural aspects of this process typically are negotiated between the teachers’ unions and Boards of Education, because Illinois courts have interpreted that evaluation procedures affect the working conditions and welfare of employees (Tucker & Kindred, 1997). As a result, teacher evaluation processes often differ from one Illinois school district to another.

**Changing Accountability**

Throughout the past three decades, several important legal mandates have dramatically affected accountability for public education. The most significant mandate that has occurred is Public Law 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, which was authorized in 1975 and subsequently codified as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This act mandated that all school-age individuals with disabilities had a right to a free and appropriate public education. This law was important because for the first time in American public schools, children with disabilities were entitled to an education provided at the community’s expense.

Since the inception of P.L. 94-142, the reauthorization of this law has further delineated the educational rights for students with disabilities. Although it is not a federal mandate that children with disabilities are to receive their educational services in their home school in a general education classroom, the least restrictive environment for educating students with disabilities must be considered (IDEA, 1997). As a result, when it is determined that it is the appropriate educational setting, students with disabilities are educated alongside their nondisabled students in general classrooms within their home schools. Placing students with disabilities in regular classrooms has had a significant effect on the delivery of special education services, as well as those personnel who are providing the necessary supports for students. Public
school educators are accountable for ensuring that students with disabilities obtain an appropriate education, and they must use research-based instructional practices that maximize students’ opportunities to learn.

The second mandate promoted by the government in recent years was *A Nation at Risk* published by a federal government task force (NCEE, 1983). The purposes of this commission were to identify weaknesses in American education and to offer solutions to those challenges. Because *A Nation at Risk* highlighted existing concerns, one significant outcome of the report was increased accountability within the nation’s educational systems. Due to the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, expectations for teachers and their instructional delivery methods changed. Teacher evaluation practices during this era focused on the teachers’ abilities to deliver the formal curriculum (Tracy, 1995).

The third important mandate occurred in 2001 with the enactment of Public Law 107-110, or more commonly referenced as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002). The tenets of this law were based on standards-based education reform, which establish high standards achieved through measurable goals leading to individual improvement. Under this law, schools receiving federal funding were required to assess individual students’ basic skills through standardized assessments (NCLB, 2002). Each state was required to establish acceptable standards for passing and improving on basic skills. In order to continue to receive federal funding, schools are required to meet the established state standard. Schools failing to meet this standard are publicly identified and must take actions to remedy their educational practices. The NCLB legislation increased accountability in public education by establishing clear standards for assessing student achievement. Clearly, public acknowledgement of schools that fail to demonstrate student achievement is a strong means by which to hold educators accountable.
Finally, the Response to Intervention (RTI) movement emerged as a result of the enactment of IDEA (2004) and NCLB (2002) (Cummings et al., 2008). Both legislative mandates required educators to implement research based instructional practices with an emphasis on student growth outcomes. The RTI model is defined as three instructional tiers of support, with the first two tiers implemented by general education teachers and the third tier implemented by special education personnel (Hazelkorn et al., 2011). As a result, the role of special education teachers as it relates to RTI and IDEA responsibilities currently is in a state of transition. By definition, special education teachers remain responsible for provisions afforded by IDEA. However, the special education teacher’s role in the RTI process is not as clearly defined.

Fuchs, Fuchs, and Stecker (2010) defined RTI through two different perspectives—special educators and general educators. The special education perspective, or IDEA group, views RTI as promoting both early intervention and more valid methods of disability identification (Fuchs et al., 2010). The NCLB group, or general education perspective, views RTI as having the “right” general education approaches in place so that having meaningful standards for all will result in the disappearance of high incidence disabilities such as learning and emotional disabilities, mental retardation, and autism spectrum disorders (Fuchs et al., 2010). Whether or not educators subscribe to either of these pure perspectives, the lens through which educators view RTI affects the assumed roles of both general and special educators. The CEC (2007) stated their position regarding RTI and its effect on the role of special education teachers, noting that special education personnel should become directly involved in the process when a student needs tier three supports. However, the CEC also asserted that special education personnel should be involved in collaborating with general educators during tier one and tier two
discussions. Cummings et al. (2008) noted that the expertise of special education teachers in assessment, instruction, and individualized interventions, uniquely positions them as invaluable contributors to the problem-solving process. The implementation of RTI practices and approaches to struggling students has had an impact on the role of special education teachers. Although there is still no “mandated” role for special educators regarding RTI, the literature is fairly consistent in documenting the need for special educators to participate in the process. This new expectation adds to the already numerous job responsibilities mandated through IDEA legislation.

**Changing teaching and learning practices.** Over the last few decades, beliefs regarding effective classroom practices gradually have shifted from an emphasis on behaviorist to constructivist approaches (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). During the 1960s, teacher-proof curricula and materials were developed, with supervisory practices focusing on the teacher’s adherence to delivering the scripted information from the text (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2010). This direct instruction approach to teaching was the basis for a behaviorist approach to teaching and learning. Constructivist theory is based upon the principle that learners create new knowledge through their background knowledge and new ideas, problems, or experiences encountered (Glickman et al., 2010). Teacher evaluation processes need to reflect an understanding and appreciation for the constructivist learning theory. This shift in predominant learning theories has critical implications for how the performance of special education teachers is assessed.

**Behaviorist theory.** One early conception of learning relied upon concepts of learning as a direct result of a stimulus and response relationship. Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1953) often is credited as the leader in the field of behavioral learning. According to Skinner, if a stimulus is
presented systematically, a corresponding response will occur. Kamii (1979) captured Skinner’s approach to learning by noting that education is a process of eliciting behavioral responses through the use of stimuli: A specific stimulus always produces the same behavior. Scheurman (1998) explained:

According to the behaviorist view, reality exists independently of learners and knowledge is received exclusively through the senses. Learning functions like a switchboard, occurring when one person transmits the universal characteristics of reality to another. According to B. F. Skinner, knowledge is acquired when the bond between stimulus and response is strengthened by means of a reinforcer. The teacher's primary function is to break information and skills into small increments, present them part-to-whole in an organized fashion, and then reward student behaviors that mirror the reality presented by teachers and texts. (p. 7)

The field of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) emerged as an outgrowth of Skinner’s theory, and ABA practices ultimately took scientific research out of the laboratory and into the classroom (Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968). From a behaviorist perspective, learning can be defined through the scientific principles of ABA. The student is presented with a stimulus, a skill, or task to complete, and upon task completion the student is positively reinforced for appropriate behavior. As a result of the reinforcement, it is likely that the student will repeat the performance. ABA techniques require that skills be taught in small incremental steps, with appropriate reinforcement provided to the individual upon completion of each step. These ABA principles are the underpinnings of the behaviorist approach to learning.

Skinner’s philosophy and the ABA principles led to the application of Direct Instruction (DI) as an instructional strategy. Engelmann and his colleagues at the University of Illinois created DI in the early 1960s (Magliaro, Lockee, & Burton, 2005). Magliaro et al. asserted that DI was effective and superior to other models of instruction in everything from learning engagement to achievement to student affect. As a result of these positive effects, the use of DI became a widely used technique. Magliaro et al. (2005) noted six primary principles of DI:
1. Materials and curriculum are broken down into small steps and arrayed in what is assumed to be the prerequisite order. 2. Objectives must be stated clearly and in terms of learner outcomes or performance. 3. Learners are provided with opportunities to connect their new knowledge with what they already know. 4. Learners are given practice with each step or combination of steps. 5. Learners experience additional opportunities to practice that promote increasing responsibility and independence (guided and/or independent; in groups and/or alone). 6. Feedback is provided after each practice. (p. 44)

Magliaro et al. explained that these six principles closely aligned with the elements of a traditional lesson plan advocated by Madeline Hunter (1990): statement of a learning objective, input from previous learning, modeling, checking for understanding, guided practice, and independent practice. The general acceptance of DI methods within the education community influenced teacher evaluation practices, as supervisors were expected to dissect teacher instructional behaviors into smaller parts that could be observed and measured (Danielson & McGreal, 2000).

**Constructivist theory.** In recent years, constructivist theory has emerged as an alternative to behaviorist teaching practices. Yilmaz (2008) asserted that constructivist principles can be subdivided into as many as 18 different categories, but the competing theories generally are aligned with three broad classifications: social constructivism, psychological constructivism, and radical constructivism. Phillips (2000) has described social constructivism as a theory that humans form understandings and formal knowledge about their world through categories such as politics, economics, and social factors. In contrast, psychological constructivism is a learning theory asserting that people construct meaning around phenomena (Phillips, 2000). Phillips noted that if individuals within a group share and come to agreement regarding their meaning, the group’s consensus on meaning might become formal knowledge. The premise of radical constructivism is based on the notion that individuals construct their own knowledge on a continuum ranging from simple basic knowledge to complex, scientific knowledge (Von
Glasersfeld, 1995). These three distinct categories of constructivism have assisted in the understanding of the various approaches to constructivist theory and its subsequent influence in the field of education.

The main premise of the constructivist perspective is that learners construct their own knowledge rather than receiving transmitted knowledge from others (Green & Gredler, 2002). The underpinnings of this theory have had a significant influence on pedagogical practices. Currently, there are several distinct perspectives that suggest specific constructivist approaches that would necessitate changes in classroom practices (Green & Gredler, 2002). The first constructivist perspective is rooted in the work of Piaget, who believed that an individual undergoes a variety of reconstruction when thinking, which ultimately leads to the development of logical reasoning (Green & Gredler, 2002). According to Piaget (1973), schools should afford learners the opportunity to engage in spontaneous student experimentation, provide opportunities for learners’ views to be challenged, and present examples and probing questions to lead learners to rethink their initial beliefs.

Vygotsky (1986) developed the second constructivist perspective influencing learning and teaching. The goal of this perspective was to develop self-regulated attention, conceptual thinking, and logical memory, and teacher-student exchange is the primary means for this approach (Green & Gredler, 2002). Students are active in formulating their own constructs, but they do so through the interaction, correction, and guidance of their instructor.

The third constructivist perspective is rooted in social constructivism. The goal of learning through this perspective is that students construct and reconstruct contexts, knowledge, and meanings through discourse and the people with whom they interact (Green & Gredler, 2002). In this approach, the teacher creates a classroom that encourages discourse among
communities (Green & Gredler, 2002). This approach hinges on the notion that everyone in a learning community has knowledge and information to share with others. Therefore, there is no one expert in this type of classroom (Green & Gredler, 2002).

The fourth approach is the holistic constructivist classroom. The goal of this classroom is student ownership of the learning process and the outcomes (Green & Gredler, 2002). The teacher in this learning environment generates tasks tailored to the needs of each learner in each learning situation (Green & Gredler, 2002). Students are expected to interact with each other and their environment, communicate with each other, and demonstrate active learning (Green & Gredler, 2002). This holistic approach is rooted in the belief that students are responsible for their learning, and the instructor readily communicates this ownership. Harris and Alexander (1998) noted that active learning and full participation of learners elicits a deep and rich understanding and promotes meaningful use of what has been learned. These varied constructivist theories have influenced pedagogical approaches to learning.

A constructivist classroom that is planned and purposeful has the potential to create a learning environment that moves beyond rote learning, through the use of engaging activities designed to stimulate students’ thinking and active formation of knowledge. Constructivist classrooms are planned, deliberate, and organized, fostering learning through a climate that emphasizes students learning from one another. Englert, Tarrant, and Mariage (1992) described a constructivist classroom as the following:

Teachers who model their classrooms as communities of learners present curricular content not merely as objects of study, but rather math, reading and writing, social studies, or science become the forums where teacher-to-student and student-to-student discourse around related phenomena foster deeper conceptual understandings. (p. 80)

Through this open discourse in an established learning community, students are supported in taking risks. Open discussions can highlight any misguided or loosely related tangential thoughts.
and ideas. As the teacher establishes a learning community, teacher-student and student-student relationships are promoted within a climate that encourages student learning.

For the special educator who works with students with the unique and individualized learning needs, it is mandated that research-based methodologies be employed (IDEIA, 2004). Special educators should be cautious of using postmodernist terms and theories in an effort to justify changes in instructional practices (Gerber, 1994). Green and Gredler (2002) identified three challenges that confront students with learning difficulties within a constructivist classroom. First, some constructivist approaches encourage students to construct meaning from authentic contexts, develop approaches to understanding, and draw connections to promote generalizations beyond the classroom activity. However, students with learning difficulties generally are not effective at monitoring their metacognitive skills. The second area of concern is the constructivist approach of relying on individual exploration (Green & Gredler, 2002). Again, because of the difficulty with metacognition, tasks that require students to rely on their personal interests can present a significant challenge to students with learning difficulties. Finally, constructivist approaches often require students to engage in the construction of meaning through dialogue. As a result, students with language disabilities must determine a means for participating in the dialogue and learning within the classroom (Green & Gredler, 2002). Although these three challenges are generalities and may not affect all students with learning challenges, they need to be considered when promoting constructivist practices within general education classrooms that also support students with disabilities.

**Balance of perspectives.** Educators can be criticized for adopting all-or-nothing instructional approaches. When new strategies or practices are introduced in the field of education, existing methods often are abandoned, rather than adopting a balanced approach that
integrates effective elements from both the established and new strategies. This phenomenon can be illustrated by the whole language/phonics approach to reading. A central question in a whole language classroom is how to best integrate phonics instruction into the classroom—not whether or not it should be an instructional component. Both approaches serve to benefit the student (Dahl & Scharer, 2000). Regardless of whether an educator’s beliefs are rooted more firmly in a behaviorist approach or a constructivist approach, it is necessary to consider the positive outcomes of each perspective.

Behaviorism and constructivism should not be perceived as two mutually exclusive theories, as some suggest (Kamii, 1979; Harris & Alexander, 1998). Instead, Kamii (1979) provided a graphic depiction of constructivism, which Kamii described as Piagetian, and behaviorism could be illustrated with two concentric circles, with the interior circle representing behaviorism and the exterior circle representing Piaget’s theory of constructivism. Current teacher evaluation systems must reflect a balanced approach to instructional methodologies and an incorporation of both constructivist and behaviorist theories. Consequently, supervisors must be aware that the application of both learning theories can be effective in promoting student learning and should look for evidence of the effective uses of both pedagogical models when conducting classroom observations.

No one approach is best for all students all of the time, especially when considering the needs of special education students. Furthermore, behaviorist approaches can be viewed as one aspect within a constructivist environment, when teachers find it necessary to use direct instruction methods to teach students a specific concept. Kamii (1979) developed a conceptual framework incorporating both constructivist and behaviorist practices, giving educators permission to use those classroom strategies that best support student learning and clearly
achieving the purpose of teaching, which is to ensure that students master the curriculum. Graham and Harris (1994a) also promoted the notion of embedding direct instruction of skills within the larger context of learning in a constructivist environment. Graham and Harris (1994b) recommended that “bridges between constructivist programs such as whole language and process writing and more traditional approaches ” (p. 286) should be built.

As learning theories have evolved and current instructional practices have changed to incorporate behaviorist and constructivist theories, it is important to examine the evolving nature of teaching and learning practices within the field of special education, particularly the increasingly implemented practice of inclusion of students with special needs within general education classrooms. An inclusive approach to education is defined as the full and active participation of children with disabilities in programs with typically developing children, (Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion, 1998). Corbett (2001) conducted a case study in a primary school in London, England, to identify factors that support effective inclusion learning, concluding that inclusive pedagogy should connect an individual learner and his/her unique learning style to the curriculum and larger school community. Richardson (2003) emphasized, “if we accept constructivist learning theory as a way of describing how students learn, we must also acknowledge that students will learn from many different forms of instruction” (p. 1636). As is true with students who are not receiving special education services, a balance of constructivist and behaviorist approaches is necessary to meet the wide-ranging needs of students with disabilities. This balanced approach and the new paradigm of inclusion have changed the role and expectations of special educators, further indicating a need to change the system of evaluating their performance.
Influence of Postmodernist Pedagogical Views on Special Education

Just as there has been a shift in teaching and learning expectations for general education teachers, special education teachers also have been affected by increased accountability measures. By definition, special education is “special” and individualized for the specific needs of students with disabilities; consequently, special education teachers must employ a variety of instructional methodologies—including behaviorist and constructivist approaches—to address student-learning needs effectively. Mastropieri, Scruggs, and Levin (1986) provided an historical account of instructional practices within special education, noting that the initial instructional approaches in special education were based on a process-product approach to learning. The methods subsequently evolved into a direct-instruction approach, which focused on teacher behaviors and student outcomes, and this approach continues to be utilized to produce positive learning outcomes for many students with disabilities (Mastropieri et al., 1986). Wolery and Schuster (1997) created a listing of instructional strategies often used with students with moderate disabilities, although it arguably is relevant for all students with disabilities. Wolery and Schuster scaffolded the strategies based on the extent to which they influenced control over students’ interactions with the environment, explaining that “the categories of strategies at the top of the list are likely to produce student engagement with the environment rather than specific student behavior; the strategies at the bottom of the list are designed to produce specific student behaviors” (p. 68).

The first strategy listed by Wolery and Schuster (1997) involved examining the structure of the environment and identifying the materials necessary to complete the task. The final strategy noted the use of response-prompting procedures (most to least, graduated guidance, or time delay) as an instructional strategy. The wide spectrum of instructional strategies identified
follow along the constructivist/behaviorist continuum, as well. Approaches at the beginning of
the list encouraged students’ interactions with their environment, while the instructional
approaches at the end of the list were designed to elicit specific student behaviors (Figure 1).
Environmental aspects are important when determining appropriate instructional strategies
designed to attain specific student behaviors. Students with special needs benefit from a balance
of both constructive and behavioral approaches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structuring dimensions of space and the availability, type and number of materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structuring dimensions of the social environment, including the number, proximity, and characteristics of peers, as well as the number of adults and their responsiveness to student behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifying the materials, activities and schedule based on students’ preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structuring roles during play and free-time activities and using scripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using self-management strategies (self-observation, self evaluation, self-monitoring, and self-reinforcement); self-instruction approaches and video-taped self-monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using differential reinforcement, response shaping, behavioral momentum, and correspondence training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structuring routines using responsive adult behavior naturalistic time delay, interrupted behavior chain strategy and transition-based teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching peers to use specific strategies to promote social interactions, to promote communicative exchanges, to tutor their classmates, and to model adaptive behavior for their classmates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using naturalistic (milieu) teaching strategies modeling, expansions, incidental teaching, and naturalistic time delay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using stimulus modification procedures stimulus shaping, stimulus fading, super-imposition, and shaping or fading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using response-prompting procedures (most-to-least prompting, graduated guidance, system of least prompts, simultaneous prompting, time delay)</td>
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The identification of an appropriate instructional method ultimately is contingent upon the desired learning outcome for the individual student. Researchers agree that an individualized approach is fundamental to all special education programming (Billingsley, 1993; McDonnell, 1997). Billingsley (1993) noted that it is possible to provide direct skill instruction to students, but there could be a negative effect on social skill development if the selected instructional strategy removes students from their peers in the general education classrooms. Special education professionals must be explicit in identifying the desired skills that students need to attain and then must tailor the instructional strategy to facilitate skills development.

**Exemplary Practices in Teacher Evaluation**

The current accountability movement has stimulated educators to reform their organizational structures and practices. In particular, the careful examination and use of data in the decision-making process has been advocated to promote improvements in student learning. As changes in instruction have occurred that are designed to improve student learning, so must the means by which teachers are evaluated.

In school districts across the U.S., educators have analyzed student-learning data to align curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices and to identify student-learning deficiencies. It no longer is sufficient for administrators to report to school boards or other community members that teachers merely have taught the curriculum within their classrooms, because constituents want to know the efficacy of the selected instructional delivery methods and assessment practices on student performance. Not only practitioners but also researchers have noted that “approaches to teacher evaluation that incorporate a measure of student learning require valid techniques to assess that learning” (Danielson & McGreal, 2000, p. 41). Student achievement
data only can be identified and accepted as an accurate assessment of performance growth when multiple sources of information are analyzed. Mendro (1998) stated, “only when numerous sources confirm effectiveness should we leave good teachers alone or attempt to learn from them” (p. 263). However, a single data source should never be considered as the sole determinant of the effectiveness of a teacher’s practices on student learning. Danielson and McGreal (2000) noted:

If the district uses measures of student achievement in the evaluation of individual teachers, the system should take into account the baseline levels of student achievement. This practice—the evaluation of teaching performance based not on the absolute level of performance of students, but on the amount they learn as the result of the teacher’s efforts—is behind the concept of “value-added.” (p. 43)

Research has confirmed that the impact of teacher practices on student achievement is significant. In fact, teacher effectiveness is the most influential school-based factor on student achievement (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Sanders & Horn, 1998). Research has confirmed that ineffective teachers can have devastating, negative consequences on the achievement of their students—effects that may take up to three years of exemplary instruction to fully remedy (Bembry, Jordan, Gomez, Anderson, & Mendro, 1998; Jordan, Mendro, & Weerasinghe, 1997). While effective teachers facilitate student academic progress, ineffective teachers actually may cause students to experience learning regression. It is imperative that teacher evaluation systems must have clear procedures and processes for identifying ineffective teachers, so that their administrative supervisors may either work with them to initiate remediation procedures or recommend contract nonrenewal.

Student achievement is an educational outcome watched and analyzed by educators, families, and policymakers; most assert that student learning is an indicator of teacher quality (Peterson, 2004). Increasingly, the public believes that student achievement outcomes should be
used when evaluating teachers. PERA (2010) requires student achievement to be a “significant factor” in the teacher evaluation process. The Phi Delta Kappan 2012 *Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools* reported 52% of respondents favored including student performance on standardized tests in teacher evaluations, with half of those in favor indicating student performance should constitute between one third and two thirds of the teacher’s evaluation. Although this perspective may represent a challenging concept to some educators, it is the reality of public education in the 21st century. Current teacher evaluation practices appear to be less concerned with instructional techniques as long as student achievement outcomes are favorable and apparent through multiple reporting sources.

**Alignment With Job Descriptions and Performance Criteria**

In order to be fully effective in assessing the performance of special education teachers during the evaluation process, the administrative supervisor ideally must have an extensive knowledge base in special education. As the school’s instructional leader, the principal is responsible for providing oversight to special education services and personnel (Valesky & Hirth, 1992). Although some school districts and/or special education cooperatives also may provide support, the daily instruction of students with special needs is under the direct care and responsibility of the building principal. Principals today are the instructional leaders for all students, including those with disabilities (Boscardin, 2005).

Despite the principal’s charge as the learning leader of all teachers and their students, research has indicated that some building-level administrators are not fully effective in working with special educators. Breton and Donaldson (1991) surveyed the entire population of special education resource teachers in the state of Maine, obtaining a 67% return rate, and identified
several deficiencies in supervisory practices. The resource teachers reported that supervisory efforts by their building principals were minimal, with 45% of respondents reporting that their principals never engaged in formal classroom observations that were required under their teacher evaluation systems. Breton and Donaldson (1991) concluded that resource teachers felt more isolated and were more vulnerable to conflict about their students and their work, when compared with their teaching colleagues in regular classroom settings. The researchers suggested that, contrary to existing practices in which special education teachers received minimal or no support, special education resource teachers actually needed more support and skilled supervision than regular classroom teachers.

Relatively few empirical investigations have been conducted into specific areas of knowledge needed by principals to understand effective principles and approaches in special education. O’Reilly and Squires (1985) determined that special education administrators needed training in six areas to address the needs of students with disabilities: roles and responsibilities of teacher assistance teams, impact of handicapping conditions on families, curricular needs and adaptations, due process regulations, evaluation of special education personnel, and special education funding. In a similar study, Arick and Krug (1993) randomly sampled 2,900 special education directors across the nation regarding their perceptions of their training needs, obtaining a 51% response rate. The three highest ranked areas of need were as follows: training for promoting successful collaboration between general and special education teachers, evaluation of program effectiveness and quality, and adaptation of curricula and instruction for students with disabilities. Burrello and Zadnik (1986) conducted a national study to determine the Critical Success Factors (CSFs) of special education administrators, interviewing 15 special education administrators to identify CSFs that “must go right” in order for the organization to be
successful. Once these CSFs were identified, a questionnaire was developed and sent to the effective referent group for the interviews and a random sample of Council of Administrators in Special Education (CASE). For teacher CSF on the survey, respondents had to make two decisions: the degree to which the CSF was a critical determinant of his/her success or the program’s success and how difficult it was for the respondent to achieve success on that statement. There was a 71.9% response rate of the effective referent group and 25.1% for the random sample of executives of local special education programs (CASE). Burrello and Zadnik concluded that special education administrators greatly valued the importance of maintaining a knowledge base of current and best practices pertaining to current literature/research, school law, and pending special education legislation.

Special education provisions are guided by very specific legislation, which has been further clarified through case law. Knowledge of special education law is a critical area for principals, because they are accountable for the oversight and implementation of special education programs, services, and instruction (Gillung, Spears, Campbell, & Rucker, 1992; Valesky & Hirth, 1992). Gillung et al. (1992) identified the following areas of special education knowledge needed by principals: coordination of general and special education methodologies and materials, program management, and curriculum administration. It is important for principals to understand these areas as they apply to special education, so that through the supervisory process they can ensure special education teachers are effectively performing their job responsibilities within the school.

Principals must understand the basic instructional methodologies and legal obligations in the area of special education to be effective instructional leaders for their students. The single most important goal when educating students with disabilities is identifying student strengths and
using those strengths to assist in learning skills that are more challenging (Hockenbury, Kauffman, & Hallahan, 1999-2000). Rather than continuously focusing on a student’s weaknesses, using a student’s area of strength to support weaker abilities is the most successful strategy.

Research confirms a need for more extensive special education training for principals. Lasky and Karge (2006) noted principals not only need more training in special education while in a pre-service administration program, but they also need to update their knowledge of special education laws and instructional practices while on the job. Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, and Ahlgrim-Delzell (2006) conducted a national study of secondary principals regarding their special education knowledge. Through systematic sampling, a random sample of 1,000 secondary principals was invited to complete the questionnaire, and the researchers obtained a 36% response rate. Over 9 out of 10 (92%) of the respondents reported not having a special education teaching license or teaching certificate. Approximately 57% of the respondents reported taking no special education classes at the undergraduate level, while nearly 46% reported participating in no special education classes during their administrator training programs. Crockett (1999-2000) provides one model when considering the knowledge needed for principals in special education. The Star model consists of five steps for special education planning: ethical practice, individual consideration, equity under law, effective programming, and establishing productive partnerships. This model is referenced as the “Star” model because when plotted on the perimeter of pentagon, the interrelatedness of each principle is easily connected in the form of a star (Crockett).

In addition to the Star model, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC, 2009) established a core list of 10 knowledge/skill areas for special education administrators who have
some previous knowledge of special education. Because of the principal’s responsibility for learning of all students within the building, it reasonable to apply the CEC’s standards for special education administrators to principals. As noted in Appendix E, the CEC recommends knowledge and skills in the following areas: leadership and policy, program development and organization, research and inquiry, individual and program evaluation, professional development and ethical practice, and collaboration (CEC, 2009). The CEC provides specific information for each of these areas that could be shared with principals through professional development opportunities. The CEC’s identification of knowledge and skills necessary to lead special education programming provides a foundation for principals to provide instructional leadership effectively for teachers of students with special needs.

**Unique Responsibilities of Special Education Teachers**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires school teams to consider instruction for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE), thus mandating additional state and local financial support for special education (Gillung, Spears, Campbell, & Rucker, 1992; Sage & Burrello, 1994). Because of the need for local support and guidance, there has been a trend to decentralize special education support (Sage & Burrello, 1994), including decisions in some districts to eliminate the administrative position of Director of Special Education (Valesky & Hirth, 1992). With less administrative assistance from special education cooperatives and school districts, many principals are being required to assume complete responsibility for special education implementation within their buildings.

Research has indicated that special education teachers prefer to have their building administrators in charge of conducting their evaluation processes. Kissel (1986) analyzed the
evaluation procedures used with tenured public school special education teachers and speech and language pathologists. In this study, which used survey research methods, 75 randomly selected principals, coordinators/supervisors, special education teachers, and speech and language pathologists from suburban Cook County, Illinois reported their perceptions regarding the evaluation processes of special education teachers and speech and language pathologists. Principals and special education directors perceived that the purpose of the evaluation process was for instructional improvement and planning for staff development; in contrast, speech and language pathologists and special education teachers believed it was to meet employer or contractual requirements. Respondents agreed that instructional improvement and planning of staff development programs should be the most important purposes of the evaluation process. Principals, special education directors, and special education teachers stated that having the principal serve as the supervisor and evaluator was most desirable, whereas the speech and language pathologists stated a preference for peer observations. An important and unique finding from this study was the fact that speech and language pathologists stated a desire to receive feedback on the professional activities required outside the classroom. This study concluded that educators’ professional responsibilities beyond those observable in the instructional setting also should be considered within the evaluation process.

**Principal Training and Preparation for Evaluating Special Education Teachers**

It appears that state principal licensure requirements contain relatively few mandates for principals to demonstrate competence in the area of special education. Research by Valesky and Hirth (1992) determined that 45% of the states required no general knowledge base in special education, 38% required only an introductory course in special education for the general
administrator, and 33% required building-level administrators to complete a special education law class. Similar results were found by Bateman (1998) a few years later, who concluded that 20 states required no special education training for their general administrators, 18 states required an introductory course in special education, and 9 states mandated that competencies related to special education must be satisfied prior to attaining administrative licensure. Within the state of Illinois, the State Board of Education requires principal preparation program requirements to include components of learning in the area of students with disabilities. However, the requirements do not indicate the extent to which knowledge about students with disabilities needs to be addressed or assessed. Furthermore, the national standards for school leaders developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008) also do not contain guidelines related to knowledge of special education for school principals. The lack of guidance and expectations for general administrators in the area of special education is clearly a detriment to principals. Unless principals actively seek out information and professional development related to special education topics, it is possible that they will encounter issues and concerns related to special education for which they are not fully prepared to address.

A recent study by Pazey and (2013) focused on educational leadership preparation programs and their faculty members’ responsibility to impart special education knowledge in future school leaders. Noting the significant litigious aspects of special education, Pazey and Cole asserted that “content related to special education and special education law has been a long neglected area within university-based administrator preparation programs and has been strangely absent in conversations relevant to the creation of administrator preparation programs that embrace a social justice model of leadership” (p. 243). Pazey and Cole called for leadership
preparation programs to include significant content regarding special education practices and law, not only for the purpose of avoiding legal entanglements but also as a mechanism to promote social justice.

Dissertation research has addressed the evaluation of special education teachers, seeking to identify the expectations for the principal’s knowledge base in evaluating special education teaching performance. In a 1986 study, Bogdan used the Delphi Technique to solicit information from 28 professionals involved in evaluating the performance of special education teachers in the state of Ohio. According to the findings of this study, in order to effectively evaluate special education staff, principals must have knowledge of the following 15 areas of special education: federal special education law, characteristics of handicapped learners, elements of instructional techniques, mainstreaming and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), components of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), related and supportive services, interpersonal techniques, assessment and evaluation techniques, classroom management, curriculum related to special education, instructional materials, time management, current theories and practices related to teacher evaluation, professional behavior and standards, and unique problems associated with parenting handicapped children.

Requiring special education knowledge and preparation for general administrators has the potential to enhance the leadership preparation program curriculum as well as to better equip principals to address unique and atypical needs of students who may or may not receive special education services. Providing special education knowledge and skills for general administrators can add value to leadership preparation programs by communicating the core principles that guide the meaningful education of students with disabilities (Crockett, 2002). Less attention has been given to how special education preparation or experience might enhance the ability of
administrators to respond to specialized concerns meaningfully (Crockett, 2002). Although the goal of including special education training for principals would be to better prepare them for providing instructional leadership for special education teachers, the information that is learned regarding students with special needs arguably also may be applied to students without disabilities. Thus, requiring principals to receive additional training in the practices of special education has the potential to enhance their effectiveness as learning leaders for all students—both regular education and special education students.

**Lack of Individualization for Special Education**

Although the topic of teacher evaluation has been extensively researched, there is only limited research on the evaluation of special education teachers. In a 2011 study through Project Forum, the 50 states were surveyed regarding the state’s role in performance evaluation frameworks (Burdette, 2011). Questionnaires were sent to two groups of administrators in states and non-state jurisdictions who were responsible for implementing IDEA. One questionnaire was sent to each state director of special education and one to local directors of special education who were identified by the state directors as implementing a value-added performance survey. There were no responses received from the local directors of special education, but 30 state directors responded to the survey. Eighteen of the 30 responding states indicated they played a role in the performance for all educators; 10 of these states reported that their state framework for evaluation allowed for differentiation to account for the specialized roles of special education teachers. Listed in the order of reported frequency, state officials reported that standards for differentiating special education teacher evaluation were based on the Interstate New Teacher
Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), the Charlotte Danielson’s framework for teaching (2007), and Council for Exceptional Children (Burdette, 2011).

The extant research typically does not distinguish between evaluation practices for special education teachers and general education teachers. Perhaps one explanation for the paucity of literature addressing the unique evaluation needs of special education teachers is that within the field of special education, the types of disabling conditions vary greatly. Special education teachers may work with severely and profoundly physically and emotionally handicapped individuals, students with mild to moderate disabilities, or with students with hearing or visual or hearing impairments. Learning supports for special needs students may vary from placing the student in a regular classroom with minimal support (i.e., inclusion) to exclusive placement in a self-contained special education classroom. As a result, special education teachers may have unique job responsibilities that necessitate specialized knowledge and performances that are not expected of general classroom teachers. It is incumbent upon the building principal, as supervisor and evaluator of the special education teacher, to have a comprehensive understanding of the responsibilities inherent in these positions. Just as in the general education classroom, student achievement performance and growth must be considered when evaluating special education programs and the performance of special education teachers. However, because special education is “special” and unique, there is a need for additional criteria when evaluating the effectiveness of special education teachers. Special education teachers and their students are by definition “exceptional,” and those evaluating special education teachers should be aware of this unique role (Katims & Henderson, 1990).

Although one of the main premises of teacher evaluation is to examine the instructional practices of teachers, there are numerous unique responsibilities for special education teachers
that directly affect student learning that must be addressed when evaluating special education teachers, including the following: “classroom schedule; instruction in small groups; integrated therapy; functional curriculum; specific individual programs; data collection and charting; specific objectives; periodic review; integration with non-handicapped; age-appropriate curriculum and materials; instruction outside the classroom; and family involvement” (Hilton, 1984, pp. 35-36). Although these areas may not be considered to be instructional practices, they affect student learning and are included in the special education teacher’s job description. These components are critical to ensuring adequate academic progress.

An additional area for consideration when evaluating the special education teacher is his/her ability to demonstrate effective classroom management. Because special education teachers work with students with identified unique behavioral and learning needs, the classroom management skills of the special education teacher, arguably, are more critical than those of a general education teacher. Kitchen (1991) examined the importance of specific instructional and classroom management components in the evaluation of teachers of the severely behaviorally handicapped, surveying all Ohio administrators who supervised teachers in these classrooms. These evaluators were asked to rate the effectiveness of their existing district teacher evaluation instruments in the following areas: instructional skills, organizational skills, classroom management skills, and as a basis for providing specialized assistance to the teacher of the severely behaviorally handicapped. Their evaluation instruments were rated as not effective by 41.3% of the respondents. This study disclosed that 74% of respondents used the same instrument and process for evaluating both general and special education teachers. Respondents reported that the use of a universal instrument for general and special education staff was not
completely effective, because it could not adequately assess the performance of teachers of students with severe behavior disabilities.

When considering classrooms that support students with a variety of disabilities, the learning environment can range on a continuum between highly effective to disruptive and not conducive to intense, remedial instruction. Given the unique needs of special education students, it is important to consider the amount of allocated time spent on direct, individualized instructional tasks. Because students with special learning needs may need to be taught in a direct, individualized manner, instructional tasks must be carefully constructed. One important skill an effective teacher must possess is the ability to maintain an appropriate instructional pace; research suggests that an effective special education teacher continuously adjusts instruction “moment to moment” based on ongoing assessment of students’ knowledge and understanding (Englert et al., 1992). Unfortunately, these practices may not be present in special education classrooms, which can hinder the academic progress of students. Although some professionals may argue for a slower instructional pace in special education classrooms, research indicates that this pace actually should be increased with special needs students. Englert et al. determined that effective special education teachers maintained a brisk pace and high success rate during teacher-led instructional activities. The high success rate referred to students’ success when being assessed on material being presented through direct instruction and was defined as 70-90% correct student responses (Englert et al.). Special education teachers should strive for an instructional pace that is rich in content and skill and results in significant student success.

The learning climate also should be considered carefully when evaluating special education teachers. Noting how the teacher interacts with students can be indicative of a teacher-student relationship that either promotes or hinders student learning. Learning can be extremely
challenging for many students with special needs, which can discourage them from persisting when attempting to master difficult skills. The quality of the student-teacher relationship can significantly affect a student’s willingness to persist. This teacher-student relationship is critical to the special needs student’s success, and a supervisor who is not present in the classroom on a regular basis may find it difficult to observe this culture of support. Englert et al. (1992) explained:

Teachers who model their classrooms as communities of learners present curricular content not merely as objects of study, but rather, math, reading and writing, social studies or science become the forums where teacher-to-student and student-to-student discourse around related phenomena foster deeper conceptual understandings. (p. 80)

The relationships that teachers form with their students have significant consequences for student learning for all students, including those with and without disabilities. When positive teacher-student relationships are established and meaningful dialogue between students and teachers is fostered, a positive culture for student learning is created. Englert et al. found that when positive relationships were established, a climate for student self-regulation was promoted, teachers were able to model language and metacognitive skills, and opportunities for higher-order thinking processes were provided and encouraged within the classroom.

The foundational principles for teacher evaluation remain relevant and necessary for all teachers. However, when evaluating special education teachers, it is necessary to take into account some very specific instructional practices as well as professional qualities needed by effective special education teachers. Katims and Henderson (1990) explained: “Teachers of the severely and profoundly mentally handicapped, seriously emotionally disturbed, and teachers of athletically or artistically talented or intellectually gifted students certainly utilize widely disparate techniques but are entitled to fair and equitable consideration in the evaluation process” (p. 47). The terms “fair” and “equitable” are key, and it is the school district’s responsibility to
determine what is fair and equitable for special education students. However, because school districts often do not identify the unique performance expectations of special education teachers, these educators typically are evaluated under the same evaluation criteria as their general education teacher colleagues. Katims and Henderson (1990) highlighted the deficiencies with this approach: “If special educators are to continue successful therapeutic and educational practices, teacher appraisal systems and their users must account for the fundamental differences between regular and special education” (p. 48). Special education teachers should be held accountable for all aspects of their job responsibilities when being evaluated, because their unique responsibility for children with special needs requires their instructional practices, student outcomes, and evaluation procedures to be individually tailored for each student.

Research by Rosell (1990) examined educators’ perceptions regarding the process of teacher evaluation. Using a Teacher Evaluation Perception Inventory (TEPI), Rosell surveyed a random sampling of special education teachers, general education teachers, general education administrators, and special education administrators from two Midwestern states. Surveys were returned from 516 educators, yielding a response rate of 64.5%. Findings included that educators’ perceptions of teacher evaluation are critical, and special education teacher evaluation is not widely researched. Although general education and special education teachers perceived components of the teacher evaluation process in similar ways, general education administrators’ and special education administrators’ perceptions of the uses of the teacher evaluation process differed significantly. General education administrators indicated a higher rate of use of the specific components used for evaluation listed on the survey than did special education administrators. Rosell concluded that although both groups acknowledged the importance of the process, they accomplished it in differing ways. Rosell recommended additional systematic
teacher evaluation research, specifically in the area of special education, as a mechanism to improve the quality of education for all students.

Although some initial research has been conducted in the area of evaluation of special education teachers, it is clear that few teacher evaluation processes account for the need to provide context-specific evaluations for special education staff. As educational trends shift away from teacher-directed instruction to learner-focused instruction and learning, there is a need for teacher evaluation systems to recognize this change and for principals to provide higher quality, specific feedback to teachers. For the special education teacher this shift is even more critical, as he/she works to individualize the educational program for each student and to draw upon the best of all learning theories to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. Beyond the classroom, the special education teacher has many professional responsibilities that also need to be considered when evaluating job performance. Thus, there is a need to restructure the teacher evaluation system in light of changes in educational theories, and there is an even more compelling need to tailor this system to the specific and unique job of a special educator.

Conclusion

Although the literature on changes in learning theory provides support for a shift in the emphasis of teacher evaluation away from observable teaching behaviors toward an analysis of student achievement, relatively little empirical research exists on this topic. This gap is especially glaring as it relates to the role of the special educator and the unique needs of students with disabilities. Scholars have provided a foundation for and a call to act upon a reform movement in teacher evaluation (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Stronge & Tucker, 1999). They emphasize that student achievement as one of the most important factors in the evaluation of
teachers, an element that currently is missing from the majority of teacher evaluation systems. The shift in the purpose of teacher evaluation from one of accountability and the adherence to specific steps in instructional delivery to the teacher’s effectiveness in improving student achievement is happening in many states. The NCLB (2002) legislation requires school districts to more carefully scrutinize student achievement and, consequently, there is an enhanced emphasis on highly qualified teachers providing scientifically based instruction to all students. Because school districts are held accountable for student achievement and scientifically based instructional practices, teacher evaluation systems also must hold individual teachers more accountable. The state of Illinois is no exception. With the recent enactment of PERA (2010) and Senate Bill 7 (2011), the teacher evaluation process in Illinois is changing. In addition to professional development and job accountability, student growth is now a considerable factor in the final assessment of teacher performance.

The history of the traditional teacher evaluation system is grounded in a clinical approach that supports a behaviorist theory of learning and emphasizes directly observable teaching behaviors. This system has become outdated in light of research investigations into effective teaching and learning practices and the system of accountability in which school systems currently operate. More specifically, little has been written about the unique needs of special education teachers. Are the formative and summative portions of the existing teacher evaluation process providing feedback that is specific to the unique responsibilities of special education teachers? Identifying and understanding the perceptions of administrators evaluating special education teachers is necessary to more fully understand the teacher evaluation process for special education teachers.
Chapter Three

Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology proposed for this study, including the research methodology. Included in this chapter are the research questions, research design, pilot study and instrument including validation and reliability, data collection, and analysis.

The purposes of this study were: (a) to determine the perceptions of elementary school principals regarding the effectiveness of their teacher evaluation instruments and processes for special education teachers, and (b) to determine principals’ ability to self-assess their efficacy in supervising and evaluating special education teachers. The information collected was disaggregated based on the principals’ knowledge and experiences related to special education practices. Through the use of a questionnaire distributed to elementary principals across the state of Illinois, the perceived advantages and disadvantages of current teacher evaluation systems for special education teachers were identified. An additional outcome of this study was to provide recommendations in the teacher evaluation process that would support the unique needs of special education teachers.

Research Questions

The guiding questions for this study were “What are the perceptions of elementary principals regarding the process and tools used to evaluate and supervise special education teachers?” and “Do these perceptions vary based on the academic training principals have in special education?” The study was designed to determine the extent to which current teacher evaluation practices were meeting the professional development and accountability needs of
special education teachers as perceived by elementary school principals. The following research questions further identified the key concepts addressed in this study.

1. To what extent do elementary school principals perceive their evaluation systems are effective in addressing the unique job responsibilities of their general education and special education teachers?

2. To what extent do elementary school principals perceive that their evaluation systems differentiate between the responsibilities of general and special education teachers?

3. To what extent do elementary school principals believe the evaluation/supervision process should include unique performance indicators of special education teachers and to what degree are they able to provide feedback?

4. To what extent do elementary principals perceive that they are proficient in providing feedback to special education teachers on various aspects of their responsibilities?

5. In what ways can the supervision/evaluation process be improved to more fully address the unique job responsibilities of special education teachers?

**Research Design**

This quantitative study utilized survey research methods, through the use of a questionnaire to collect data from the respondents. The initial impetus for survey research is to gain an understanding of social problems (Groves et al., 2004). Survey research is described as a process of identifying the specific characteristics or reactions of a group of people (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Krathwohl, 1998). The value of survey research is the ability to generalize findings from a representative sample to the general target population (Groves et al., 2004; Krathwohl, 1998). The generalization of survey sampling is critical to the usefulness and application of the obtained results.

Survey research is based on inference, which allows researchers to describe unobserved events based on observed events (Groves et al., 2004). Inferences or conclusions are made throughout survey research as opinions, or unobserved mental states, are measured based on the
observations of a sample of others from the same population (Groves et al.). In soliciting opinions or perceptions from a sample of the larger population, the results are inferred to apply to all those within the targeted population. Survey research is founded on two main inferential principles: answers that respondents provide must accurately describe the characteristics of the population and the participants in the sample must have characteristics similar to those in the target population (Groves et al.). It is believed that sound inferences can be made based on the results of this survey, permitting the generalization of the information received from the respondents to the larger target population.

Population of the Study

The population for this study was the principals of Illinois public elementary schools, which contain any combination of grades pre-kindergarten through six (Pk-6). This study defined an elementary school as an Illinois public school educating students in pre-kindergarten through sixth grade only and served at least three grades within the Pk-6 grade range. Because of the size of the population, access to principals’ electronic mail addresses, and feasibility of conducting the study, the entire population of the study was included. Principals of schools meeting the above criteria were solicited for participation in the survey. The findings of the research were more easily generalized as a result of including the entire target population rather than a sample.

Development of the Instrument

Two studies supported the formulation of the survey instrument used in this study. Rosetti (2005) examined superintendents’ perceptions regarding the evaluation of teacher performance, using a survey document titled the Teacher Evaluation Practices Survey (TEPS).
Because it was designed for administrators, Rosetti’s questionnaire was helpful in developing the questionnaire for this study. Additionally, Rosell (1991) created a questionnaire to investigate perceptions of the purpose and the process of teacher evaluation that were held by general and special education teachers, as well as by general and special education administrators. The structure and format of Rosell’s questionnaire, the Teacher Evaluation Perception Inventory (TEPI), also was key in the development of the questionnaire for the current study. The TEPI used Likert scales to identify the strength of respondents’ attitudes and beliefs related to several survey items (Frankel & Wallen, 2003).

The questionnaire developed for this study was divided into three sections (Appendix A). The first part was designed to gather information regarding the current teacher evaluation practices for special education teachers. Specifically, this section sought to identify which administrators were responsible for evaluating special education teachers and the type of training and professional development attained in evaluating special education teachers, as well as self-assessment of the evaluators’ perceived ability to evaluate special education teachers. In an effort to determine if the respondents believed their evaluation skills differed between special and general education teachers, respondents also were asked to self-assess their skills in evaluating general education teachers.

The second portion of the questionnaire focused on the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation process as it related to special education teachers. This section attempted to quantify the perceptions of the elementary principals regarding statements about the various aspects of the teacher evaluation process and its implementation for special education teachers. Areas for respondent consideration included the instructional responsibilities, management of student behavior, support procedures, parental relationships, advocacy, professional development, and
working with other professionals. The content for this section incorporated the Professional Standards developed by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC, 2009). Respondents were asked to respond to specific statements in these categories based on a Likert scale, indicating the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement and the extent to which they employed the practices. Additionally, respondents were asked to identify the effectiveness of assessing general and special educators in the areas of professional development, accountability and ensuring student learning. Finally, in this section respondents were asked an open-ended question to identify any additional training or information needed to improve their perceived effectiveness in evaluating special education teachers.

The third section of the questionnaire contained demographic information about the respondents. This information was used to identify characteristics of the respondents and identified correlations between demographic information and the opinions obtained from the survey. The information gathered through the use of the survey instrument was intended to be objective, well planned, and sufficient to address the research questions established for this study.

Validation of the Instrument

The content and format of the survey instrument were established based on the research of Rosetti (2005) and Rosell (1991), which most closely aligned with the purpose and research questions of this study. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2003), validity refers to the degree to which correct inferences can be made based on the results of the instrument. It was necessary, therefore, to establish that the information contained in the survey was presented in a manner that was clear, easily understood, and addressed the research questions established in this study. Prior
to distribution to the population for this survey, the survey instrument was submitted to five experts in the field of special education and teacher evaluation. Feedback was solicited on appropriateness, accuracy, and wording of survey items and ease of completion, and their feedback was incorporated into revised questionnaire. Appendix B provides an example of the cover letter sent to the selected expert reviewers. The questionnaire then was piloted with 10 middle school principals. These individuals were selected because they were not part of the research population but their positions were most closely aligned with the roles and responsibilities of elementary principals. The feedback obtained from the pilot group also was incorporated into the revised questionnaire.

The reliability of the answers received from the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient. For items 14-20, Cronbach’s statistical analysis was conducted to determine the reliability of the responses to the various statements in each section. This reliability analysis occurred because there were several statements that were closely related to each of the seven topics. The purpose of this analysis was to determine if the responses to any one statement were not as highly correlated to the other statements related to the topic.

**Human Subjects Approval**

In order to conduct research at the University of Illinois, the institution’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) must review and approve the process, procedures and instrumentation of all studies that include human subjects. The purpose of the IRB is to ensure that all researchers at this institution apply legal and ethical conduct of human subject research. Prior to beginning data collection, the process, procedures and survey instrument were formally reviewed and approved by the IRB.
Procedures

After receiving feedback regarding the questionnaire from experts and practitioners, the survey instrument was modified to incorporate their recommendations and uploaded into Survey Monkey. Email addresses for 1,451 of the 1,551 elementary principals were obtained from ISBE, and inspection of school websites provided email information for the remaining 100 principals. The survey invitation and all necessary documentation were sent to the building administrators via electronic mail on January 9, 2011 (Appendix C). Within this email message, a web address was included so that participants could easily access the questionnaire online. Principals were asked to complete the questionnaire by February 11, 2011. Fifty-two email communications were returned as “non-deliverable,” and the invitation was resent to 46 of these individuals for whom email addresses could be obtained. After the initial distribution, 5 respondents declined immediately. Email reminders were sent to all respondents on January 24, 2011, and February 2, 2011 (Appendix D). A final email invitation was sent to non-respondents on February 10, 2011. On February 12, 2011, the electronic questionnaire was set to no longer accept responses to the survey, and responses subsequently were exported to an Excel worksheet. Data were cleaned and numerically coded for ease of analysis in Statistical Package in Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

Because the purpose of this study was to obtain information regarding the evaluation process of special education teachers, an initial item on the survey instrument asked principals to identify whether or not they evaluated special education teachers. Principals who responded affirmatively were allowed to complete the questionnaire. If a principal indicated that he/she did not evaluate special education teachers, the online survey ended. There were 368 total responses to this survey, resulting in a response rate of 23.73% of the overall population. Of the 368 responses, 29 participants, or 7.88% of the respondents, indicated that they did not evaluate
special education teachers. As a result there were 339 principals, approximately 21.8% of the entire population of Illinois elementary school principals, who reported they indeed evaluated special education teachers, and they completed a portion of or the entire questionnaire. Upon further review of the demographic data provided by the respondents, 9 of the 339 respondents reported grade levels served within their school that did not meet this study’s working definition of an elementary school. After reviewing websites and attempting to verify the information regarding grade levels served within the nine respondents’ schools, the grade levels served in each school could not be verified. Therefore, of the 339 respondents who completed all or a portion of the survey, data for 330 respondents were analyzed in this study, representing 21.3% of the population.

General Characteristics of the Sample

As a result of a detailed review of the literature and lack of current information regarding the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation system for special education teachers, it was necessary to select respondents who engaged in the evaluation process of special education teachers. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) provided a list of all public elementary schools in Illinois. The population was selected based on the following criteria: the school must have been categorized as an elementary school by ISBE, the school must serve grades no greater than sixth, and the school must serve at least three grades within kindergarten through sixth grade. Based on these criteria, 1,551 Illinois public elementary school principals were selected to participate in this study.

The most important factor identified throughout data analyses was the respondents’ knowledge and understanding of special education. For the purpose of this study, it was
determined that if a principal had attained certification as a special education teacher, he/she would be considered to have advanced knowledge of special education teaching methodology and job responsibilities. Principals with this level of training and understanding were identified as “certified” throughout the analysis of results. Principals indicating that they had not received special education teacher certification were “non-certified.” The questionnaire contained a specific regarding this level of certification. Of the 330 respondents, 59 (17.9%) reported that they had attained special education certification, 234 (70.9%) indicated they did not have special education teaching certification, and (11.2%) did not provide a response to this question. All 59 principals who reported having obtained special education certification had worked as special education teachers. The resulting demographic information will be analyzed in three categories: those principals having received special education teaching certification (certified), those principals having never obtained special education teaching certification (non-certified), and results reported by all respondents (total).

**School Demographics**

Demographic information was separated into two categories: information related to the respondent and information related to the school in which the respondent is the principal. This section reports information related to the schools in which the respondents worked.

**Grade levels within the schools.** Each respondent was asked to identify the grade levels served within his or her school. The categories for the grade levels indicated are reported in Table 1. The most frequently reported combination of grades served was grades Kindergarten through fifth grade (K-5), at 29.3% \((N = 97)\). The next most frequently reported type of school
was Pre-kindergarten through fifth grade (PK-5), at 17.6% (\(N = 58\)). The respondents reported a total of 22 different grade level combinations.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>(N)</th>
<th>Valid percent of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PK-5</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PK-6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PK-4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PK-2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>PK-3</td>
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<tr>
<td>3-6</td>
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<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PK, 2-5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PK, 2-4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PK, 3-5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student enrollments.** In addition to considering the grade levels included in each respondent’s school, the total number of students served in each school also was reported.

Student enrollments in the 295 schools for which respondents reported these data ranged from 75 to 1,037, with a mean of 438.9 students.

**Affiliation with special education cooperative.** Another consideration was whether or not respondent schools were affiliated with a special education cooperative. Even though the responding principal still reported being fully responsible for the evaluation of the special education teachers within his/her school, affiliating with a special education cooperative can be helpful in providing assistance with professional development, training, and mentoring of special
education teachers. Of the 330 respondents, 297 answered this question: 220 (74.1%) indicated their school was affiliated with a special education cooperative and 77 (25.9%) indicated they were not part of a cooperative. Of the 59 respondents who held special education certification, 39 (66.1%) indicated their school was affiliated with a special education cooperative, whereas 176 (75.2%) of the 234 non-special education certified respondents reported a school affiliation with a special education cooperative.

**Special education teachers within schools.** Respondents reported a range of 1 to 45 special education teachers working within their buildings, with a mean of 4.83 (Table 2). Respondents also reported a range of 0 to 40 for the number of special education teachers being formally evaluated during the 2010-2011 school year, with a mean of 3.43 teachers. The data are disaggregated in Table 2, noting respondents certified in special education and those respondents not certified in special education. Respondents certified in special education reported higher proportions of special education teachers working within their schools as well as more special education teachers to evaluate than did those respondents who were not certified in special education.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Certified</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Certified</th>
<th>Non-certified</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-20</td>
<td>1-45</td>
<td>1-45</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>4.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-26</td>
<td>0-40</td>
<td>0-40</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant Demographics

In this section, the respondents’ gender, ethnicity, age, highest degree earned, attainment of special education director certification, years of experience in teaching, years of experience as an administrator, and years of experience in evaluating general and special education teachers is reported. Table 3 presents data for all respondents regarding their gender, ethnicity, age, and highest degree earned. The information is further disaggregated by special education certification.

Table 3

Demographic Profiles of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Certified</th>
<th></th>
<th>Non-certified</th>
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<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/ Alaska Native</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biracial/ Multiracial</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/ African American</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/ Latino/a</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>86.4</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>91.4</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>32</td>
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<td>46-50</td>
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<td>51-55</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>56-60</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Highest degree earned</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Specialist/ Certificate of Advanced Study</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>65</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
Table 3 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Certified</th>
<th></th>
<th>Non-certified</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest degree earned (continued)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor of Education/Doctor of Philosophy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9.42</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>1.7</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education director certification</td>
<td>N = 59</td>
<td></td>
<td>N = 234</td>
<td></td>
<td>N = 298</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
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<td>79.7</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>97.4</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>84.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Gender.** Overall data indicated more female respondents ($N = 185$, 63.4%) than males ($N = 107$, 36.6%). Respondents holding special education certification overwhelmingly were females ($N = 50$, 84.7%), while 132 (57.64%) without special education certification were females (Table 3).

**Race/ethnicity.** Reviewing the race/ethnicity of the respondents, the most frequently reported ethnicity was White. White respondents represented 90.5% ($N = 267$) of the total: 86.4% ($N = 51$) for respondents with special education certification, and 91.4% ($N = 212$) for respondents without special education certification. The second most frequently reported ethnicity was Black/African American (4.4%, $N = 13$); 11.9% ($N = 7$) of the respondents with special education certification and 2.6% ($N = 6$) of the respondents without special education certification were Black/African American. The third most frequently reported ethnicity was Hispanic/Latino/a, at 3.1% ($N = 9$). There were no respondents in the certified group reporting Hispanic/Latino/a as their ethnicity, but 3.9% ($N = 9$) non-special-education-licensed respondents were Hispanic/Latino/a.

**Age.** The most frequently reported age range for the total respondents was 51-55, with 18.8% ($N = 55$) of the respondents in this age category. Considering the subgroup of special...
education certified respondents, the most frequently reported age category also was 51-55, with 27.1% \((N = 16)\) of the respondents reporting this age category. The majority of the non-special education certified respondents indicated they were between the ages of 41-45, with 19.7\% \((N = 55)\) of the respondents selecting this age category.

**Highest degree earned.** The majority of respondents reported a Master’s degree as their highest degree earned (66.8\%, \(N = 195\)); 59.3\% \((N = 35)\) of special education certified respondents and 68.7\% \((N = 160)\) of non-special education certified respondents reported a Master’s degree. Respondents reported an Education Specialist degree as the next most commonly attained degree with 22.3\% \((N = 65)\) of the total respondents reporting, with 25.4\% \((N = 15)\) of special education certified and 21.5\% \((N = 50)\) of non-special education certified respondents reporting this degree. Finally, 10.3\% \((N = 30)\) of respondents reported a Doctor of Education or Doctor of Philosophy as their highest degree, with 13.6\% \((N = 8)\) of special education certified and 9.4\% \((N = 22)\) of the non-special education certified respondents reporting this degree.

**Special education director certification.** Nineteen (5.8\%) of the overall respondent group indicated they had attained special education director certification. Of the 59 respondents certified to teach special education, 12 (20.3\%) also held special education director certification, while 6 (2.6\%) of the non-special education certified respondents reported holding special education director certification.

**Teaching experience.** Respondents reported a range from 0-37 years of teaching experience, with a mean of 12.83 years (Table 4). Respondents certified in special education reported a slightly higher mean of 15.25 years, ranging from 3-35 years, with non-certified respondents reporting an average of 11.88 years of teaching experience, ranging from 0-37 years.
Table 4

Respondents’ Professional Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Certified</th>
<th>Non-certified</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years of teaching experience in grades K-12</td>
<td>3-35 0-37 0-37</td>
<td>15.25 11.88</td>
<td>12.83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of experience as an assistant principal or principal</td>
<td>2-29 0-29 0-29</td>
<td>9.85 8.79</td>
<td>9.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years conducting teacher evaluations</td>
<td>2-29 1-29 1-29</td>
<td>10.69 9.06</td>
<td>9.44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years conducting special education teacher evaluations</td>
<td>0-29 0-29 0-29</td>
<td>10.22 8.52</td>
<td>8.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Administrative experience. The years of building administrative experience for the respondent group ranged from 0 to 29 years, with a mean of 9.06 years (Table 4). Respondents certified as special education teachers reported a range of 2-29 years, with a mean of 9.85 years. Respondents not certified as special education teachers reported a range of administrative experience from 0-29 years with a mean of 8.79 years. Respondents certified as special education teachers reported a slightly higher mean number of years working as administrators than did those not holding this certification.

Experience evaluating teachers. Experience with formally evaluating teachers ranged from 1 to 29 years for total respondents, with a mean of 9.44 years. Respondents not certified to teach special education also reported a range of 1-29 years of evaluation experience, with a mean of 9.06 years. Respondents certified in special education reported slightly more experience, with a range of 2-29 years and mean of 10.69 years (Table 4).

Experience evaluating special education teachers. The range of years evaluating special education teachers was consistent among the respondents certified as special education teachers, respondents not certified as special education teachers, as well as the total respondents,
reporting 0-29 years (Table 4). Respondents certified as special education teachers reported a slightly higher mean ($M = 10.22$ years), than did respondents not certified as special education teachers ($M = 8.52$ years) and total respondents ($M = 8.84$ years).

**Analysis of Data**

Survey data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The purpose of descriptive statistics is to organize and summarize observations so that they are easier to understand (Minium, King, & Bear, 1993). Descriptive statistics provide a means for describing a single attribute of a set of numbers (Krathwohl, 1998). Frequency distribution using measures of central tendency, specifically, the mean, were used to provide a general understanding of the responses from the population. Unlike other measures of central tendency, the mean is responsive to the exact position of each score in a distribution (Minium et al.). The mean is selected as a measure of descriptive statistics when the measure of central tendency should reflect the total of the scores in the response (Minium et al.). By selecting the mean, the descriptive analysis of the responses demonstrates consideration of all the responses to a survey item.

In addition to basic descriptive statistics, inferential statistics were utilized to draw conclusions from the respondents of the questionnaire to the targeted population. Although the entire targeted population was invited to participate in this study, it is acknowledged that not everyone in the population responded. Therefore, inferential statistics were applied to draw conclusions from the respondents to the greater, targeted population. This research utilized independent $t$ tests to compare the mean scores of two different groups (Frankel & Wallen,
Appendix F provides information regarding the research question, questionnaire item correlation, and statistical analysis used to address each question.

Research question 1 utilized descriptive and inferential statistical analyses to determine the extent to which respondents perceived the effectiveness of the evaluation system in addressing the unique job responsibilities of special education teachers. The mean and standard deviation were calculated for the total respondents, respondents certified as special education teachers and respondents not certified as special education teachers. In addition to considering the effectiveness of the evaluation process for special education teachers, respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of the evaluation process for general education teachers to determine if there was a difference in perception of the process. Independent t-tests were also conducted to determine if the difference in responses were significant.

Research question 2 used descriptive statistics to describe the extent to which principals perceived their evaluation processes to differentiate between the job responsibilities of general and special education teachers. Descriptive statistics of frequency distribution were calculated to determine if differentiated systems were employed. Additionally, a qualitative analysis of open-ended responses was conducted, as respondents who indicated a differentiated process were asked to describe it. Open-ended responses were coded for theme and reported as a frequency distribution.

Research question 3 and 4 utilized descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze questionnaire responses. Research question 3 attempted to determine the extent to which respondents believed the unique job responsibilities special education teachers should be included in the evaluation process and the respondents’ ability to provide feedback to special education teachers in this area. Research question 4 attempted to assess respondents’ perception
of their ability to provide feedback to special education teachers of their specific, unique job responsibilities. Mean and frequency distribution were calculated for the total respondents, respondents certified as special education teachers and respondents not certified as special education teachers. This analysis was completed for each questionnaire item related to research question 3 and 4. Additionally, independent t tests were conducted for data reported by respondents with and without special education certification. The purpose of this analysis was to determine the level of significance in the discrepancy of responses between both respondent groups. Additionally, for research question 4, a reliability analysis for questionnaire items in each of the 7 categories was conducted using Cronbach’s Alpha to determine the level of reliability of responses to questions within each category.

In order to address research question 5, an open-ended question was asked on the questionnaire asking respondents to identify way in which the evaluation process could be improved to more fully address the unique needs of special education teachers. Responses were calculated for frequency and qualitative themes were categorized and reported based on the total respondents and then by the special education certification of the respondents.

Summary

This chapter presented the research questions, research methodology, study population, instrument design and validation, instrument distribution, and data collection and analysis. Survey research is designed to gather information from many stakeholders. Through the use of descriptive and inferential statistical analysis, it is hoped that the results of this study contribute to the teacher evaluation research literature related to special education teachers.
Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this study was to discern the perceptions of elementary principals regarding the effectiveness of their school districts’ existing teacher evaluation systems for special education teachers in promoting professional development and job performance accountability. The survey instrument asked elementary principals to rate their ability to evaluate special education teachers and the extent to which they perceived their current evaluation processes were effective at addressing the unique job responsibilities of special education teachers. This study utilized both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze principals’ responses and to determine if there were differences in the perceptions of principals with respect to their special education academic backgrounds. Responses to open-ended questions were coded for common themes. This chapter contains a description of the characteristics of the sample, an overview of the analysis procedures, the major findings for each research question, and a summary of the overall findings from this study.

Research Findings

This section reports findings for the five research questions of this study. In addition to presenting findings of the overall respondent group, the responses were analyzed by subgroups, based upon the respondents’ special education licensure status. A .05 significance level was required for statistical significance.

Research Question 1: To what extent do elementary school principals perceive that their evaluation systems are effective in addressing the unique job responsibilities of their general education and special education teachers?
The respondents’ perceptions of the effectiveness of current evaluation systems for both general and special education teachers were analyzed and are reported. Analysis was conducted based on the special education certification status of respondents.

Table 5 reports the mean ratings of the effectiveness the respondents’ school district evaluation processes in evaluating general educators and special educators as related to professional growth, accountability, and ensuring student learning, using a 4-part scale ($4 = extremely
effective, 3 = somewhat effective, 2 = somewhat ineffective, 1 = very ineffective$). The total respondent group recorded means for professional growth ($M = 3.04$), accountability ($M = 3.03$), and student learning ($M = 3.02$) when evaluating general education teachers. Considering the effectiveness of the evaluation process for special education teachers, total respondents recorded means for professional growth ($M = 2.97$), accountability ($M = 2.90$), and student learning ($M = 2.95$). Thus, the overall respondent group perceived that their districts’ evaluation systems were somewhat effective in promoting professional development, accountability, and student learning when evaluating general education teachers, and slightly less than somewhat effective in facilitating these practices for special education teachers.

Table 5

*Effectiveness of District Evaluation Processes for General and Special Educators*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Total respondents</th>
<th>Certified</th>
<th>Non-certified</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of general educators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional growth</td>
<td>290 3.04 0.73</td>
<td>58 2.98 0.78</td>
<td>232 3.05 0.72</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>289 3.03 0.71</td>
<td>57 3.07 0.70</td>
<td>232 3.02 0.71</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student learning</td>
<td>287 3.02 0.71</td>
<td>58 3.07 0.72</td>
<td>229 3.01 0.72</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
Respondents who were not certified in special education perceived that their current evaluation systems were *somewhat effective* for special education teachers in the areas of professional growth ($M = 3.05$), accountability ($M = 3.02$), and student learning ($M = 3.01$); respondents with special education certification recorded similar mean scores for the evaluation of general education teachers (professional growth, $M = 2.98$; accountability, $M = 3.07$; student learning, $M = 3.07$ (Table 5). Both subgroups recorded slightly lower means when rating the effectiveness of their evaluation systems for special education teachers; respondents with special education certification reported mean scores that were marginally higher than those without this certification (Table 5).

The responses were analyzed using an independent $t$ samples test. No significant differences were found based upon the respondents’ special education certification when reporting on the districts’ evaluation systems’ effectiveness with evaluating general educators in the areas of professional growth ($t = -.6, df = 288, p = .55$), accountability ($t = .46, df = 287, p = .64$), and student learning ($t = .53, df = 285, p = .60$) (Table 5). Analyzing the responses based upon the respondents’ special education certification for the evaluation of special education teachers, no significant differences were found in the areas of professional growth ($t = .52, df = \ldots$)
289, \( p = .60 \)), accountability \( (t = .54, \, df = 286, \, p = .59) \), and student learning \( (t = .91, \, df = 286, \, p = .37) \).

**Research Question 2:** To what extent do elementary school principals perceive that their evaluation systems differentiate between the responsibilities of general and special education teachers?

A forced-choice item asked whether principals used a differentiated evaluation/supervision instrument for general and special educators. Of the 325 responses to this question, 48 (14.8\%) indicated there was a differentiated evaluation system with 277 (85.2\%) reporting no differentiation (Table 6). Therefore, over 8 in 10 respondents reported that their districts’ evaluation systems and processes were consistent for both general and special education teachers.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differentiated Evaluation System</th>
<th>( N )</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>83.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To gain more information regarding differentiated evaluation systems, those respondents who reported differentiated evaluation practices were asked to describe how their system was different for special education teachers. Forty-seven of the 48 respondents provided a narrative explanation, although three responses were unrelated to the question. Ten (22.7\%) were reported by respondents certified in special education, while 34 (77.3\%) were provided by respondents not certified in special education. These open-ended responses were analyzed for common themes, and three prominent themes were identified. Results are presented in Table 7.
Table 7

Themes of Differentiated Evaluation Systems for Special Education Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Total respondents</th>
<th>Certified respondents</th>
<th>Non-certified respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most common</td>
<td>Completely different evaluation system for special education teachers.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second most common</td>
<td>The evaluation tool is applied to all teachers, with some differentiation for special education teachers.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third most common</td>
<td>The use of Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for general and special education teachers.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth most common</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first major theme, noted by 21 (43.8%) respondents, was the use of a completely different evaluation system for special education teachers. Respondents noted that their special education teachers were evaluated through the principals’ use of the teacher evaluation system from the special education cooperative that supported their school. Some respondents reported that differentiation occurring in the evaluation process was more directly related to specific occupational fields within the overall field of special education, such as a speech and language pathologist or a psychologist rather than a “typical” special education teacher. Therefore, the frequency of the responses within this theme should be considered with caution. Finally, one respondent reported a recent change in the evaluation process for special education teachers based on their unique job responsibilities: “Our evaluation plan for sped [special education] teachers is based on standards for sped teachers (where previously our plan was designed for general education teachers and we made it ‘fit’ for sped teachers).”
The second most frequently reported theme was that the evaluation systems contained basic standards and expectations that were applied to each teacher, but with an ability to differentiate the process. There were 17 (36.1%) responses associated with this theme. A few responses within this theme described a formative process that allowed for differentiation of observations and feedback but required a summative evaluation instrument that was uniformly applied to every teacher and not differentiated. Another response indicated that differentiation was the standard in the evaluation process for all teachers, regardless of teaching assignment. The use of professional growth plans was a common strategy, highlighting that differentiation is embedded within professional growth plans. One respondent noted that the evaluation plan for special educators was more detailed including items for evaluation, such as “differentiated instruction, knowledge of IEP paperwork and evaluation, and a component related to professional development with specific disciplines and parent communication.” One respondent gave a comparison of the areas evaluated for general and special education teachers. The areas assessed were comparable but with slight changes to the names, making the areas considered more specific to special education teacher responsibilities. For example, a general education teacher is assessed in instructional planning and strategy, while a special education teacher is assessed on program planning intervention/assessment strategies. It appears that this type of differentiation in the names of the performance categories assists teachers and evaluators in understanding how the areas apply to general and special education teachers. Responses in this area indicated that there is differentiation in the evaluation system for special education teachers.

The third theme noted in the differentiation of teacher evaluation for special education teachers was the use of Charlotte Danielson’s framework for teaching. Six responses were reported within this theme. One respondent noted that her school had created rubrics for special
education teachers, as well as other teachers with unique job descriptions, using the framework for teaching developed by Charlotte Danielson.

Finally, there were three narrative responses noted as “other” because they were unique responses that could not be grouped into themes. One response indicated the use of interventions. Another respondent noted she did not have time to indicate the differences. The remaining response indicated a need for supplemental reading materials and more time/training on differentiated instruction.

**Research Question 3:** *To what extent do elementary school principals believe the evaluation/supervision process should include unique performance indicators of special education teachers and to what degree are they able to provide feedback?*

Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with a statement that the supervision/evaluation process for special education teachers should include performance indicators related to the unique job responsibilities of special educators, using a 5-point scale (*1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree 5 = strongly agree*). The mean for the 292 respondents was 3.54, indicating that they scored between neutral and agree. Responses were disaggregated into two groups, based upon special education teacher certification. Certified respondents indicated a slightly higher mean (*M* = 3.56) than did non-certified respondents (*M* = 3.53), but the differences were not statistically significant (*t* = .15, *p* = .88; Table 8).

Table 8

*Respondents’ Perceptions of the Need to Incorporate Special Education Performance Indicators in the Evaluation Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent groups</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certified</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-certified</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents also rated their skill/comfort levels in providing feedback to general and special educators through the supervision/evaluation process, using a 4-point scale (1 = basic, 2 = moderate, 3 = good, 4 = highly developed). The 293 respondents recorded a mean of 3.44, which is between good and highly developed, regarding their ability to provide feedback to general education teachers (Table 9). These respondents recorded a lower mean (M = 3.15) regarding their ability to provide feedback to special education teachers, also falling between the good and highly developed range. Table 9 presents the data collected, with results disaggregated based on respondents’ teacher certification in special education. Respondents certified in special education rated their feedback skills to both special and general education teachers more highly than did those without such certification. Perceived effectiveness in providing feedback to general education teachers was not statistically significant based upon special education certification (t = 1.9, p = .06), but perceived effectiveness with providing feedback to special education teachers was significant (t = 6.72, p < .001; Table 9).

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Certified</th>
<th></th>
<th>Non-certified</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback to general education</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback to special education</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>6.72</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question 4:** To what extent do elementary principals perceive that they are proficient in providing feedback to special education teachers on various aspects of their responsibilities?
The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) identified seven key areas in which special education teachers have a professional responsibility: instructional responsibilities, management of behavior, support procedures, parent relationships, advocacy, professional development, and working with other professionals. Respondents rated their levels of expertise in providing feedback to special educators on these key areas on a 4-point scale (1 = basic, 2 = moderate, 3 = good, 4 = highly developed). Results for each category are reported first, and then results are reported for items within categories. Finally, reliability results for each category are presented.

Table 10 notes the ratings from each of the seven categories for all respondents and also by special education certification status.

### Table 10

**Comparison of CEC Identified Areas of Professional Responsibility**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Certified</th>
<th>Non-certified</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional responsibilities</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of behavior</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support procedures</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent relationships</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with other professionals</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

As noted in Table 10, respondents certified as special education teachers rated themselves higher in their ability to provide feedback to special educators in each of the CEC categories, with means ranging between 3.3 and 3.66. The means for respondents not certified as special education teachers ranged between 2.99 and 3.33. Both respondent groups reported “professional
development” as their weakest area in providing feedback to the special education teachers. While special education certified respondents rated “management of behavior” as their strongest area for providing feedback, those without special education certification rated “working with other professionals” as their strongest area.

Analyzed by special education certification, statistically significant differences were found in each category: instructional responsibilities ($t = 5.41, p < .001$), management of behavior ($t = 4.62, p < .001$), support procedures ($t = 2.18, p = .03$) parent relationships ($t = 2.19, p = .03$), advocacy ($t = 3.43, p = .001$), professional development ($t = 3.32, p = .001$), working with other professionals ($t = 2.59, p = .01$; Table 10). In each instance, respondents with special education certification reported higher levels of expertise than did their counterparts who did not possess this certification. The responses collected for each CEC category were further analyzed based on specific skills associated within each category. This information is provided in Tables 11-17.
Table 11

Respondents’ Self-Reported Expertise in Providing Feedback to Special Education Teachers on Instructional Responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Certified</th>
<th>Non-certified</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies whether special educators individualize instruction for their students</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selects appropriate instructional materials</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determines whether special education teachers take accurate program data, based on efficient and objective record keeping practices for the purposes of decision making for students</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintains student confidentiality</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accurate in creating and completing IEP paperwork</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates quality IEPs</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitors student progress toward attaining IEP goals</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitates effective IEP meetings</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complies with specific IEP related deadlines</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .01. **p < .001.
**Instructional responsibilities.** Instructional responsibilities of special education teachers included nine different skills (Table 11). Overall, respondents rated their ability to provide feedback in the area of “creating quality IEPs” as their least-developed area of expertise ($M = 2.92$), while providing feedback on “maintaining student confidentiality” was rated highest ($M = 3.63$). Respondents with special education teacher certification rated “selecting appropriate instructional materials” as their weakest area ($M = 3.22$), with “maintaining student confidentiality” as the strongest area for providing quality feedback ($M = 3.68$). Respondents not certified as special education teachers indicated “creating quality IEPs” as the weakest ($M = 2.81$), while providing feedback on “maintaining student confidentiality” was rated as their strongest area within the instructional responsibilities category ($M = 3.62$).

Independent $t$ tests determined that eight of the nine items were statistically significant, based upon special education certification: “identifies whether special educators individualize instruction for their students” ($t = 4.86, p < .001$); “selects appropriate instructional materials” ($t = 2.84, p = .006$); “determines whether special education teachers take accurate program data, based on efficient and objective record keeping practices for the purposes of decision making for students” ($t = 3.04, p = .003$); “accurate in creating and completing IEP paperwork” ($t = 4.54, p < .001$); “creates quality IEPs” ($t = 5.06, p < .001$); “monitors student progress toward attaining IEP goals” ($t = 3.74, p < .001$); “facilitates effective IEP meetings” ($t = 3.11, p = .002$); and “complies with specific IEP related deadlines” ($t = 3.81, p < .001$). In each of these instances, respondents holding special education teacher certification reported higher levels of expertise in providing feedback to special education teachers than did their colleagues with this certification. The remaining item, “maintains student confidentiality” ($t = .63, p = .53$), was not statistically significant.
**Student behavior management.** The next category of professional responsibility for special education teachers was in the area of student behavior management. The overall respondent group reported their strongest ability to provide feedback in the area of “applies approved disciplinary and behavioral procedures while maintaining human rights and dignity of the student” ($M = 3.48$) (Table 12). The second category in the area of student behavior management was “uses specific goals and objectives for behavior management practices within the students’ IEP” ($M = 3.22$). Respondents reported a higher ability to provide feedback to special education teachers in the area of applying behavioral and disciplinary supports to students than their ability to provide feedback on a special education teacher’s application of IEP goals and objectives in managing student behavior.

Table 12

*Respondents’ Self-appraisal in Providing Feedback to Special Education Teachers on Their Management of Behavior*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Certified</th>
<th>Non-certified</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applies approved disciplinary and behavioral procedures, while maintaining human rights and dignity of the student</td>
<td>59 3.68 .54</td>
<td>231 3.41 .65</td>
<td>290 3.48 .63</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>104.6</td>
<td>.001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses specific goals and objectives for behavior management practices within the students’ IEP</td>
<td>58 3.60 .59</td>
<td>231 3.12 .67</td>
<td>289 3.22 .66</td>
<td>5.03</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>&lt;.001*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*$p < .001$.*

The independent $t$ tests confirmed significant differences for “applies approved disciplinary and behavioral procedures, while maintaining human rights and dignity of the student” ($t = 3.3$, $p = .001$) and “uses specific goals and objectives for behavior management practices within the students’ IEP” ($t = 5.03$, $p < .001$).
practices within the students’ IEP” \( (t = 5.03, p < .001) \). Respondents with special education certification rated themselves higher than those without certification.

**Support procedures.** The third category identified by the CEC as part of the professional responsibilities of a special education teacher is support procedures. Total respondents \( (N = 285) \) recorded the highest mean for the ability to provide feedback on “reports changes in student behavior to IEP team members, including parents” \( (M = 3.36) \). The second item in this category, “seeks support from colleague or supervisors as needed” had a mean of 3.34 for total respondents \( (N = 287) \), and 3.47 for certified respondents.

Table 13

**Respondents’ Self-appraisal in Providing Feedback to Special Education Teachers on Their Support Procedures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Certified</th>
<th>Non-certified</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>( t )</th>
<th>( df )</th>
<th>( p )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seeks support from colleague or supervisors as needed</td>
<td>58 3.47 .68</td>
<td>229 3.31 .65</td>
<td>287 3.34 .66</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>285 .12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reports changes in student behavior to IEP team members including parents</td>
<td>57 3.54 .66</td>
<td>228 3.31 .69</td>
<td>285 3.36 .68</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>283 .02*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*\( p < .05 \).*

Independent \( t \) tests were calculated for based upon special education certification. Results were statistically significant for “reports changes in student behavior to IEP team members including parents \( (t = 2.35, p = .02) \), with special education certified respondents rating themselves higher than those without certification.

**Parent relationships.** Four items were contained within the CEC parent relationship category. Total respondents reported “develops effective communication with parents” as the strongest skill in this category when providing feedback to special education teachers \( (M = 3.45; \) Table 14). The area within this category that respondents reported as the weakest was “utilizes
parents’ knowledge and expertise in conducting special education and related services for persons with exceptionalities” \((M = 3.15)\).

Table 14

**Respondents’ Self-appraisal in Providing Feedback to Special Education Teachers on Their Parent Relationships**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Certified</th>
<th>Non-certified</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>(t)</th>
<th>(df)</th>
<th>(p)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develops effective communication with parents</td>
<td>59  3.49  .68</td>
<td>231  3.44  .61</td>
<td>290  3.45  .62</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeks parents’ knowledge and expertise in conducting special education and related services for persons with exceptionalities</td>
<td>59  3.34  .73</td>
<td>231  3.17  .71</td>
<td>290  3.20  .71</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>.102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilizes parents’ knowledge and expertise in conducting special education and related services for persons with exceptionalities</td>
<td>58  3.31  .73</td>
<td>229  3.11  .71</td>
<td>287  3.15  .71</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognize and respect cultural diversities with families</td>
<td>57  3.53  .68</td>
<td>228  3.26  .68</td>
<td>285  3.31  .68</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>.01*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(p < .05\).

Respondents with special education certification rated their feedback to special education teachers significantly higher than those without certification in the category of “recognizing and respecting cultural diversities with families” \((t = 2.60, p = .01)\). There were no significant differences for the remaining three items.

**Advocacy.** Respondents rated their skills in two areas within the advocacy category. The mean for all respondents was 3.31 for “advocates for least restrictive special education services for students,” and the mean was 3.29 for “follow local, state, and federal laws and regulations,
which mandate a free, appropriate public education to exceptional students,” indicating a “good” ability to provide feedback on legal obligations of special education teachers (Table 15).

Table 15

Respondents’ Self-appraisal in Providing Feedback to Special Education Teachers on Their Advocacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Certified</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advocates for least restrictive special education services for students</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>.002*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows local, state and federal laws and regulations, which mandate a free, appropriate public education to exceptional students</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>.003*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .01.

Respondents with special education certification rated their feedback skills significantly higher on both items: “advocates for least restrictive special education services for students” ($t = 3.19, p = .002$) and “follows local, state and federal laws and regulations, which mandate a free, appropriate public education to exceptional students” ($t = 3.04, p = .003$).

**Professional development.** Within the category of professional development, the strongest area reported by respondents was “systematically advances their knowledge and skills in order to maintain a high level of competence and response to the changing needs of persons with disabilities,” with total respondents recording a mean of 3.13 (Table 16). The next item was “adheres to standards and codes of ethics of those [professional] organizations,” with total respondents recording a mean of 3.09. For the final item, “participates in professional organizations,” total respondents recorded a mean of 2.95.
Table 16

Respondents’ Self-appraisal in Providing Feedback to Special Education Teachers on Their Professional Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Certified</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Non-certified</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systematically advances their knowledge and skills in order to maintain a high level of competence and response to the changing needs of persons with disabilities</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participates in professional organizations</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adheres to standards and codes of ethics of those organizations</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .01.

Significant differences were found for “systematically advances their knowledge and skills in order to maintain a high level of competence and response to the changing needs of persons with disabilities” \((t = 3.41, p = .001)\) and “participates in professional development organizations” \((t = 2.79, p = .006)\), with respondents certified in special education indicating a stronger ability to provide feedback.

**Working with other professionals.** Within the category of working with other professionals, the strongest item reported by all respondents was “maintains effective interpersonal relations with colleagues and other professionals, helping them to develop and maintain positive and accurate perceptions about the special education profession,” with a mean of 3.44 (Table 17). Respondents recorded a mean of 3.41 for “consults with general educators as well as other school personnel serving persons with disabilities” and a mean of 3.28 for “recognizes and acknowledges the competencies and expertise of members representing other disciplines.”
Table 17

Respondents’ Self-appraisal in Providing Feedback to Special Education Teachers on Working With Other Professionals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Certified</th>
<th>Non-certified</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes and acknowledges the competencies and expertise of members representing other disciplines</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>.002**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consults with general educators as well as other school personnel serving persons with disabilities</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>.04*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintains effective interpersonal relations with colleagues and other professionals, helping them to develop and maintain positive and accurate perceptions about the special education profession</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>.03*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Significant differences were noted for all three items, with respondents certified in special education reporting a stronger ability to provide feedback: “recognizes and acknowledges the competencies and expertise of members representing other disciplines” \( (t = 3.12, p = .002) \), “consults with general educators as well as other school personnel serving persons with disabilities” \( (t = 2.07, p = .04) \), “maintains effective interpersonal relations with colleagues and other professionals, helping them to develop and maintain positive and accurate perceptions about the special education profession” \( (t = 2.15, p = .03) \); Table 17).

Because each category contained multiple items, response reliability was calculated using Cronbach’s Alpha. Results of the reliability analysis should be considered with caution because categories that contain more items have a more valid reliability measure, and several of these
categories only contained 2-3 items. Listed in order from most reliable to least reliable, the categories are “other professionals,” “instructional responsibilities,” “parent relationships,” “support procedures,” “management of behavior,” “advocacy,” and “professional development.” (Table 18).

Table 18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>n of items</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional responsibilities</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>.907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of behavior</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>.802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support procedures</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>.807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent relationships</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>.900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>.786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>.778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other professionals</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>.922</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question 5**: In what ways can the supervision/evaluation process be improved to more fully address the unique job responsibilities of special education teachers?

Respondents provided 201 recommendations for improving their districts’ evaluation practices for special education teachers. These responses were analyzed and coded for common themes and also were disaggregated based on respondents’ special education certification status. Of the total 201 narrative responses, 144 were provided from individuals without special education teacher certification, 50 from individuals with certification, and 7 from respondents who did not indicate whether they had obtained special education certification. Table 19 summarizes the major themes.
Table 19

Recommendations for Improving the Evaluation Process for Special Education Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Total respondents</th>
<th>Certified respondents</th>
<th>Non-certified respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved evaluation process</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for a new evaluation tool</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More evaluator training</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None/no need for differentiation</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently under review/development (wait and see)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current system meeting needs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many changes needed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Listed in order of descending frequency, the suggestions were as follows: an improved evaluation process (N = 77, 39.7%), improved evaluation tool (N = 63, 32.5%), more training for evaluators (N = 19, 9.8%), a response of “none” (N = 8, 4.1%), currently under review/development (“wait and see;” N = 8, 4.1%), no need for differentiating (N = 6, 3.1%), current system is meeting needs, no need for changes (N = 5, 2.6%), “unsure” (N = 5, 2.1%), and too many changes are needed (N =5, 2.1%). Responses were disaggregated based on special education certification, and this information is included in Table 19.

**Suggestions by respondents certified in special education.** Fifty respondents with special education teacher certification provided a narrative response to this question. The major themes and suggestions are presented below.

**New evaluation tool.** The most common theme, reported by 19 respondents (38.0%) was the need for a new summative evaluation tool. Responses within this theme cited a need for a tool that incorporated the unique needs and job responsibilities for special education teachers.
Two responses noted a desire for a “checklist” type of tool that could enumerate the unique job responsibilities of special education teachers. As part of these responses, another identified area for improvement was the need for the evaluation instrument to provide constructive feedback and to identify areas for needed improvement.

*Improved evaluation process.* The second major theme for special education-certified respondents was the desire for an improved evaluation process, with 15 responses (30.0%). Within the responses indicating a need for an improved process, three major areas were suggested. The first suggestion, with 8 of the 15 responses, indicated a need to include a variety of means for gathering information about a teacher. Suggestions included professional growth models, including one observation by someone with special education expertise, project-based evaluations for very successful teachers, and a means for providing more anecdotal/informal observation feedback. Also recommended for improving the process was including a component of student data/student growth, with 5 of the 15 responses. The recommendations in this area focused on including data in teacher evaluation to demonstrate whether or not their students had made academic progress. Finally, within this theme, two responses indicated a need for an improved evaluation process that supported the unique needs of special education teachers. Rather than just having a tool that identifies the unique needs of special education teachers, respondents suggested a need for the process to include more differentiated ways to address unique special education concerns. Some needs noted were to provide feedback to teachers on their ability to maintain IEPs, facilitating meetings, and the teacher’s ability to address the unique special education needs of students.

*Additional evaluator training.* The third most frequently reported theme by respondents with special education teaching certification was the need for more comprehensive evaluator
training, with 8 of 50 (16.0%) responses. One respondent noted, “To evaluate any teacher you need to know what the person’s jobs are. Most district administrators have limited to no coursework in special education and they do not care to attain any additional information in the area of special education.” Other recommendations included the need for professional development for evaluators related to how to provide feedback and coaching to special education teachers as well as developing and engaging in professional conversations with professional learning teams about best practice implementation.

*No need for differentiation.* The fourth most frequently reported theme was the respondents’ assertion that there was no need for differentiating the evaluation instrument or process for special education teachers. Of the 6 responses (12.0%) in this area, comments included the following: “a good teacher is a good teacher,” “I can identify strong teachers regardless of their teaching expertise,” and “We use the Danielson Model of Evaluation. I believe that offers teachers the ability to learn and grow no matter what their specialty is.”

*Currently under review.* Finally, there were two responses (4.0%) that noted their evaluation instrument or process was in the process of being revised, and they wanted to “wait and see” regarding the effectiveness of the new tool or process. These respondents did not comment on the previous system or its effectiveness.

*Suggestions by respondents not certified in special education.* The responses from respondents who did not hold special education teacher certification were coded for major themes. There were eight themes identified within the 144 responses, which are reported in this section by order of frequency.

*Improved evaluation process.* The first theme was the need for a better evaluation process, which was reported by 62 of the 144 respondents (43.1%). The primary suggestion for
change in the process was the inclusion of special education responsibilities within the
evaluation process (16 of 62 responses; 25.8%). Suggestions included evaluating a special
education teacher’s ability to complete IEP paperwork, timeliness from when observation occurs
to when feedback is given, behavior management, working with general education teachers,
choosing the correct interventions, and whether the special education teachers were following the
IEP and teaching the skills identified on a student’s IEP. The next suggestion for change in the
evaluation process was the need for collaboration (7 of 62; 11.3%). The main suggestion
regarding collaboration was the need for building principals to consult with special education
administrators regarding the effectiveness of the special education teachers. However, one
respondent noted the need for administrators to meet with special education teachers on a regular
basis: “We currently meet monthly with district special education teachers to focus on their
unique needs. . . . They have input on the subject matter of those meetings.”

Another suggestion within this theme included the suggestion of having administrators,
other than the building principal, evaluate the special education teachers (6 of 62, 9.7%). The
most frequent suggestion in this area was to have the special education director provide the
evaluation for special education teachers. The next most frequent suggestion with regard to the
evaluation process included some general suggestions (5 of 62, 8.1%). Some suggestions
included, better process for tenured teachers to interact with the evaluator, more clearly defined
standards for professional practice, and considering the ages and development of the students the
teacher is working with. The need for including professional development for special education
teachers within the evaluation process was also as frequently reported as some of the general
suggestions (5 of 62, 8.1%). Suggestions in this area included professional development for
special education teachers in skills that are unique to special education teachers such as IEP goal writing and ways to assess student growth on IEP goals,

These next three suggestions for improvement in the evaluation process for special education teachers were each reported by 4 of 62 (6.5%) of the respondents. Suggestions included the use of Charlotte Danielson’s framework for teaching, having special education teachers participate in a professional growth model, and including a component of student growth (accountability) in the evaluation process for special education teachers. The next most frequently reported suggestions for changes to the evaluation process with 2 of 62 (3.2%) included providing more time for the administrator to observe the special education teacher working with students within the classroom, requiring a reflection component to the evaluation process for teachers, a focus on the individualized instruction special education teachers provide to students and providing a more goal oriented evaluation system where teachers establish professional goals and assess their ability to achieve those goals.

Finally, with regard to suggestions for change to the evaluation process, there were a few singleton responses that were noteworthy. One respondent noted the need for interactions between the evaluator and teacher to occur more frequently. Also, one respondent noted the need to include a component from families that work with the special education teachers. Gathering input from families would provide an additional avenue for data regarding the family’s satisfaction with the teacher and the teacher’s job performance.

New evaluation tool. The second most frequently reported area for change was the evaluation instrument (44 of 144 responses, or 30.6%). The most common suggestion for change in the evaluation instrument was the need for differentiation. “We need to provide evaluation tools for the various different areas throughout a school district. One size does not fit all.”
Several comments in this section noted that evaluation tools currently in use were antiquated and outdated regarding the ability to comment on current teaching practices. Another respondent commented regarding the need for “differentiated evaluations to meet the job responsibilities. The primary goal should still be teaching and learning.” Finally, one respondent noted, “The instrument needs to evolve to specifically target curriculum, instruction and practices that affect student achievement.”

Additional evaluator training. The third most frequently reported suggestion was the need for additional evaluator training. Eleven of 144 respondents (7.6%) noted this as a need for improvement. Suggestions for training or professional development in this area included, training in special education law, special education curriculum and programs, instructional strategies that are recommend as best practices in special education, and ways in which evaluators can guide special education teachers in their ability to differentiate, question, and assess student learning. One respondent noted, “We are a small school district with only 4 special education teachers. We do not have a special education coordinator, so the responsibility is on the principal to keep up and provide opportunities for staff to grow though professional development and informal and formal observations regularly.

No changes suggested. The fourth theme for the responses reported by respondents without special education teacher certification was that no changes to the evaluation process were needed (8 of 144, or 5.6%). No new information was provided regarding suggestions for improvement.

Currently under review. The fifth theme reported by respondents without special education certification indicated that their current evaluation process was under review and/or going through revisions. Six of 144 respondents (4.2%) indicated that their evaluation
process/tool was currently under review/new development, and the respondents did not provide a comment with regard to the system that was currently in place.

*No need for differentiation.* The sixth theme identified by the responses from non-certified respondents was that the current evaluation system meets the needs of special education teachers and therefore there was no need for differentiation. Five of 144 respondents (3.5%) indicated that the evaluation system currently used by their schools/districts was addressing the needs of the teachers and administrators. “Ours does a great job meeting everyone’s needs through the evaluation process.” One respondent noted, “Every teacher at every level and/or subject matter has unique job responsibilities/expectations that need to be considered and evaluated in the process both formally and informally.” Another respondent reported, “Good teaching is good teaching. However, having additional resources to identify that in special educational settings would be beneficial.”

*Unsure/too many changes needed.* The seventh thematic category reported by respondents not certified in special education was that they were unable to fully describe changes that should occur, with 8 of 144 (5.6%) respondents. Four of these respondents indicated that they were unsure, and another four reported that there were simply too many changes needed.

**Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of the study. Survey data were analyzed for all respondents and subsequently analyzed based on whether or not special education teaching certification was held by the respondent. The findings indicated that, based upon whether they held special education teaching certification, Illinois elementary school principals did not have
significantly different perceptions of the effectiveness of an evaluation system to provide professional growth opportunities, teacher accountability, or student growth.

Respondents also provided information regarding whether the current evaluation systems within their school districts differentiated between the professional responsibilities of general and special education teachers. The data overwhelmingly indicated that evaluations systems currently in place did not differentiate for general and special education teachers. Respondents who reported a differentiated system for their special education teachers provided these responses, in decreasing order of frequency: special education teachers were evaluated using an entirely different system; a standard evaluation process was employed for both general and special education teachers, with the process allowing for differentiated components for all teachers; and Charlotte Danielson’s framework for teaching was utilized to develop unique rubrics for special education teachers.

Asked about the extent to which the evaluation process should include unique performance indicators, respondents generally were neutral. There were no significant differences in responses between principals with special education teacher certification and those not holding this certification. Respondents rated their ability to provide feedback to general and special education teachers during the evaluation process. There was no statistically significant difference based upon principals’ special education certification status when providing feedback to general education teachers, with both subgroups reporting “good” ability to provide feedback. Asked about their ability to provide feedback to special education teachers, statistically significant differences were found. Although both groups rated their ability to provide feedback to special education teachers as “good,” principals with special education teacher certification rated their ability higher than principals without such certification.
Respondents also were asked to self-assess their ability to provide feedback to special education teachers based on the unique job responsibilities of special education teachers. Respondents with special education teaching certification consistently reported a stronger ability to provide feedback in the seven areas than those without this certification. The differences in all seven areas were statistically significant.

Respondents identified ways in which the supervision/evaluation process could be improved to more fully address the unique job responsibilities of special education teachers. Respondents with special education teaching certification cited the need for a new evaluation instrument as the primary concern and the need for an improved evaluation process as their secondary concern. Respondents without special education teaching certification also agreed with these needs but in a different order: change the evaluation process was rated as primary concern and the need for an improved evaluation instrument was ranked as the second most important need.
Chapter Five

Summary, Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

This chapter presents a summary of the research study, including the purposes of the study, description of the methodology, and major findings. The research questions were the guiding framework for the study design and the conclusions reported in this chapter. Limitations also are shared in this chapter to assist in interpreting the data collected and results of the study. The discussion provides possible explanations for the findings and implications, including recommendations for future research.

Overview of Study, Methodology, and Findings

The purposes of this study were as follows: (a) to determine the perceptions of elementary school principals regarding the effectiveness of their existing teacher evaluation processes and supervisory practices for special education teachers, and (b) to determine principals’ self-assessments of their efficacy in supervising and evaluating special education teachers. As the researcher, I was interested in learning whether elementary principals with significant special education training, identified as principals with special education teacher certification, perceived the effectiveness of the evaluation/supervisory evaluation process differently than principals without special education teacher certification. The study employed survey research methodology.

The population for this study included 1,551 public school elementary principals in Illinois. For the purpose of this research, “elementary school” was defined as an Illinois public school that educated students in pre-kindergarten-sixth grade, containing at least three grades within the pre-kindergarten through sixth grade level. Usable responses to an online
questionnaire were obtained from 330 principals, representing 21.28% of the population. Data from the online questionnaire were downloaded into an electronic spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel. Data then were further cleaned and sorted before importing into the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Within SPSS, statistical analyses were conducted related to each research question presented within the study. Qualitative data were sorted, analyzed, and coded for common themes.

**Findings**

The guiding questions for this study were: “What are the perceptions of elementary principals regarding the process and tools used to evaluate and supervise special education teachers?” and “Do these perceptions vary based on the academic training principals have in special education?” In order to address these guiding questions, five research questions, and the findings are presented in this section.

**Research Question 1: To what extent do elementary school principals perceive that their evaluation systems are effective in addressing the unique job responsibilities of their general education and special education teachers?**

Using a 4-point scale (4 = extremely effective, 3 = somewhat effective, 2 = somewhat ineffective, 1 = very ineffective), respondents rated the supervision/evaluation process for general educators as somewhat effective for professional growth ($M = 3.04$), accountability ($M = 3.03$), and student learning ($M = 3.02$), but rated the process as slightly less effective for special educators in the areas of professional growth ($M = 2.97$), accountability ($M = 2.90$), and student learning ($M = 2.95$). Respondents certified as special education teachers reported a stronger
ability to evaluate general and special education teachers in these areas than did respondents without certification, although the differences were not statistically significant.

**Research Question 2:** *To what extent do elementary school principals perceive that their evaluation systems differentiate between the responsibilities of general and special education teachers?*

The data overwhelmingly indicated that district teacher evaluations systems currently in place did not differentiate for general and special education teachers. Of the 330 responses to this question, 48 (14.5%) reported there was a differentiated evaluation system in place within their school districts and 277 (83.9%) reported the same evaluation system was used for both general and special education teachers.

Respondents reporting a differentiated evaluations system were asked to describe how the evaluation system was differentiated within their district for general and special education teachers. The 47 responses to this open-ended question were coded for common themes and analyzed based on respondents’ certification in special education. Ten responses (22.7%) were reported from individuals certified in special education and 34 responses (77.3%) were provided by individuals not certified in special education; three respondents did not report their special education status. Respondents who indicated a differentiated evaluation system was in place for special education teachers (44.7%), most commonly noted special education teachers were evaluated using an entirely different system. Responses also noted, with less frequency (36.1%), a standard approach to evaluation for both general and special education teachers with the process allowing for differentiated components for all teachers. The final theme noted in response to this inquiry was the use of Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching.
Respondents (6.4%) felt the use of Danielson’s Framework for Teaching differentiated for the unique needs of special education teachers.

**Research Question 3:** *To what extent do elementary school principals believe the evaluation/supervision process should include unique performance indicators of special education teachers and to what degree are they able to provide feedback?*

Respondents rated an item that the supervision/evaluation process for special education teachers should include performance indicators related to the unique job responsibilities of special educators. Using a 5-point scale (*1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree*). The mean of the 292 respondents was 3.54, indicating a neutral response with a tendency toward agreement. There were no significant differences based upon special education certification of the respondents.

Respondents also assessed their ability to provide feedback to general and special education teachers during the evaluation process using a 4-point scale (*1 = basic, 2 = moderate, 3 = good, 4 = highly developed*). The mean for all respondents was 3.44, indicating a “good” ability to provide feedback. There was no statistically significant difference based upon special education certification status. Asked about their ability to provide feedback to special education teachers during the evaluation process, principals with special education teacher certification rated their feedback skills significantly higher (*M* = 3.66) than did principals without special education teacher certification (*M* = 3.02).

**Research Question 4:** *To what extent do elementary principals perceive that they are proficient in providing feedback to special education teachers on various aspects of their responsibilities?*
Respondents rated their levels of expertise in providing feedback to special educators in seven areas of professional responsibility identified by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), using a 4-point scale (*1 = basic, 2 = moderate, 3 = good, 4 = highly developed*). The means in each category for all respondents were instructional responsibilities (*M* = 3.18), management of behavior (*M* = 3.35), support procedures (*M* = 3.35), parent relationships (*M* = 3.28), advocacy (*M* = 3.30), professional development (*M* = 3.08), and working with other professionals (*M* = 3.37). Respondents holding special education teacher certification reported a stronger ability than their colleagues without such certification to provide feedback in the seven areas; all differences were statistically significant.

**Research Question 5:** *In what ways can the supervision/evaluation process be improved to more fully address the unique job responsibilities of special education teachers?*

Recommendations regarding how the districts’ teacher evaluation systems could be improved to address the professional responsibilities of special education teachers were obtained from 201 respondents; 144 (71.6% answering this question) were from individuals without special education certification, 50 (24.9% answering this question) from individuals with certification, and 7 (3.5% answering this question) from respondents who did not report their special education certification status. Major themes included the need for an improved evaluation process (total = 39.7%, certified = 30.0%, non-certified = 43.1%), the need for a new evaluation tool (total = 32.5%, certified = 38.0%, non-certified = 30.6%), the need for more evaluator training (total = 9.8%, certified = 16.0%, non-certified = 7.6%), no need for differentiation or none (total = 7.0%, certified = 12.0%. Non-certified = 5.6%), the evaluation process is currently under review/development (total = 4.1%, certified = 4.0%, non-certified = 4.2%), the current evaluation process is meeting the needs of all teachers (total = 2.6%, certified = 0%, non-
certified = 3.5%), uncertain what changes should be implemented (total = 2.1%, certified = 0%, non-certified = 2.8%), and too many changes were needed to articulate (total = 2.1%, certified = 0%, non-certified = 2.8%). It was evident from the responses that changes are necessary in current evaluation processes.

Limitations

The limitations for this study were as follows:

1. The survey population included only public elementary schools in Illinois, defined as serving grades pre-kindergarten through sixth grade, with at least three of the pre-kindergarten through sixth grades offered within the school.

2. This study only included respondents from the state of Illinois, therefore limiting the generalizability of findings to school district evaluation practices in other states.

3. The data collected were dependent on the respondents’ commitment to provide honest and accurate responses to each question.

4. This study was designed to gather information on the perceptions of the respondents. The results of the study can only assess the respondents’ personal beliefs about their evaluation skills and evaluation systems and could not assess the accuracy of their self-assessments when compared to their actual supervisory practices.

5. Due to the implementation of PERA (2010) and Senate Bill 7 (2011), the teacher evaluation systems throughout Illinois are changing. Although the data was collected in January of 2011 for this study, it is likely that the full impact of necessary teacher evaluation revisions as a result of PERA were not fully implemented when the data for this study were collected. The results of this study could provide a baseline for the implementation of revised evaluation systems in Illinois, this study cannot be replicated.

6. Although data from this study were analyzed based on respondents’ special education certification, recency of when certification was attained, whether individuals holding special education certification had worked as special education teachers, and the extent of professional development in the area of special education instruction or procedures were not considered as variables.
Discussion

Teacher evaluation has been part of accountability practices in education as far back as the mid-1600s (Tracy, 1995). While the process for evaluating teachers has continued to evolve, one of the primary purposes of teacher evaluation has remained: accountability to the students whom teachers instruct. Currently, the literature identifies the two main purposes of teacher evaluation as facilitating educators’ professional development and accountability by which administrators reach decisions about the individual teacher’s continued employment (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; McQuarrie & Wood, 1991; Stronge 1997). The Illinois state legislature enacted the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA) in 2010, which requires every evaluator to participate in mandatory statewide, standardized training and also mandates that student growth must comprise a significant portion of each teacher’s summative evaluation. Senate Bill 7, enacted in 2011, redefined the processes of establishing teacher tenure and for reductions in force based on job performance ratings. Job security no longer is based solely on the teacher’s employment longevity within the school district. Teacher evaluation is becoming increasingly high stakes for Illinois public school teachers and more complex for their evaluators.

There is little research to guide administrators in the process of evaluating special education teachers. In fact, there is very little research regarding special education within educational leadership practices (Pazey & Cole, 2013), let alone related to the evaluation process. With over 6.5 million school age students supported through IDEA supports and services (NCES, 2011), there is an ever increasing need for school administrators to be informed and current in their special education knowledge. Results from this study would suggest that principals with knowledge in special education practices are more effective in providing
feedback to special education teachers than principals without this level of special education knowledge. Pazey and Cole (2013) recommend that principal preparation programs provide opportunities for developing leaders to develop the necessary knowledge and expertise with regard to special education practices and law. Hopefully, in addition to adding to the current literature, one of the outcomes of this study is to begin to identify specific areas for additional and extended training for school leaders, both in training and those seeking professional development. This discussion addresses selected findings from this study, connecting them to current literature on the teacher evaluation process for special educators.

**Providing specific feedback to special education teachers.** One finding from this study was that respondents with special education teacher certification self-reported a stronger ability to provide evaluative feedback to special education teachers. Although there was no significant difference between the subgroups, respondents with special education certification self-reported having more advanced skills and more effectiveness in providing feedback to special education teachers compared to those without such certification. There is relatively minimal empirical research related to principals’ effectiveness in providing feedback to special education teachers, although Frost’s (2010) research also concluded that principals with special education certification reported greater knowledge and involvement with special education teachers than did their non-special education certified peers. It is logical to assume that principals with special education training are better positioned to address the unique job-related needs of special education teachers because they have received comparable academic preparation and presumably have classroom teaching experience in special education. Principals with special education knowledge who can identify the unique job responsibilities of special education teachers and provide feedback through the evaluation process are better equipped to provide guidance and
direction to areas for professional growth. This level of support and direction supports one of the main purposes of the evaluation process. Thus, arguably principals with special education certification should feel confident to provide extensive feedback and direction to teachers who hold the same teacher certification.

Another interesting finding from this study included respondents with special education certification self-reporting a stronger ability to provide feedback to general education teachers than did respondents without special education certification. Although the differences from the two respondent groups were not statistically significant, there was a discrepancy. It is not unexpected that principals with special education certification would feel more confidence in providing feedback to special education teachers, but it is interesting that principals with this knowledge also report more effectiveness in providing instructional feedback to general education teachers. Perhaps, given the expanded demands of Response to Intervention (CEC, 2007) for both general and special education teachers, it is possible that principals who hold special education teacher certification possess specialized knowledge of individualized teaching and learning practices that they feel are applicable to all instructional situations—encompassing the classroom practices of both special education and general education teachers.

Findings also disclosed that special education-certified principals rated themselves significantly higher than their colleagues without this certification in their ability to provide feedback in the seven areas of professional responsibility for special education teachers developed by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC, 2009): instructional responsibilities, management of behavior, support procedures, parent relationships, advocacy, professional development, and working with other professionals. Statistically significant findings were found, indicating principals with special education certification self-reported a stronger ability to
provide feedback on the unique job responsibilities of special education teachers than did their colleagues who did not have special education certification. The following discussion explores these seven skills and subcategories.

**Instructional responsibilities.** Statistically significant differences in the instructional responsibility skills area were noted in eight of nine categories: identifying special educators’ individualized instruction methods for their students, selecting appropriate instructional materials, determining accurate program data based on efficient and objective record keeping practices to make decisions for students, creating and completing accurate IEP paperwork, creating quality IEPs, monitoring student progress toward attaining IEP goals, and complying with IEP-related deadlines. The ability to maintain student confidentiality was not statistically significant, which was not unexpected because this skill is important for both special and general educators and thus should not require specialized training on the part of school administrators. The fact that this was the only area that was not significant may provide further confirmation that respondents were openly and honestly reporting their perceptions of their ability to provide feedback to special education teachers. It is logical to conclude that principals, regardless of their educational background, acknowledge the need for student confidentiality, irrespective of whether the student receives special education support.

The findings from this study are consistent with strands that have been investigated in prior research. Widener (2011) found that special education directors in Virginia identified components related to timely completion of required paperwork and documentation as necessary for special education teacher evaluations. Additionally, Mimms (2011) found that the principals in North Carolina reported the lowest levels of proficiency in evaluating IEP paperwork. The research findings of Widener (2011) and Mimms (2011) support the results obtained in this study.
in that IEP creation, analysis, and monitoring are skills necessary for supporting and evaluating special education teachers. Additionally, recent trends in classroom teaching and learning practices need to be considered. While most general education classes are evolving towards a constructivist approach to learning (Englert et al., 1992), many students with special needs may benefit from direct instruction approaches (Green & Gredler, 2002). Knowledge about special education instructional practices would allow a principal to assess a special education teacher’s ability to select and implement the best instructional approach based on individual students’ needs. Demonstrating instructional knowledge for addressing the special needs of students would provide principal credibility in the eyes of the special education teacher.

**Management of student behavior.** The skills related to student behavior management included the principal’s ability to provide feedback to the special education teacher on the application of approved disciplinary and behavioral procedures while maintaining the student’s human rights and dignity, and the ability to provide feedback to special educators on their use of specific goals and objectives for behavior management practices within the students’ IEP. Respondents with special education certification rated their skills significantly higher than those without certification. Sisson (2000) found that principals reported a desire for additional training in managing behaviorally disordered, chronically disciplined, and emotionally challenged students. The IDEIA (2004) provides very clear standards and rules for addressing discipline issues for students with special needs. Principals need to understand the distinction of behaviors rooted in an emotional disorder versus behaviors that require disciplinary actions. Principals who lack knowledge of disabilities and approaches to address unexpected behaviors in students could be at a disadvantage in supporting their special education teachers and also may subject themselves to potential legal challenges as a result of procedural errors. Students with special
needs are entitled to a quality education with teachers who are skilled in managing student behaviors so that learning may occur. Special education teachers need support from their building administrators to improve in these skills as well as adhere to legal requirements.

**Support procedures.** One item within the support procedures category was found to be significant, with special education-certified principals reporting enhanced skills: providing feedback on the special education teacher’s ability to report changes in student behavior to IEP team members, including parents. Seeking support from others when needed and informing other professionals of observed changes in student behavior is key to providing consistent, meaningful instruction to students with special needs. Like every educator, special education teachers need to feel a sense of support and understanding from their principals (Miller, 2007). In addition to seeking suggestions from their colleagues, special education teachers also need to feel comfortable seeking out their principals for recommendations about their professional practices. The findings from this study are consistent with the research of Stormont, Reinke, and Herman (2011), who conducted a study of 363 general and special education teachers working with children in early childhood through elementary grades. Special education teachers reported more confidence than did general educators in their knowledge and application of evidenced-based behavioral interventions. Knowing when and how to seek support from colleagues and administrators is a critical skill of educators. Special education teachers are held to a higher standard in accomplishing this because it is necessary for IEP team members to work collaboratively with regard to each other’s expertise to support the student as required by law and through best practices within special education pedagogy.

**Parental relationships.** One item within the parental relationships category was statistically significant, with respondents with special education certification more likely to
report skills in the area of recognizing and respecting cultural diversities with families. This skill may not be unique to special education teachers but is something that teachers in this discipline need to consider when addressing and communicating with families. Again, as is the case with student confidentiality, this area must be addressed by both general and special educators in their daily practices. McLaughlin (2009) noted the importance of involving parents in the entire special education process. Beyond the basics of instructional methods and legal requirements, positive working relationships are central to establishing and building trust between families of children with special needs and school officials. The special education process, by design, is intended to highlight areas of student weakness. For the parents of these students, information about your child’s inability or significant challenge to accomplish expected tasks is very difficult to hear. Strong parent-school partnerships provide parents with a sense of support and comfort during the process. As a result, strong relationships can be established, helping to facilitate an effective educational process for students receiving special education services.

**Advocacy.** Both items in the advocacy category were statistically significant, with special-education certificated respondents reporting higher skills in the following areas: advocates for least restrictive special education services for students and follows local, state and federal laws and regulations, which mandate a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) to exceptional students. Principals evaluating and supporting special education teachers’ understanding of the basic legal foundation and purpose of the law (FAPE) is essential (Duncan, 2010; Frost, 2010; Mimms, 2011). Because special education teachers are often the professionals who are responsible for leading IEP teams, they must have a comprehensive understanding of the legal framework and procedures by which team decisions must be made. Although research does not indicate a discrepancy in beliefs between principals with or without special education
certification, the literature does indicate a need for knowledge of special education underpinnings (Frost & Kersten, 2011). Paze and Cole (2013) highlighted the significant liability that exists for administrators and teachers who do not adequately perform their duties and responsibilities with respect to students with disabilities. Accountability is one of the main purposes of teacher evaluation (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; McQuarrie & Wood, 1991; Stronge, 1997), and special educators have a higher standard of accountability than their general education colleagues, due to the IDEA legal elements encompassing their job responsibilities. Through the evaluation process, principals have the responsibility to hold special education teachers accountable for all of their job responsibilities. In order to do this, principals need to have basic knowledge of special education laws and procedures.

**Professional development.** The findings in the category of professional development found significant differences in two areas, with special-education certified principals reporting higher skills related to the ability to systematically advance his/her knowledge and skills in order to maintain a high level of competence and response to the changing needs of persons with disabilities, and to participate in professional organizations. Research by Frost (2010) concluded that principals reported they were least knowledgeable about how to develop a plan for program improvement for special education. Additional research (Frost, 2010; Mimms, 2011; Wiedener, 2011) suggests the need for professional development for principals related to legal principles and instructional practices in special education. Therefore, a logical conclusion is that principals need to gain basic knowledge of best practices in these areas of special education before demonstrating the capacity to recommend additional training for special education teachers.

**Working with other professionals.** Respondents with special education certification reported significantly higher abilities when working with other professionals on the following
items: recognizes and acknowledges the competencies and expertise of members representing other disciplines; consults with general educators as well as other school personnel serving persons with disabilities; and maintains effective interpersonal relations with colleagues and other professionals, helping them to develop and maintain positive and accurate perceptions about the special education profession. Although these skills are expected of both general and special education teachers, they are essential for special educators because of the need to collaborate among special education-related services (e.g., speech and language pathology, occupational therapists, social work, etc.) as well as general education personnel including regular grade-level classroom teachers and such additional disciplines as physical education, fine and applied arts, and music. Special education teachers are often the facilitators of the IEP team, and decisions for students are made by this team. Therefore, special education teachers need to have developed skills in collaborating and facilitating team decisions for the benefit of the students. The findings from this study are supported in current literature. Robinson and Buly (2007) indicated the importance of collaboration between general and special education teachers, noting unsuccessful collaboration is often a result of a “lack of similar definitions for shared concepts” (p. 85). Robinson and Buly suggested purposeful modeling of expected collaborative behaviors of both general and special education teachers. Principals need to understand the IEP team dynamics and expected roles for team members in order to be able to best support the special education teacher in facilitating the team dynamics, recommendations and presentation.

Implications

The findings from this study confirmed that principals with special education teacher certification perceive that they have higher levels of knowledge and effectiveness in supervising
and evaluating the special education teachers within their buildings than those principals who do not hold this certification. This overarching finding has numerous implications, which are reported in this section.

**Credibility of the supervision/evaluation process.** The two primary purposes of the teacher evaluation process are to promote accountability and professional development (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Peterson 2004; Veir & Dagley, 2002). Research indicates that supervisors have more credibility with their teachers when they are perceived to possess sufficient content knowledge in the teacher’s academic discipline and understand the requirements of the teacher’s job description (Blase & Blase, 2001). Principals who evaluate special education teachers must have sound knowledge about exemplary instructional practices, current legal requirements, and current behavioral management methodologies for special education students so that they will be able to accurately assess special education teachers on their ability to address the unique factors of the special education teacher’s role as an educator as well as guide them in their professional growth. Because Illinois evaluation laws (PERA, 2010) now require special education teachers to demonstrate student growth, principals must have knowledge of effective instructional methods and assessment strategies for students with special needs. Principals without expertise in special education may find themselves sorely inadequate when providing evaluative feedback to their special education teachers. Without the administrative support and suggestions for instructional practices and data collection, special education teachers could feel a sense of frustration and helplessness in their effort to improve in their ability to educate students with special needs.

In addition to accountability for student growth, there is an added accountability component for special education teachers that is not an issue for general education teachers.
There are legal requirements identified in IDEA of which special education teachers must be knowledgeable in order to ensure compliance. Examples of these requirements are the annual review due dates of students’ IEPs, reevaluation requirements and deadlines, procedures for parental requests for an evaluation or re-evaluation, IEP data collection methods and timelines, IEP goal reporting periods, and case management responsibilities. Although there are numerous other legal parameters established in IDEA, these examples are the most common responsibilities of special education teachers. Evaluators of special education teachers must have current legal knowledge of these requirements and knowledge regarding how to support special education teachers in fulfilling these requirements. In some areas within the state of Illinois, special education cooperatives or district-level special education directors may have supported this process in the past; however, decentralization of special education is now requiring that building leaders support this process (Bays & Crockett, 2007). Principals need knowledge of special education law in order to support and teach special educators how to meet the requirements (Pazey & Cole, 2013). Regardless of how districts receive updated information about special education practices and procedures, without effective feedback to special education teachers regarding their ability to create, maintain, and monitor IEPs, individual teachers, administrators, and school districts are vulnerable to legal action. Failure to effectively manage IEPs can be costly and damaging to school systems.

Professional development is another key purpose of the teacher evaluation process. Although glaring performance weaknesses of special education teachers may be evident to any administrator, subtle instructional weaknesses, minor misinterpretations of IDEA mandates, or areas in need of improvement may be less evident to evaluators who do not possess training in this field. Examples of these subtleties may include the use of age-appropriate materials (Jones,
2010), instructional prompting hierarchies (Fisher, Kodak, & Moore, 2007), successful implementation of augmentative communication devices (Sigafoos & Iacono, 1993), and successful indicators of inclusion when considering social/emotional growth (Palmer, Heyne, Montie, & Abery, 2011). Students with special needs could be negatively affected if these subtleties are overlooked in the evaluation process of special education teachers. Even if the teacher’s areas of performance weakness are glaringly evident to the administrator, guidance as to what type of professional development would be more effective or knowledge of high quality providers of special education professional development may be more challenging to identify without a comprehensive understanding of special education practices. In order for building principals to provide guidance and direction to special education teachers regarding professional development plans, they need sound, basic knowledge of special education instructional and procedural practices. Principals who lack this knowledge may be unable to identify areas of professional growth needed for special education teachers.

**Sense of support and understanding.** Being an educator is a challenging endeavor, even on a good day. Being a special education teacher carries many of the challenges of their general education teacher colleagues, but with the added elements of working with unique learners, mastering an understanding of legal requirements, dealing with emotionally charged parental relationships, and managing professional teaming responsibilities. Special education teachers need support and guidance from knowledgeable administrators on a daily basis. In survey research conducted by Miller (2007), 298 special education administrators reported on ways in which administrators support special education teachers. Miller identified seven significant areas of administrator support for special education teachers, with one of these areas being availability to problem solve with the special education teacher. Without such support, even special
educators with excellent skills are vulnerable and at risk for leaving the profession. Two recent dissertation studies confirmed that lack of administrative support was a key factor in special education teacher attrition. Green (2011) surveyed 4,000 Southern California special education teachers to determine salient factors of teacher burnout, finding that the primary reason prompting teachers to leave the profession was lack of administrative support. Van Alstine (2010) interviewed 20 former special educators in Orange County, Florida who left the field of special education to work as general educators or who were working outside of the field of education to determine the key factors in teacher retention. Administrative support was a critical element to encourage teachers to remain in their positions, with a supportive classroom environment, sufficient funding, and adequate monetary compensation comprising the other three themes. It is understood that all teachers need administrative support to be excellent teachers. Building administrators knowledgeable in the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers is critical in retaining qualified special education teachers. Without administrators well educated in special education instructional practices and legal procedures, special education teachers are at risk for an abbreviated career in special education.

Recommendations

As a result of the findings of this study, several recommendations are presented for local and state-level decision makers.

Recommendations for principals. Building principals are accountable for the education of all students within their schools; therefore, every principal must obtain basic knowledge and remain current in their understanding of best instructional practices for unique learners as well as the legal responsibilities for students with special needs. Principals have the responsibility and
obligation to provide support to special education teachers through guidance on best practice and a means for differentiated professional development that ultimately will lead to student growth and learning. In order for principals to guide special education teachers in learning about exemplary instructional practices and accurate legal requirements, they must be accurately informed and trained. Principals who do not possess special education certification have a professional obligation before they accept their first principalship to become informed about instructional and legal expectations in special education. Once basic knowledge is obtained, every principal has a professional responsibility to participate in ongoing professional development on topics related to special education. Professional development is offered by various agencies throughout the state of Illinois, including Regional Offices of Education, special education cooperatives, the Midwest Principals’ Center, and other professional organizations.

**Recommendations for school districts.** District-level administrators should closely monitor the training and supervisory practices of their building-level administrators, specifically in the area of special education. Although principals have a responsibility to remain current in special education practices, central office administrators have the responsibility for ensuring principals are informed regarding instructional practices, legal expectations, and procedures specific to the district. Although numerous federal and state statutes, case laws, and federal and state rules govern special education practices, each district has the autonomy to develop local practices to meet the needs of their students within the confines of the state and federal regulations. Regular and ongoing district-level training would ensure that principals gained current knowledge about special education practices and how those practices are implemented within the districts in which they are working.
Additionally, central office administrators should regularly review the performance of special education teachers with building principals. Principals should be evaluated on their ability to successfully evaluate special education teachers. Holding principals accountable for successful evaluation of special education teachers would ensure that building administrators are considering all of the unique job responsibilities of special education teachers as well as the instructional practices and legal requirements that are necessary within the role and responsibilities of a special education teacher.

**Recommendations for leadership preparation programs.** More focused training related to special education needs to be required of school administrators. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) in April 2012 revised the requirements for principal preparation programs. According to the Illinois Administrative Code, 2012, principal preparation programs are required to offer curricula that address student learning for all students, with specific attention to students with special needs (Illinois Administrative Code, §30.30(d)(4), 2012). Additionally, the preparation program rules require an internship for candidates that, among other things, require instructional activities that involve teachers at all grade levels including special education teachers (Illinois Administrative Code, §30.40(a)(1)(A), 2012). Candidates within a principal preparation program also must demonstrate a thorough understanding of the requirements for developing an IEP (Illinois Administrative Code, §30.45(a)(4), 2012). Finally, there are coursework requirements that principal candidates must participate in regarding state and federal laws as well as case law related to students with disabilities (Illinois Administrative Code, §30.50, 2012).

Aspiring principals who trained under programs that fulfill these new requirements will begin their administrative careers with basic knowledge of special education. However, for the
next 1-2 years, graduates of principal preparation programs in the state of Illinois are at a disadvantage, similar to their colleagues in principalship who earned their administrative endorsements prior to the implementation of these new requirements. These candidates will not have had the benefit of a principal preparation program that fully incorporates these special education requirements, because principal preparation programs do not have to have these revised requirements fully implemented until September 1, 2014 (Illinois Administrative Code, §30.30(d), 2012). Faculty members who work in university-based principal preparation programs in the state of Illinois are encouraged to identify ways in which they could enhance special education knowledge of the candidates. It is not suggested that additional requirements be added to the curriculum of leadership programs, but rather that special education classrooms, meetings, and legal requirements could be the context for completing existing projects or assessments. Encouraging projects related to special education services or procedures would deepen the knowledge of aspiring school leaders in the area of special education. Principal preparation program faculty are encouraged to consider any and all opportunities to provide information on instructional and procedural best practices in special education.

**Recommendations for Illinois State Board of Education and policymakers.** Because of the new requirements in principal preparation programs that will be in full implementation by the fall 2014, policymakers and ISBE need to now consider the ongoing training and development of established principals with regard to special education instructional and procedural practices. Currently, Illinois principals must be recertified every five years, which includes a requirement that they must complete a minimum of one Administrator Academy course and 20 hours of professional development annually (Illinois Administrative Code, §25.315(c)(d), 2012). There are many different types of professional development possibilities,
including but not limited to college coursework, providing mentoring to other administrators, and independent studies (Illinois Administrative Code, §25.315(c), 2012). It is recommended that ISBE and policymakers consider developing a system for ongoing training and development of school administrators in the area of special education, similar to what was created for principal preparation programs. The certificate renewal process for general education teachers requires that at least 20% of their renewal activities must be devoted to (a) learning about multi-modality instruction, applied techniques for teaching academic content, making adaptations and modifications to the curriculum, managing student behavior and team teaching; and/or (b) adapting and modifying curriculum related to the Illinois Learning Standards to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Illinois Administrative Code, §25.805(a)(2), 2012).

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The following recommendations for further study are presented:

1. The population for this study focused on elementary school principals, in part, because students who require special education services are very often identified and initially supported at the elementary level. Research could be conducted of elementary, middle level, and high school principals to determine whether there are differences in principals’ perceptions of their effectiveness in working with special education teachers, based upon the organizational levels of the schools.

2. Elementary principals in Illinois were the population for this study. It is possible that other states may require that special education content is include in principal preparation programs. Research could be conducted of principals in other states to determine if there are differences in principals’ perceptions of their effectiveness in working with special education teachers, within their respective states, and based upon their state administrative licensure requirements.

3. Expanding upon the findings of this survey research, qualitative research, including interviews or focus groups, could be conducted with principals with and without special education certification, which would permit in-depth exploration of their perceived strengths and limitations related to the supervision of special education teachers, as well as obtaining their recommendations for improving their skills.
4. Data collected in this study involved principals’ perceptions of their knowledge and skills related to supervision and evaluation of special education teachers, and these perceptions may not reflect the reality of their administrative practice. Quantitative or qualitative research could be conducted with special education teachers to obtain their perceptions of the effectiveness of their districts’ evaluation processes and their principals’ supervisory skills.

5. This study did not investigate how recent the principals’ special education training was obtained, whether they had teaching experience as special education teachers, or whether they had participated in professional development activities in the area of special education. Future research could examine the recency of principals’ special education certification, topics, and service providers of ongoing professional development as variables when assessing the principals’ knowledge and understanding of special education law, procedures, and instructional practices.

6. Because data collection for this study was conducted in 2011, changes to the state of Illinois Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA, 2010) had not yet been implemented. Therefore, the findings from this study should be considered as baseline data regarding the implementation of the new evaluation laws, practices and required evaluator training. By 2016, the full implementation of PERA (2010) will be in effect. This study could be replicated after all school districts have implemented their revised teacher evaluation systems, which include updated administrator training and student growth as a significant factor in each teacher’s summative evaluation, and after the state’s principal preparation program reforms are fully implemented. This subsequent research will be helpful in analyzing the effectiveness of these reforms in improving principals’ practices in the evaluation process for special education teachers.

Conclusion

The purposes of this study were to (a) determine the perceptions of elementary school principals regarding the effectiveness of their existing teacher evaluation processes and supervisory practices for special education teachers, and (b) to determine principals’ ability to assess their efficacy in supervising and evaluating special education practices. Three hundred and thirty public elementary school principals contributed to the findings in this study. Principals who held special education certification reported a stronger ability to provide feedback to special education teachers than did elementary school principals without special education certification. Principals with special education certification were significantly more likely than principals
without such certification to report the ability to provide feedback to special education teachers on their instructional responsibilities, management of behavior, support procedures, parent relationships, advocacy, professional development, and working with other professionals.

The Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA) was enacted in 2010. As a result, the beginning phases of this act were implemented in the fall 2012, with full implementation throughout the state by the 2016-2017 school year. In addition, Senate Bill 7 was enacted in April 2011, revising practices for tenure attainment and dismissal procedures for teachers. This study was conducted early in 2011, prior to the implementation of the requirements of either of these two public acts. As a result, the findings from this study should be considered within the timeframe of the enactment of PERA and Senate Bill 7, providing the potential for baseline data regarding teacher evaluation prior to the enactment of required changes in Illinois. Respondents to this study provided several suggestions for changes to current school district teacher evaluation systems, including the following: the development of differentiated tools for general and special education teachers, consideration of special education teachers’ responsibilities outside of the classroom, and incorporation of the unique job responsibilities of special education teachers into the teacher evaluation system.

Although the teacher evaluation process and its effectiveness for special education teachers has not been widely explored in empirical research, the perspectives of the elementary principals who responded to this study points to a need for evaluators to become more knowledgeable in special education practices—particularly those individuals who lack coursework and classroom teaching experience within this discipline. When their administrative supervisors are adequately informed about the legal requirements and effective teaching learning practices in this field, special education teachers likely will receive more credible feedback on
their unique job responsibilities and will be provided with enhanced guidance about professional development opportunities. As a result, elementary schoolchildren with special and unique needs hopefully will be afforded highly skilled and knowledgeable special education teachers who feel fully supported by their building principals.
References


Appendix A

Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction to Survey</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please take a few minutes to share your current practices and opinions regarding the effectiveness of teacher evaluation systems for special education teachers with regard to supporting their professional development and their accountability to the unique needs of the job. The purpose of this questionnaire is to examine the perceptions of Illinois elementary public school principals related to the supervision and evaluation of special education teachers. For consistency in this questionnaire, the following definitions have been developed:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education teacher: An individual who holds an Illinois special education teaching certificate whose primary instructional assignment is to instruct students who have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), whether the students are placed in a general education, resource classroom, or self-contained classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General education teacher: An individual whose primary instructional assignment is not in the special education area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision: The formative activities in supporting teachers, including, but not limited to observations of teachers throughout the school year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation: The summative event in which formative data are considered in determining the level of teacher proficiency, through the completion of the district summative evaluation form, and to reach decisions regarding job renewal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Although it is not required, it may be helpful to have access to your district’s teacher evaluation plan when completing this questionnaire.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**1. Who is responsible for supervising and evaluating general education teachers within your school? (check all that apply)**

- [ ] Special education cooperative administrator
- [ ] District administrator
- [ ] Principal
- [ ] Assistant Principal
- [ ] Dean
- [ ] Other (please specify)

2. As principal, do you evaluate one or more of the special education teachers in your school?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

If no, please specify who evaluates the special education teachers at your school:
3. Who is responsible for supervising and evaluating special education teachers within your school? (check all that apply)

☐ Special education cooperative administrator
☐ District administrator
☐ Principal
☐ Assistant Principal
☐ Dean

Other (please specify)


4. Within the last five years, have you participated in professional development activities or university coursework related to the supervision/evaluation of professional staff?

- Yes
- No

5. Within the last five years, have you participated in professional development activities or university coursework specifically related to the supervision/evaluation of special education teachers?

- Yes
- No

6. Within the last five years, have you participated in professional development activities or university coursework related to specific laws pertaining to special education?

- Yes
- No

7. Within the last five years, have you participated in professional development activities or university coursework specifically related to effective instructional practices for students with disabilities?

- Yes
- No

8. Does your district provide a differentiated supervision/evaluation instrument for general and special education teachers?

- No
- Yes (If yes, please provide information on the ways in which your district differentiates for special education teachers in the supervision/evaluation process.)
9. Please indicate your response to the following statement:

When supervising and evaluating special education teachers, the process should include performance indicators regarding the unique job responsibilities of special education teachers.

- [ ] Strongly disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Neutral
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Strongly agree
For the following two questions, please reflect on your own supervisory skills using the following definitions:

Basic: At a minimal level of proficiency, continuing to develop and apply the necessary skills for supervising/evaluating special education teachers.

Moderate: Attained a competent level of proficiency with skills for supervising and is able to effectively apply the knowledge and concepts when supervising/evaluating special education teachers.

Good: Very proficient in knowledge and application of the necessary skills for supervising/evaluating special education teachers.

Highly Developed: Exceptional proficiency in knowledge and application of the necessary skills for supervising/evaluating special education teachers.

10. Please rate your skill/comfort level in providing feedback to general education teachers regarding skills related to student instruction and other job responsibilities.
   - [ ] Basic
   - [ ] Moderate
   - [ ] Good
   - [ ] Highly Developed

11. Please rate your skill/comfort level in providing feedback to special education teachers regarding skills related to student instruction and other job responsibilities.
   - [ ] Basic
   - [ ] Moderate
   - [ ] Good
   - [ ] Highly Developed
12. Do you believe additional training would help you to improve your supervisory skills for special education teachers?

- No
- Yes (please specify)

13. Reflecting on your own experiences, please indicate what you believe to be the purpose(s) of the evaluation process for special education teachers (check all that apply).

- Assists in identifying areas of growth for teachers
- Identified professional development needs
- Assists in evaluating instructional methods for special education teachers
- Holds special education teachers accountable for learning
Perceptions of the Special Education Teacher Evaluation Process

The following items relate to professional responsibilities of special education teachers, which may or may not be assessed by the school district's teacher evaluation process. Using the scales indicated below, please rate your expertise in providing feedback to special education teachers in each of the specified areas.

For the purpose of this section, the following descriptors are defined as:
Basic: At a minimal level of proficiency, continuing to develop and apply the necessary skills for supervising/evaluating special education teachers.

Moderate: Attained a competent level of proficiency with skills for supervising and is able to effectively apply the knowledge and concepts when supervising/evaluating special education teachers.

Good: Very proficient in knowledge and application of the necessary skills for supervising/evaluating special education teachers.

Highly Developed: Exceptional proficiency in knowledge and application of the necessary skills for supervising/evaluating special education teachers.

14. Instructional Responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Identifies whether special educators individualize instruction for their students</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Highly Developed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. Selects appropriate instructional materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Determines whether special education teachers take accurate program data, based on efficient and objective record keeping practices for the purposes of decision-making for students</td>
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<td>D. Maintains student confidentiality</td>
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<td>E. Accurate in creating and completing IEP paperwork</td>
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<td>F. Creates quality IEPs</td>
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<td>G. Monitors student progress toward attaining IEP goals</td>
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<td>H. Facilitates effective IEP meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>I. Complies with specific IEP related deadlines (e.g., goal updates, annual reviews, etc.)</td>
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</table>
### 15. Management of Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Applies approved disciplinary and behavioral procedures, while maintaining human rights and dignity of the student</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Highly Developed</th>
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<tr>
<th>B. Uses specific goals and objectives for behavior management practices within the student’s IEP</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Highly Developed</th>
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### 16. Support Procedures

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Seeks support from colleague or supervisor as needed</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Highly Developed</th>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>B. Reports changes in student behavior to IEP team members including parents</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Highly Developed</th>
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### 17. Parent Relationships

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<tr>
<th>A. Develops effective communication with parents</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Highly Developed</th>
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<tr>
<th>B. Seeks parents’ knowledge and expertise in conducting special education and related services for persons with exceptionalities</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Highly Developed</th>
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<tr>
<th>C. Utilizes parents’ knowledge and expertise in conducting special education and related services for persons with exceptionalities</th>
<th>Basic</th>
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<tr>
<th>D. Recognize and respect cultural diversities with families</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
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<th>Highly Developed</th>
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### 18. Advocacy

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Advocates for least restrictive special education services for students</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Highly Developed</th>
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<tr>
<th>B. Follows local, state and federal laws and regulations, which mandate a free, appropriate public education to exceptional students</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Highly Developed</th>
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</table>
19. Professional Development

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<th>Basic</th>
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<th>Highly Developed</th>
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<td>C.</td>
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20. Other Professionals

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<th>Basic</th>
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<th>Highly Developed</th>
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<td>B.</td>
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<td>C.</td>
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</table>
### District’s Supervision/ Evaluation Practice

For the next two questions, please reflect on the effectiveness of your district’s supervision/evaluation practice as it relates to general and special education teachers.

21. To what extent do you believe your district’s teacher evaluation practices are effective in supervising/evaluating general education teachers and their unique job responsibilities.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Extremely Effective</th>
<th>Somewhat Effective</th>
<th>Somewhat Ineffective</th>
<th>Very Ineffective</th>
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<td>Accountability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensuring Student Learning</td>
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22. To what extent do you believe your district’s teacher evaluation practices are effective in supervising/evaluating special education teachers and their unique job responsibilities.

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<tr>
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<th>Extremely Effective</th>
<th>Somewhat Effective</th>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Growth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensuring Student Learning</td>
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23. In what ways do you believe your district’s teacher supervision/evaluation process could be improved to more fully address the unique job responsibilities of special education teachers?

24. One of the intended purposes of the supervision process is professional development for teachers. For special education teachers who are not demonstrating continuous professional growth, what could be done differently by administrators within the district’s current supervision/evaluation process to accomplish this purpose?


Demographics

Please provide some basic demographic information about your school and yourself.

School Demographics

25. Please check all grade levels currently served within your school:
   - [ ] Pre-Kindergarten (early childhood)
   - [ ] Kindergarten
   - [ ] First grade
   - [ ] Second grade
   - [ ] Third grade
   - [ ] Fourth grade
   - [ ] Fifth grade
   - [ ] Sixth grade

26. Your school’s total student enrollment for the 2010-2011 school year:

27. Is your school affiliated with a special education cooperative?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No

28. For how many special education teachers (both probationary and tenure) will you complete formal, summative evaluations during the 2010-2011 school year?

29. How many special education teachers currently work within your building (please include full- and part-time teachers)?

Personal demographics

30. Your sex:
   - [ ] Male
   - [ ] Female
31. Your race/ethnicity:
- Asian
- American Indian/Alaska Native
- Biracial/Multiracial
- Black/African-American
- Hispanic/Latino/a
- Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Other

32. Your current age:
- 21-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- 36-40
- 41-45
- 46-50
- 51-55
- 56-60
- 60-65
- Over 65

33. Your total years of K-12 teaching experience (not including administrative experience):

34. Your total years of experience as an assistant principal or principal, including this year:

35. Your number of years conducting teacher evaluations, including this year:

36. Your total number of years of experience with evaluating special education teachers, including this year:
37. Have you ever been certified as a special education teacher?
   - Yes
   - No

38. Have you ever worked as a special education teacher?
   - Yes
   - No

39. Have you ever attained licensure/certification as a Director of Special Education?
   - No
   - Yes (if yes, what year?)

40. Highest degree earned (please indicate degree that has been completed—not in process)
   - Bachelors
   - Masters
   - Educational Specialist/Certificate of Advanced Study
   - Juris Doctorate/LL.M.
   - Doctor of Education/Doctor of Philosophy
   - Other (please specify)

41. Please feel free to include any additional information that you would like to share, concerning the effectiveness of supervision/evaluation processes for special education teachers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thank You</th>
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<tr>
<td>Thank you for completing this questionnaire.</td>
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</table>
Appendix B

Expert Feedback Informed Consent
Emailed to Experts Along With Survey Questions

Dear,

I am completing the dissertation research requirements for a Doctor of Education degree in Educational Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The focus of my dissertation research is the perceptions of Illinois elementary school principals regarding the teacher evaluation process for special education teachers. I intend to survey Illinois elementary school principals in the state of Illinois using a survey instrument that I have developed. A review of current literature has disclosed that a paucity of research has been conducted on evaluation processes of special education teachers. The information attained through this research will describe the current status of the teacher evaluation process for special education teachers through the perspective of the elementary school principal, as well as noting areas in which the process is effective and areas in which it can be improved.

As an education professor, you have unique perspective and expertise in the area of teacher evaluation, and it is my hope that you will provide feedback regarding the survey. Your feedback for this study is completely voluntary. I respectfully request that you review the survey questions and recommend revisions, additions, or deletions. Additionally, I request that you provide an estimate of the approximate time you believe it will take respondents to complete the survey.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (847-271-1152), tweety23@illinois.edu or my dissertation director, Dr. Donald Hackmann (217-333-0230), dghack@illinois.edu. Thank you for taking the time to support this project. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant please contact Anne Robertson, Bureau of Educational Research, 217-333-3023, or arobrtsn@illinois.edu or the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 or irb@illinois.edu.

If you are willing to assist with providing expert feedback this project, please provide your feedback to me by November 22, 2010. Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Heather Glowacki, Ed.D Candidate
University of Illinois
Appendix C

Email to Elementary Principals

Dear Principal,

I am completing the dissertation research requirements for a Doctor of Education degree in Educational Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. My Dissertation Director is Dr. Donald Hackmann. My research focuses on teacher evaluation for special education teachers.

As an Illinois school principal, you have unique experience and expertise in evaluating both general and special education teachers within your building. A review of current literature has disclosed that a paucity of research has been conducted on evaluation processes of special education teachers. The information attained through this research will describe the current status of the teacher evaluation process for special education teachers through the perspective of the school principal, as well as noting areas in which the process is effective and areas in which it can be improved. Your feedback as a practicing administrator and evaluator is key to the reliability of the information collected. In addition to my dissertation, the results of the survey may be shared at an educational administration conference or in a journal article. When my research is complete, overall results of the survey will be available by request to me at tweety23@illinois.edu.

The survey you will be completing will be coded so that no identifying information can be linked to you or your school. Your participation will not impact your employment status. The information you provide will be kept confidential, as opinions and perceptions will only be presented in summary. The survey should take approximately 30 minutes to complete and must be completed by February 11, 2011. I do not anticipate that participants in this study are at any risk other than what is assumed in normal life. Your completion of the survey is voluntary. There are no consequences for not participating in this research study. You are free to withdraw at any time without reason or penalty. You are also free to refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.

If you DO want to participate please just print a copy of this letter for your records and proceed to respond to the attached link. If you do NOT want to participate in the project, please just delete this email and do not proceed to the questionnaire.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (847-271-1152) or tweety23@illinois.edu or my dissertation director, Dr. Donald Hackmann (217-333-0230) or dghack@illinois.edu. Thank you for taking the time to support this project. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant please contact Anne Robertson, Bureau of Educational Research, 217-333-3023, or arobrtns@illinois.edu or the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 or irb@illinois.edu. Thank you for considering this invitation.
Sincerely,
Heather Glowacki, Ed.D Candidate
University of Illinois
Link to the survey:
http://www.surveymonkey.com
Appendix D

Follow-up Email Reminder to Non-respondents

If you have already completed this survey based on previous email invitations, please excuse this email and delete. If you have not yet completed the survey, please consider participating as the survey will close at the end of the day on 2/11.

I am completing the dissertation research requirements for a Doctor of Education degree in Educational Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. My Dissertation Director is Dr. Donald Hackmann. My research focuses on teacher evaluation for special education teachers.

As an Illinois school principal, you have unique experience and expertise in evaluating both general and special education teachers within your building. A review of current literature has disclosed that a paucity of research has been conducted on evaluation processes of special education teachers. The information attained through this research will describe the current status of the teacher evaluation process for special education teachers through the perspective of the school principal, as well as noting areas in which the process is effective and areas in which it can be improved. Your feedback as a practicing administrator and evaluator is key to the reliability of the information collected. In addition to my dissertation, the results of the survey may be shared at an educational administration conference or in a journal article. When my research is complete, overall results of the survey will be available by request to me at tweety23@illinois.edu.

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invitation.

Sincerely,
Heather Glowacki, Ed.D Candidate
University of Illinois

Link to the survey:
http://www.surveymonkey.com
### Appendix E

**CEC Knowledge and Skill Base for Special Education Administrators**

**Special Education Administrators**

**Standard 1**  
Leadership and Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACC1K1</td>
<td>Needs of different groups in a pluralistic society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC1K2</td>
<td>Evidence-based theories of organizational and educational leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC1K3</td>
<td>Emerging issues and trends that potentially affect the school community and the mission of the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC1K4</td>
<td>National and state education laws and regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC1K5</td>
<td>Current legal, regulatory, and ethical issues affecting education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC1K6</td>
<td>Responsibilities and functions of school committees and boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA1K1</td>
<td>Models, theories, and philosophies that provide the foundation for the administration of programs and services for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA1K2</td>
<td>Historical and social significance of the laws, regulations, and policies as they apply to the administration of programs and the provision of services for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA1K3</td>
<td>Local, state, and national fiscal policies and funding mechanisms in education, social, and health agencies as they apply to the provision of services for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACC1S1</td>
<td>Promote a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC1S2</td>
<td>Promote high expectations for self, staff, and individuals with exceptional learning needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC1S3</td>
<td>Advocate for educational policy within the context of evidence-based practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC1S4</td>
<td>Mentor teacher candidates, newly certified teachers and other colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA1S1</td>
<td>Interprets and applies current laws, regulations, and policies as they apply to the administration of services to individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA1S2</td>
<td>Applies leadership, organization, and systems change theory to the provision of services for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA1S3</td>
<td>Develops a budget in accordance with local, state, and national laws in education, social, and health agencies for the provision of services for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA1S4</td>
<td>Engages in recruitment, hiring, and retention practices that comply with local, state, and national laws as they apply to personnel serving individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Communicates a personal inclusive vision and mission for meeting the needs of individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families

**Standard 2**  
**Program Development and Organization**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACC2K1</td>
<td>Effects of the cultural and environmental milieu of the individual and the family on behavior and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC2K2</td>
<td>Theories and methodologies of teaching and learning, including adaptation and modification of curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC2K3</td>
<td>Continuum of program options and services available to individuals with exceptional learning needs with exceptional learning needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC2K4</td>
<td>Prereferral intervention processes and strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC2K5</td>
<td>Process of developing individualized education plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC2K6</td>
<td>Developmentally appropriate strategies for modifying instructional methods and the learning environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA2K1</td>
<td>Programs and services within the general curriculum to achieve positive school outcomes for individuals with exceptional learning needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA2K2</td>
<td>Programs and strategies that promote positive school engagement for individuals with exceptional learning needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA2K3</td>
<td>Instruction and services needed to support access to the general curriculum for individuals with exceptional learning needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACC2S1</td>
<td>Develop programs including the integration of related services for individuals based on a thorough understanding of individual differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC2S2</td>
<td>Connect educational standards to specialized instructional services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC2S3</td>
<td>Improve instructional programs using principles of curriculum development and modification, and learning theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC2S4</td>
<td>Incorporate essential components into individualized education plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA2S1</td>
<td>Develops and implements a flexible continuum of services based on effective practices for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA2S2</td>
<td>Develops and implements programs and services that contribute to the prevention of unnecessary referrals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA2S3</td>
<td>Develops and implements an administrative plan that supports the use of instructional and assistive technologies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Standard 3**  
**Research and Inquiry**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACC3K1</td>
<td>Evidence-based practices validated for specific characteristics of learners and settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA3K1</td>
<td>Research in administrative practices that supports individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACC3S1</td>
<td>Identify and use the research literature to resolve issues of professional practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC3S2</td>
<td>Evaluate and modify instructional practices in response to ongoing assessment data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC3S3</td>
<td>Use educational research to improve instruction, intervention strategies, and curricular materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA3S1</td>
<td>Engages in data-based decision-making for the administration of educational programs and services that supports exceptional individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA3S2</td>
<td>Develops data-based educational expectations and evidence-based programs that account for the impact of diversity on individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA3S3</td>
<td>Joins and participates in professional administrative organizations to guide administrative practices when working with individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Standard 4 Individual and Program Evaluation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACC4K1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC4K2</td>
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<td>ACC4K3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC4K4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA4K1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACC4S1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC4S2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC4S3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC4S4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA4S1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA4S2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA4S3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA4S4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Standard 5 Professional Development and Ethical Practice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACC5K1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC5K2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC5K3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA5K1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA5K2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA5K3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA5K4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA5K5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACC5S1</th>
<th>Model ethical behavior and promote professional standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACC5S2</td>
<td>Implement practices that promote success for individuals with exceptional learning needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC5S3</td>
<td>Use ethical and legal discipline strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC5S4</td>
<td>Disseminate information on effective school and classroom practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC5S5</td>
<td>Create an environment which supports continuous instructional improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC5S6</td>
<td>Develop and implement a personalized professional development plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA5S1</td>
<td>Communicates and demonstrates a high standard of ethical administrative practices when working with staff serving individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA5S2</td>
<td>Develops and implements professional development activities and programs that improve instructional practices and lead to improved outcomes for individuals with exceptional learning needs with exceptional learning needs and their families</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Standard 6 Collaboration**

**Knowledge**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACC6K1</th>
<th>Methods for communicating goals and plans to stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACC6K2</td>
<td>Roles of educators in integrated settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA6K1</td>
<td>Collaborative theories and practices that support the administration of programs and services for with individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA6K2</td>
<td>Administrative theories and models that facilitate communication among all stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA6K3</td>
<td>Importance and relevance of advocacy at the local, state, and national level for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Skills**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACC6S1</th>
<th>Collaborate to enhance opportunities for learners with exceptional learning needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACC6S2</td>
<td>Apply strategies to resolve conflict and build consensus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA6S1</td>
<td>Utilizes collaborative approaches for involving all stakeholders in educational planning, implementation, and evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA6S2</td>
<td>Strengthens the role of parent and advocacy organizations as they support individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA6S3</td>
<td>Develops and implements intra- and interagency agreements that create programs with shared responsibility for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA6S4</td>
<td>Develops seamless transitions of individuals with exceptional learning needs across educational continuum and other programs from birth through adulthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA6S5</td>
<td>Implements collaborative administrative procedures and strategies to facilitate communication among all stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA6S6</td>
<td>Engages in leadership practices that support shared decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA6S7</td>
<td>Demonstrates the skills necessary to provide ongoing communication, education, and support for families of individuals with exceptional learning needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA6S8</td>
<td>Consults and collaborates in administrative and instructional decisions at the school and district levels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F

Research Questions and Corresponding Statistical Analysis

Each question was analyzed based on total respondents as well as a disaggregation of respondents with and without special education certification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Survey Questions</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Type of Statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. To what extent do elementary school principals perceive that their evaluation systems are effective in addressing the unique job responsibilities of their special education teachers?</td>
<td>21, 22 and 37</td>
<td>-4 point Likert scale for three statements, for both general and special education (21 and 22) -certified/not certified as special education teacher (37)</td>
<td>Descriptive: mean and standard deviation for three statements for general education and special education Inferential: Separate t-tests for 21 and 22 (those certified/not certified as special education teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To what extent do elementary school principals perceive that their evaluation systems differentiate between the responsibilities of general and special education teachers?</td>
<td>8 and 37</td>
<td>-identification of whether or not there is differentiation (yes/no). -qualitative response regarding the type of differentiation for those indicating that differentiation exists</td>
<td>Descriptive statistic: number of respondents indicating differentiation exists/does not exist Qualitative: responses coded for themes and reported accordingly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To what extent do elementary school principals believe the evaluation/ supervision process should include unique performance indicators of special education teachers and to what degree are they able to provide feedback?</td>
<td>9, 10, 11 and 37</td>
<td>-5 point Likert scale (9) -4 point Likert scale for both general and special education (10 and 11) -certified/not certified as special education teacher (37)</td>
<td>Descriptive: mean, frequency distribution for 9, 10, and 11 Inferential: Separate t-tests for 9, 10, and 11 and (those certified/not certified as special education teacher)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. To what extent do elementary school principals perceive that they are proficient in providing feedback to special education teachers on various aspects of their responsibilities?

| 14-20 and 37 | - 4 point Likert for each statement | Descriptive: mean, frequency distribution for 14-20
Inferential: separate t-tests for each statement, collective t-test for all statements under each category. |
|--------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|

5. In what ways can the supervision/evaluation process be improved to more fully address the unique job responsibilities of special education teachers?

| 23 and 37 | -principals certified/not certified to teach special education. | Descriptive: % of principals certified/not certified as a special education teacher
Qualitative: responses coded for themes and reported based on respondent’s certification of special education practices |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|

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