A special educators insight on stigma, student performance and job satisfaction: who determines educational success?

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A Special Educators Insight on Stigma, Student Performance and Job Satisfaction: Who Determines Educational Success?

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Master of Science in Education
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A Special Educators Insight on Stigma, Student Performance and Job Satisfaction: Who Determines Educational Success?

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Abstract

This study describes the views, perceptions and thoughts of special education teachers at a New York City public school in Brooklyn, NY. The author requested the input of 5 special education teachers and 5 general education teachers to compare and contrast the thought processes behind teaching students with special needs. The participants completed a 20 question survey and discussed how special education in their school community could be improved. The results demonstrate that there are in fact several changes that require implementation to make the special education department at BHS more effective and beneficial to our students with special needs. Furthermore, the participants in this study have shown that special and general education teachers actually share many of the same views, and can benefit from each other’s best practices and experiences.
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BACKGROUND

A problem that has been a long standing issue in my organization is the separation of support as it relates to the special education department, its students, and teachers specifically. There is little research done on the social stigma and self-esteem of a special educator. Collectively students in special education are often overlooked and ignored compared to students in general education. I often ask myself, if students experience a sense of rejection and have no sense of belonging, how do our teachers feel?

Historically and politically, the special education department has never possessed any substantial authority in the school environment. When identifying whose voice needs to be considered when negotiating curriculum, funding or program planning; special education requests and/or concerns are usually rated least important. The general education curriculum and the general education staff has always been the main concern of our learning institution. The organization has always been a high competitor to other large high schools in the area due to the academic abilities of general education students therefore special education teachers are generally overshadowed.

The most pressing reason the special educator input is needed in my organization is the constant possibility of school closure. The school has been on the failing school list for 3 consecutive years. Time is of the essence to make needed changes to the school's organizational process. The benefit of implementing special education needs into the general curriculum and school wide programming will not only
affect student needs, it could also improve school performance ratings. The department of education has established criteria for school organizations to receive additional credit when they transition and graduate students with special needs appropriately.

As a social worker functioning in the special education department for the past 12 years I feel empowered and charged to make a difference in the lives of special education students. However, this cannot be done without the involvement of the special education teacher. The role of the special educator is a very unique one. Not only are they responsible for educating students with physical, emotional and cognitive deficiencies, they are also required by law to develop Individualized Education Plans. In my role as a social worker working in the my school’s Special Education Department I often hear special educators complain of not having administrative support or feeling isolated by general education teachers. My goal in my IMP is to create a voice for special education staff in my organization to help facilitate the needs of special education students where they will be able to perform more proficiently in general academic and recreational curriculum, reach their full potential, become productive citizens and achieve the goals they aspire to reach.

**School Environment General Description:**

BHS (Brooklyn High School) is an urban New York City public high school. It is located in the heart of Brooklyn and is surrounded by 7 housing projects. Although the neighborhood is becoming more gentrified, there is still a high rate of drug and gang activity around the school campus. The student population is 88% African American, 8%
Hispanic and 4% other. There is an estimated 1600 students on register, and 300 receive some form of special education service. The graduation rate is at 50 percent and students attending college after graduation is 35%. Sports are largely advertised and the school is ranked #1 in Varsity basketball and #3 in Junior Varsity football. However, many of the student athletes are not passing major subject classes or attending division one college teams due to low grades. The school has been placed on the schools that need improvement list for the past 3 years, and there are threats that the city wants to close the school down and develop 4 small charter schools inside the building.

Administration has collaborated with several community based organizations to provide mental health, reproductive, dental, and mediation services inside the school. Within the last two years the school has incorporated a Young Adult Program, GED Preparation program, Early Childhood Training program, Home Tutoring program and a Truancy program to assist children and families who experience difficulty finding work or attending school. Although these great programs have been implemented, performance statistics remain very low. Many senior teachers and faculty have been forced to retire before they were ready, and it has caused a huge disconnect between staff and administration. Turnover is very high due to the constant bullying or indiscreet signs of favoritism shown by administration to younger employees. Even with its shortfalls, BHS is committed to providing a safe and secure environment that enables students to display growth and development academically, culturally and socially. It is the school’s moral obligation to prepare students to become active and productive individuals in this global economy. BHS believes the approach to Urban Education is
pairing compassionate educators, with a diverse student population while receiving community and parental support.

In my opinion and experience, I believe this approach is a goal the school is aspiring to bring into fruition. Over the past 4 years, I have observed several compassionate educators be forced to retire or be arbitrarily removed from teaching their classes due to personal feelings of administrative staff. This in turn has led to students being left without academic instruction for weeks and in some cases several months. The student population at BHS is primarily very uniform. Most students fall in the Level 2 classification and need support or remedial services to be academically successful. There are a small percentage of students enrolled in a gifted and talented program. These students are given preferential treatment by faculty and administrators which I believe may also lower the academic expectations of the overall student population. Although the parental involvement component continues to struggle, the school has made strides to change the low rate of parent participation by affording student’s parents full-time job opportunities and supportive workshops.

**BHS Social System Model:**

The overall goal of BHS is to prepare our students to achieve their full potential and have a plan for life after high school. These goals will be accomplished by increasing our graduation rate, improving parental involvement, increasing the passing rate of students taking Regents exams, ensuring students accumulate 11 credits or more per
academic year, and increasing academic professional development to strengthen teacher practice and student work.

Within the social system at BHS, students have a profound effect on teachers. Teachers have been written up or penalized by administration if students were caught misbehaving in the classroom environment. Student behavior greatly determines a teacher’s observation or rating. The administrative roles and responsibilities in my school environment are enmeshed. There is 1 overall principal, and then a second in command who holds the title of Assistant Principal of Organization. There are 4 Assistant Principals assigned to each core subject (English, Math, Social Studies and Science), 1 Assistant Principal assigned to the Guidance Department, and the same assistant principals are responsible for one of the four small learning communities. Most of the Assistant Principal’s roles and responsibilities are often intertwined. For instance my immediate supervisor is responsible for Special Education and the Law Academy. Another Assistant Principal is responsible for Security and the organization of the entire school building. Next in line are Academy Coordinators. Academy Coordinators are appointed teachers who are second in command under the assistant principal of an academy; however they have no administrative power. Lastly, teachers and other faculty which include Guidance Counselors, Social Workers, Psychologists, School Aides/Paraprofessionals, Secretaries and Custodial Staff make up the entire social system at BHS High School.

Students are expected to attend class daily, and are responsible for carrying their student ID card and program card. Students are encouraged to carry an 8 ½ x 11 binder
with sections for all subjects on a daily basis and are also required to have composition notebooks. There should also be substantial notes relating to each class lesson that includes dates, a heading, aim or objective and understandable information.

Teachers are expected to arrive to work promptly before their students and prepare daily lesson plans that emphasize literacy and learning objectives. They are to ensure that students are motivated to learn by creating classrooms that are print rich, student centered, and technology infused. It is the responsibility of the teacher to provide students with support to help develop and maintain good notebooks, exhibit skills that are indicative of the emphasis on learning and have knowledge of the subject being taught. Teachers are also required to display learning standards in their classrooms and provide positive reinforcement and rewards to students who competently complete task and assignments.

Students who engage in behavior that is substantially disruptive to the educational process or substantially interferes with a teacher’s authority over the classroom will be removed from the classroom. Students who are involved in fighting will initially be placed with administrators, guidance counselors, social workers or other teaching personnel. The assistant principal of security will then determine the number of days (1-5) or whether the suspension will be a Principals, Superintendent, or Extended Suspension at a Secondary option school. Parents must be informed of all the above and a parent conference will be held within 48 hours of the incident. However if a student brings in a weapon they automatically receive a superintendent suspension which could lead to expulsion for the entire school year or possibly an arrest.
The role of the teacher is to provide instructional teaching strategies to students. Formal guidelines for teachers and staff who are sanctioned for the following categories are investigated (poor attendance, excessive lateness, appearance, misuse of drugs and alcohol, inappropriate conduct with teacher and or students abuse) and if found guilty of said offense a conduct a letter will be placed in their file which could lead to termination of employment. In regards to observations, teacher contracts state they are entitled to due diligence and should receive a pre observation, observation and post conference. When a teacher is given an unsatisfactory rating for a poor observation they are given a counseling memo and if improvement is not made by the scheduled time allotted, a letter will be placed in a file which can also led to termination of employment.

The community plays a huge part in the school's environment. Local politicians and community based organizations assist the school in many roles. The community plays such a big role in the school they alongside local politicians fought for the school to remain open when the city and state attempted to close it. The community conducted rallies, townhouse meetings and public demonstrations. The community has also been responsible for creating the new state of the art library which is furnished with all Apple computers, up to date reading material, and access to a host of research databases. They are currently in the process of creating a greenhouse for the local community as well.
**Informal Social Structure:**

The informal social structure of my organization consists of teachers, secretaries and other faculty that do not have administrative licenses. However, many of them have very close relationships with individuals in the formal structure. Personal relationships have the potential to influence actions made by administrative faculty. For instance, Academy Coordinators are second in command to the Assistant Principal of a small learning community but in reality they are only teachers with a title. Their title as Academy Coordinator however gives them influence to speak at many cabinet or administrative meetings other faculty members are not invited to. There are several cliques in the informal structure. One of the main networks is the School Leadership Team (SLT). These are a group of teachers that discuss concerns and topics that will be addressed to administration. Staff members who volunteer on the school leadership team often run into resistance by other teachers and faculty because many staff members have a hard time trusting them. Most staff members believe teachers associated with the SLT have ulterior motives, or administration has planted them in an informal group as a mole. Although these allegations are unfounded, there have been times in meetings where administrators have discussed topics in school faculty meetings that were told in confidence at a SLT meeting.

Staff who work for administration that are not concerned with personal acceptance are usually unhappy, take more days off and find it difficult to relax. They are also the group that spends most of the time complaining. Those who work with administration who are generally concerned about personal acceptance believe their
supervisor has their best interest and encourages their advancement. These staff members appear to be more content and are more cognizant of the realization of organizational goals because they feel valued and are vested in the organization.

**BHS Research Plan:**

Processes that would encourage brainstorming and system thinking would be defining a purpose, choosing a select amount of participants, and identifying a facilitator. Examples of this process could include:

- Administration and special educators defining their purpose and identifying each of their goals. This could be provided by questionnaires that target the school’s mission and vision statement, interviews with select administrative and special education staff and group chat in scheduled department meetings.

- After the defining purpose reaches a consensus, two or three members from administration and the special education department will develop strategies geared towards implementation. This process will be conducted throughout the school year and members will meet monthly to discuss what strategies work and what doesn’t.

- During these scheduled implementation meetings a facilitator will be assigned that shares the mutual interest of administration as well as special education needs/concerns, such as a social worker or guidance counselor. The facilitator will ensure that everyone gets a chance to speak, in addition to making sure the meetings remains on track.
**Goals of Special Education Department at BHS:**

In order to effectively address special education student needs and provide special education teachers a platform to be heard, there has to be administration buy-in.

Through non formal meetings, data collection, surveys, and record finding, administrators will have a better understanding of the special education teacher’s role as it relates to instruction, and individualized student need.

- It is suggested that administration should collaboratively meet with Special Education Staff to discuss curriculum, policy, and school activities. During these regularly scheduled meetings, special education staff can discuss with their department head how the current curriculum negatively affects special education students and how it could be differentiated to better suit students at lower academic functioning. In addition, both staff and administrators can brainstorm ideas on how to incorporate school wide activities that special education students shy away from or feel rejected by.

- It is suggested that administration arrange assemblies with Special Education Students to discuss their needs and interests. A survey could be generated to inquire about their interests, strengths, weakness and post-secondary goals. Or an open forum with a question and answer segment where students can voice their opinion on what works and what doesn’t. This information can then assist teachers, administrators and other support staff on what programs or workshop can be implemented or what current programs or policy can be reviewed or restructured.
• It is suggested that administration arrange regular meetings with both general
and special educator teaching staff and support staff to discuss methods of
effectively including special education students and staff in general education
activities and curriculum. In these meetings best practices can be shared by both
special and general educators. Special education teachers and staff can provide
general educators with information about individualized student needs and
differentiation tools used in the classroom. I believe this will help special
educators feel less isolated and an integral part of the school community.

By requesting the school community to be actively involved in assisting our
special education department, I believe students with special needs will benefit
tremendously. Progress could be monitored by the overall involvement of student
participation in school activities such as cheerleading, debate team, clubs or student
government. In addition, success could also be demonstrated by the involvement of
administrators in the special education curriculum process and the transitioning of
the special education population. By adopting a human resource framework it would
symbolize that everyone is important and student and teacher needs could be met,
supported and empowered. Student and teachers needs could be more visible and
accessible regardless of special or general education criteria.

**Student Identity in Segregated Classes**

According to Freeman and Alkin (2000) the most appropriate educational
environment for students with disabilities has been an issue of intense public debate for
some time. Some argue the advantages of maintaining segregated special educations
settings, however there is increasing recognition of long-term social and academic cost of segregation and the benefit of full inclusion for all students.

A study conducted by Frank Fitch considered the perspective of special education student’s identity of self in inclusive and segregated learning environments. It concluded that information from participant observation as well as teacher and student interviews supports inclusive schooling. The study suggests that as the students moved into and out of traditionalist and inclusive classrooms they presented a changing sense of themselves in relation to ideological beliefs and practices within particular schools and classrooms. Students in inclusive classrooms constructed a sense of themselves that was significantly different and more positive from those in either segregated or traditionalist classrooms. The original intent was to gain an understanding of the experience of inclusion from the perspective of special education students. The author was interested in how they made sense of the transition from a self-contained special education environment to full inclusion in general education. As the study progressed, the author eventually expanded this interest to encompass the perspective of students in the self-contained developmentally handicapped (DH) class at Grand Elementary School. A total of 11 students were interviewed for this study.

Data Collection:

The research method of this study employed participant observation and the audio taping of semi structured interviews. There were approximately 15 written questions for students and formal interviews were conducted with teachers. Student interviews were conducted from 1995-2001. Teachers were interviewed from the 1995-
1996 school year. The questions were intended to gain an understanding of how students viewed their present class placement, the legitimacy of special education and the extent they regarded themselves as part of the wider school culture and felt accepted by their classmates and teachers.

**Key Insights/Findings**

Research done by Brantlinger (199), Albinger (1995), Reid and Button (1995), Gutterman (1995), Wearmouth (1999), and Jahnukainen (2000) revealed feelings of humiliation and shame accompanied by strategies of avoidance or passing and denial on the part of special education students and low achievers. The results of these studies have made me question the self-confidence and image of the special educator. This study asked how special education students experience various segregated and inclusive learning environments. The most prevalent theme that was recurrent throughout the study was confidence vs. resignation which reflects the contrast between students regard for themselves in an inclusive, traditionalist and segregated classrooms. When integrated students were placed in inclusive classrooms they were seemingly confident and had a hopeful sense of self in the mainstream school culture. The second theme was special education as a sanctuary. As integrated students were resegregated the former sense of confidence and belonging was severely shaken or disappeared. Among segregated students the degree of hope, confidence, and belonging never fully emerges.

The ideological beliefs of teachers appeared to make a difference in the social identities of their students. Student’s sense of themselves appeared to change according to their circumstances. What was consistently surfaced throughout the study
was the extent to which they adopted the attitudes, behavior and view of themselves that was consistent to the school educational professionals. “The narratives of segregated students illustrate how the system of delivering services to the developmentally delayed has produced a particular reality and has all but covered them with a cloak of incompetence” (Bogedan and Taylor, 1994).

Although all of the students in this study began special education in self-contained classes, over time their sense of self varied widely according to the nature of their educational placements. When integrated students became members of inclusive classroom communities, they constructed a relatively confident, hopeful sense of themselves as legitimate participants in the mainstream of school culture. Significantly however, even within what they termed inclusive schools, there were traditionalist classrooms that did not offer this sense of belonging. In this environment, students often expressed a sense of rejection, resignation, and a desire to escape to the safety of the special education classroom. As integrated students were eventually resegregated in two local junior high schools, and anonymity of the special education class, they admitted a secret sense of shame, embarrassment, and desire to eventually escape its confines.

This study touches on the aspect of my research that suggest changes in professional views can lead to having a more profound and positive impact of the lives of special education students. Therefore the attitudes of special education teachers such as their concerns, recommendations and ideas should be taken into consideration when school
wide programming and general activities are being conducted because it will ultimately affect the lives of the students they teach.

Traditionally, we have been led to believe that special education students work improve if they receive specialized, skill based instruction in separate settings. However, this study revealed that the longer a student remained within the special education classroom; the more they took on the identity as an outsider. To some extent I reckon this thought process may be felt by special education teachers too. Support and interventions are usually conducted by special education experts. As a school community, support and interventions should be collective and not curriculum specific. Diversity within general and special education is needed to break through the preconceived beliefs that those with disabilities and or teach students with disabilities are different.

**Labels and Stigma in Special Education**

Traditionally the term special education is known to have a negative connotation. Although, a lot of attention is not brought to the forefront there are labels and stigma in special education. Labels such as intellectually disabled, mentally retarded, culturally disadvantaged, and culturally deprived constitute the largest group of exceptional children in the schools. There are conferences and workshops on labeling and categorizing issues in special education, but sadly, there is an absence of empirical data and documentation on the extent of this problem. The central theme of the paper *Labels and stigma in Special Education* written by Reginald L. Jones, will touch on some of these concerns.
Deficiencies exist in the delivery of services to exceptional children in two important aspects:

1) Insufficient attention has been given to the fact that some of the labels used imply deficiencies and shortcoming which generate attendant problems of lowered self-concept and expectation which interfere with children’s optimum growth and development.

2) No systemic inquiry has been conducted into children’s perceptions of the labels and special services which we offer them.

Analyses of data from several students involving more than 10,000 public school students, graduates, and dropouts, college students; prospective and in-service teachers; and counselors revealed that 1) children reject the labels culturally disadvantaged and culturally deprived as descriptive of themselves, 2) that acceptance of such labels was associated with lowered school attitudes, 3) that teachers hold lowered expectation for performances of the deprived and disadvantaged child, 4) that educable mental retardates report (and teachers confirm) stigma associated with special class placement, and that (5) few strategies for the management of stigma in classes for the educable mentally retarded have been developed by teachers (Jones, R., 1971).

There is very few data or documentation of the extent of the problem of labels and stigma as previewed by teachers, pupil’s school administrations, citizens, and parents. There is no documentation of strategies designed to deal with these problems—empirically based or otherwise. Given these deficiencies, it is apparent that data in these
areas are sorely needed if we are to plan effectively for the delivery of service to exceptional children on a sounder base than it has been before.

The concern about labels and stigma special education has been stimulated by minority groups, particularly, African Americans, Mexican-Americans, who point to the excessive amount of their members in special classes for the mentally retarded and to the stigma associated with such placement. The consequences of such practices for the child include a lowered self-concept, rejection by teachers, parents and peers, and poor prospects for post school adjustment and employment.

**Key Insights/Findings:**

A descriptive term for a child of lower socio-economic background, usually of black or other minority status, is culturally disadvantaged or culturally deprived. Although this study was conducted 4 decades ago, many of the labels continue to exist. No matter the socioeconomic or grade level, children reject the labels culturally deprived and culturally disadvantaged as descriptive of oneself. We as educators have to do better when describing students and characterizing them by the labels they are associated with.

Teacher expectation about the performance of children can come to serve a self-fulfilling prophecy. Investigations suggest that teachers do hold low expectations for certain classes of students and that expectations do relate to the ways in which teachers interact with their pupils. Herriot and St. John (1966) led a set of interviews with a national sample of teachers and pupils in urban public school which reported that the lower socio-economic status (SES) of the schools the smaller the proportion of teachers held favorable opinions about the motivation and behavior of their pupils. Jones states
there is evidence which indicates that reported satisfaction in teaching is directly correlated with pupil school morale (Jones, 1968). Regardless of the order of development of the attitudes it seems reasonably clear that lower satisfaction in work with young children is very closely tied to pupil satisfaction with school. Teacher satisfaction has the more powerful effect on pupil morale in the early grades.

Educators considered support staff also hold clear stereotypes about the characteristics and attitudes of children’s labeled. Sadly, most of the characteristics and stereotypes are negative. It seems important in planning school programs for the intellectually disabled to have some knowledge of perceptions of his/her special class placement and of techniques which the child uses to manage the fact of such placement.

Meyerowitz, (1962) conducted research at the elementary level which indicates that the young child’s concept drops following placement in a self-contained special class for the intellectual disabled student. At the high school level, the self-concept of the same student was found to be lower than that of non classified students in regular class (Jones, 1968)

The student labeled intellectually disabled or mentally challenged while in school does not following graduation or school termination erases this experience from consciousness. There is evidence that the student is sensitive to the fact of his former special class placement and that such sensitivity does influence interaction with friends, acquaintances and potential employers (Dyck & Jones (1969). By understanding the
harsh effects of being stigmatized, we as educators have to be mindful of how we treat youngsters while they are in our care.

**Placement Options where Secondary Students with Disabilities are Educated**

IDEA concludes that the majority of students in special education will acquire the knowledge and skills needed to access the general education curriculum and make adequate yearly progress based in success in standardized state and local assessments. However the current climate in schools seems to be more focused on accountability, increased standards and high performance testing for all students (Browder, Spooner, Wakeman, Trela& Baker, 2006; Thurlow & Wiley 2006). A one size fits all standardized approach does not always mesh with the individual instructional and support needs of students with disabilities (Browder et al., 2006; Goodman, Hazeltorn, Bucholz, Duffy & Kitta, 2011). Focusing primarily on content knowledge overlooks what we conventionally know about teaching, a teachers style and practice is one of the central factors in improving academic success and strengthening the self-efficacy of struggling learners (Deshler, Schumaker, & Woodruff, 2004; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003, Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997).

Researchers Gloria Wilson, Sun A. Kim and Craig A. Michaels (2011) conducted a study on increasing the knowledge base on students with disabilities at the secondary level. Data was gathered on 559 classified students with disabilities served in 4 educational options cotaught classes, resource room, alternate day support programs and no direct supports. Results indicate that there are associations between
classifications and placement options, differences in full scale IQ by placement option, differences in the numbers of related services and the number of testing accommodations students receive based on placement option, associations among placement option and both related services and testing accommodations and no differences in grades by placement option.

**Data Collection:**

This study was conducted in a large suburban, metropolitan school district consisting of two middle schools (grades 7 and 8) and three middle high schools (Grades 9 through 12), serving approximately 6,000 students in New York State. At the time that this data was collected 90.7% of students with disabilities in New York received part of their daily instruction in general education classrooms and 24.13% received more than 60% of their daily instruction in resource rooms or segregated special education settings within a public school (National Center for Educational Statistics 2010). Data was gathered on 559 secondary students with disabilities in the sample through electronic and paper-based file and document review including IEP’s, report cards and formal assessment reports. Two graduate level research assistants entered study data, without student names or any other identifying personal information.

**Key Insights/Findings:**

Morningstar, Turnbull and Turnbull (1995), report that students feel that school professionals place little attention on getting student input during the transition process. Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (Cameto, Levine, & Wagner, 2004) indicate that while in school almost half of all secondary students with
disabilities planned to attend college, yet 2 years post-graduation only 19% of students with disabilities were actually attending college; as compared to 40% of their peers without disabilities. This is a very interesting point because as the transition coordinator at BHS, the student’s voice and preference is noted when deciding a transition placement. In my experience, most students are successful and remain in the program if it was their choice to attend.

“Although some researchers express concerns about the effectiveness of coteaching on the academic, social, and behavioral outcomes of secondary students with disabilities (e.g., Boudah et al, 1997; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Murawski, 2006; Vaughn, Elbaum, Schumm, & Hughes, 1998; Weichel, 2001), others report that co-teaching improves the academic outcomes of secondary students with disabilities across content areas such as reading (Hang & Rabren, 2009), math (Fontana, 2005; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Rea, McLaughlin & Walther-Thomas, 2002) & science (McDuffie, Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2009)”. Research also demonstrates that co-teaching is a preferred option of students and teachers with both groups reporting the benefits of co-teaching (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007; Wilson & Michaels, 2006). Secondary students with and without disabilities viewed coteaching positively as result of the increased opportunities to receive assistance afforded by having two teachers in the classroom (Wilson & Michaels, 2006). At BHS, co-teaching is also the more preferred classroom environment compared to self-contained classes; however, the only co-teaching subjects are English and Math. In my opinion another factor that plays a role in
the co-teaching preference at BHS, is the social/emotional aspect of learning with students who are thought to be in general education.

In spite of the body of literature reporting that coteaching promotes positive learning and behavioral outcomes for students with disabilities, other research suggests that’s students with disabilities, especially students with emotional disturbance, learning disabilities, and behavior disorders, may not be doing better than their counterparts in resource rooms or pull-out programs (Boudah et al 1997; Fore, Hagan-Burke, Boon, & Smith, 2008; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Vaughn et al, 1998). This research finding tells us that there is reason self-contained classrooms were developed. Often times, students with special needs feel more comfortable learning with students they feel they can relate to. The answer to improving students’ academic functioning should not always be to remove them from a self-contained or special education program.

“The only certainty regarding the effects of class placement is that there is no consensus, and there is little evidence that academic achievement differs by placement option (Fore, 2008). Many have questioned how decisions are made about how students with disabilities are placed into educational options along the continuum of services and what subsidiary services and instructional supports (i.e. related services, and accommodations or modification) are actually provided to these students to facilitate access to the general education curriculum (Bull &Reedy, 2007;Guardino, 2008; Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004); and if such a large percentage of students with disabilities are currently being educated in general education classes how are they
actually performing academically. Recently, Goodman (2011) reported on data for the state of Georgia suggesting that although inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms increased 64% over the 6 year period addressed in their study, the overall graduation rate for these students remained unchanged at slightly less than 30%. These findings are consistent with previous research reporting that class placement for students with disabilities are not correlated with academic achievement (Fore, 2008).

Empirical data on student’s responses to various placement options are essential to initiate any attempts to verify effective special education practices. This study represents an initial step gathering data for secondary level students with disabilities. The findings also question the effectiveness of resource room. Resource room services have remained substantially unchanged for the past 35 + years, whereas expectations to students, curriculum demands (standards) and high stakes testing have increased steadily (E.G Bentum & Aaron 2003). At BHS, resource room has not been effective since license special educators have instructed the class. Currently, resource room is simply a class students attend for credit recovery.

Beyond the scope of the study the findings suggest that the field of special education is a service not a place. It is important to explore the assumption that although reflecting a full-time placement in general education classrooms, coteaching classes are considered a more restrictive placement option than placement in resource room. Co-teaching classes are being selected as a placement option for supporting
students who may have previously been served in self-contained classes, rather than students who were historically served in resource room setting. Further research needs to be conducted regarding a student’s placement as it relates to their grades, standardized testing and student performance.

**Attachment security and the school experience for Emotionally Disturbed Adolescents**

Teenagers with disabilities are at increased risk for school failure. And those in special education classified emotional disturbed consistently have the highest dropout rate of any disability. Carolyn Ericson (2006) discusses the importance of feelings of security in relationships for these adolescents and the results of a study designed to determine the effects of these feelings on their educational experience. The impact of relationships such as, home, and school life of emotionally disturbed adolescents are explored. Parents, teachers, social workers, and peers are all potential secure bases for these adolescents.

**Data Collection:**

A total of 64 students who were enrolled in Intensity V schools in a large urban area participated in this study. Intensity V is a classification used to indicate that a student is in need of intensive services in a setting outside mainstream school. All students tested with the normal and in some cases above normal IQ limits. 78% of the subjects were male. 40% of the students in the study were African American. One was Hispanic, and the remaining 27% were white. The highest percentage of students lived with both parents (37.5%) and the next highest (26.6%) lived with mother only.
The measures of the study included the independent variable (relatedness) and the dependent variable (classroom engagement). Student quality of relatedness to social partners was derived from a set of items (9 items) total for each relationship) which were rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale: very true, sort of true, not very true and not at all true. The variable perceived emotional quality of student’s relationships partners, was measured through self-reports of emotional quality of students’ relationships. The dependent variable was classroom engagement as rated by teachers on a 4-point Likert scale. Nine teachers altogether completed the scale. Students are considered to be engaged if they pay attention, work hard, prefer challenging rather than easy work, do more than is required and enjoy school. The control variable was a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity. ADHD may impact on a student’s ability to stay involved in classroom activities, which can influence a teacher’s evaluation of engagement.

Twenty (31%) of the students had been diagnosed with ADHD.

**Key Insights/Findings:**

Although increased independence is generally seen as a task of adolescence, this occurrence does not mean that absence of feelings that one can, or should, rely on parents is ideal or conducive to healthy growth. There is agreement that individuation and personality development are fostered not through detachment from significant caregivers, but through a continuation of relatedness (Greenberg, Sigel and Leitch, 1983; Steinberg & Silverman, 1986). Relationship factors are often overlooked when planning programs that will support educational achievement. Adolescents with disabilities are at increased risk for school failure and those with emotional and
behavioral disturbances consistently have the highest school dropout rate of any group of disabilities.

The National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health (Resnick, 1997) found that perceived connectedness to schools made adolescents less likely to participate in risky behaviors, and positive relationships with teachers were more important than classroom size or level of teacher training. In addition, feelings of classroom attachment and teacher support have been associated with academic encouragement, achievement, and motivation among early adolescents.

Children who have experienced affectionate and responsive caregiving not only develop secure attachment relationships with their caregivers but then, based on this early experience, are likely to trust others and to see the world as a safe place in which exploration can occur. Bowlby states (1998) that a secure base is provided by a person who is available, and who will encourage and assist when needed, but intervenes only when necessary. In child development, secure readiness to learn has been defined as a dynamic balance between creating safe, secure relationships with adults and feelings independent enough to venture out to explore the world in a manner that is likely to promote maturation of cognitive competencies (Aber & Allen, 1987)

The idea of security of attachment is important during the adolescence years when increasing independence is expected and new academic hardships are presented. Behrends and Batt (1985) assert that separation-individuation occurs in adolescence as well as in toddlerhood. Adolescents are able to establish new relationships, because they have internalized their parents cognitively and emotionally. If security of
attachment plays a significant role in a child or adolescent’s school experience, a student doesn’t feel secure or safe finds it difficult to respond effectively to new stimuli in a classroom. The student’s focus will dwell on emotional safety rather than on appealing to classroom activities and exploring new areas, this concept will feel too risky.

Ryan and Lynch (1994) using the Inventory of Adolescent Attachments, found that students who experienced more security in attachments with parents were also more apt to feel more secure with teachers. In a study of African American high school students, relatedness to parents uniquely predicted student engagement, which positively correlated with staying in school (Connell, 1995). Secure maternal attachment has been positively correlated with grade point average for academically successful inner-city youth (Kenny, 2002). However, family therapy is infrequently a component of special education services (Knitzer, Steinberg & Fleisch, 1990).

It is indicated that the level of felt security ands safeness in relationships with significant people in the adolescent environment will greatly impact the ability to engage successfully in a classroom. This element is critical in that engagement is necessary for adolescents to prosper in the classroom environment and increase the likelihood of maximizing their potential. A student’s ability to engage has been shown to have a relationship to the ability to achieve academically (Skinner, Wellborn & Connell, 1990; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Connell et al., 1995). Disengagement from school has been found to be a significant predictor for dropping out of high school (Jimerson et al., 2000; Englund & Luckner 2004). If students are not feeling emotionally secure, it is
difficult to focus on what is expected of them. At times, feelings of anxiety overpower the curiosity necessary to learn.

This study has shown that the student’s connections to certain others are related to their academic life. Since the goal of special education is to provide services that enhance a student’s ability to learn, the need to include professionals who can foster the development of secure relationships is clear. The defensive nature of a need to idealize must be considered when interventions are made. Services should not be discretionary but offered as an integral part of an Emotional Disturbed student’s program. In addition, others in the student’s classroom environment can provide security to the student and should be educated in attachment issues and effective responses to students who evidence insecure attachments.

**What Impedes Collaboration between General and Special Education Staff?**

At BHS, there are several misconceptions about special education and the role the special and general educator play in inclusive settings. In 1975 The Education for All Handicapped Children Act required all public schools accepting federal funds to provide equal access to education for children with physical and mental disabilities. This law was the first step towards inclusion in the classrooms. In 1990 during reauthorization, the law changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In response to this law, schools began programming students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (Kluth, Vila and Thousand 2002). By placing students in the least restrictive environment, students who were traditionally placed in segregated classrooms were now being placed in regular classrooms. Since the amendments of this law in 1991 and
1997 many self-contained classrooms for special education has ended. Teachers are now seeing the placement of more diverse students with diverse needs in their classrooms. Now that the roles of teachers in general and special education are changing I thought this literature review would highlight many of the misconceptions teachers at BHS also share. Since our teachers play a crucial role creating climate in the classroom, knowledge of their attitudes toward collaboration and the special needs students they instruct is imperative.

A study conducted by three teachers, Beth Hart, Kia Conrad and Pat McDonald (2003) examined the climate among teachers that deal with students with special needs. The researchers felt there was an uncomfortable undercurrent between general and special education staff, administration and other support staff regarding roles and responsibilities of teachers working with special needs students. They also felt this undercurrent might have a negative impact on the student learning in general education classrooms.

**Data Collection:**

In this study, three certified secondary teachers at East High School in the Madison Metropolitan School District developed a survey designed to determine staff attitudes towards team teaching and communication between two groups of teachers. This survey consisted of 123 responses from 140 surveys.

**Key Insights/Findings:**

Research literature tells us that teacher attitude towards collaboration and each other play an important role in the success of students. At BHS, and many other public
schools, teachers are colleagues in name only. They rarely like to co-exist with one another in the same classroom. Teachers generally work in isolation in a closed door classroom. Due to the constant demands of paper work, bulletin board, assessments and common core standards there is little time for planning and sharing ideas with others in their departments.

This study finding indicates that most teachers are not clear on what is appropriate inclusion. Collaboration involves commitment by teachers, administrators, school systems, and the community to ensure each child has the opportunity to learn (Ripley, 1997). There has to be regular scheduled meeting or workshops conducted for collaborative teaching classrooms to be implemented. However, in many cases collaborative classes are constructed without any communication to the teachers beforehand. This lack of communication and preparation leads to misconceptions and poor collaborative settings.

Many teachers equated differentiation with modifying for special education. This concept is very common at BHS. Associating differentiation with special education students points out that the teachers are not actually familiar with the theory of differentiation. Ongoing teacher training is essential to enhance teacher’s skills in order to accommodate all students. In my experience at BHS, professional development workshops and trainings highlighting specifics about working with students with disabilities, general education teachers seldom attend.

Overall both general and special education teachers feel out of touch with what is going on departmentally and feel isolated. Communication as a whole in BHS, between
staff and administration continues to be a concern. One of the major reasons communication is poorly delivered is lack of consistency. There often seems to be a disconnect between administrators receiving information and then disseminating that information to peers and subordinates effectively.

Many teachers lack information on duties and responsibilities of special education teachers. Lack of information on the special educators role reinforces the idea that one group has it easier than the other group, especially when it concerns self-contained classes in content areas. When in reality, self-contained classroom presents the same if not more responsibilities on the part of the special educator.

Teachers generally feel positive about team teaching and are in favor of differentiation. In a collaborative model the general education and special education teachers each bring their skills, training, and perspectives to the team. Typically the role of the general education teachers is to use their skills to instruct students in the curricula dictated by the state. The role of the special education teacher is to provide instruction by adapting and developing materials to match the learning styles, strengths, and special needs of each of their students. The collaborative goal is that all students in the classroom are provided with appropriate classwork and homework assignments so that each is challenged and participating in the classroom process. Unfortunately, the amount of special education teaching staff at BHS is so low this goal is almost impossible. There are only 6 certified special education teachers in the building; so many collaborative classes are instructed by two general education teachers. This collaboration doesn’t benefit students with special needs because they are still held up
to the same standards as their counterparts however, their work is not individualized and assignments are not accommodated.

Teachers need to develop ways to understand the role of the special/general education teacher roles and increase staff/administration communication to aid in planning and problem solving. This study confirms that misconceptions regarding the roles of the special and general educator need to be clarified systematically. Some teachers lack understanding of why we need collaborative teaching in the classroom. Teachers need to be reminded that every student regardless of a special or general education classification are nonetheless still OUR children. Therefore the misunderstandings that exist can actually have a negative impact on the achievement of our students.

**Job Satisfaction and Retention of Special Education Teachers**

Currently, students with special needs make up a third of the student population, however the amount of certified special educators facilitating instruction are far less. In comparison, 13 years ago, at the start of my career there were over 15 certified special educators and resource room teachers. Attracting, satisfying, and retaining teachers of students in special education programs, especially those who are labeled emotional and behavioral difficulties presents as a huge challenge in today’s society. The occupational field of special education has been particularly vulnerable to losing its well trained professional staff. A study conducted by Lori Stempien and Roger Loes (2002) compared the satisfaction and dissatisfactions of teachers of emotionally/behaviorally impaired students in special education, teachers of students in general education and teachers
responsible for both groups of students in schools within a 30 mile radius in Detroit Michigan.

Data Collection:

Teacher participation was requested from eight suburban schools from five different school districts. The schools were located within a 30-mile radius of Detroit, Michigan, and served predominantly White, middle class, suburban neighborhoods. All participants were full-time certified teachers. The data collected compared three classifications of teachers.

1. Teachers of students without disabilities
2. Teachers of students identified as having emotional and or behavioral impairments in special education
3. Teachers of students with both types of programs.

The participating teachers ranged in age from 22 to 57 years. Nearly all participants were White (97%). Most were women (88%), married (75%) and had children (68%).

The questionnaire was a 5 page survey that consisted of two satisfactions scales. One scale focused more on the emotional reaction to work and the second scale focused more on the teacher’s psychological well-being.

Key Insights/Findings:

This study focuses on teachers of students who are emotionally/behaviorally impaired. The findings suggest these teachers rate themselves lower than teachers of students in general education programs and were found to be the most dissatisfied. At BHS, this is a familiar undertone. Due to the new enrollment process, students who
were traditionally put into District 75 schools are now being enrolled at BHS. Teachers and support staff are constantly trying to remain in compliance with the services and accommodations the students are legally afforded. In addition to making sure the I.E.P is up to date.

Work challenges are especially evident among the new special education teachers. They have the least experience and are given students with multiple disabilities, inconsistent symptoms and poor prognoses for substantial progress. Records are inaccurate or outdated and each of the students need individualized attention and support (Billingsley & Tomchin, 1992). Progress is often not highlighted because standard measures of academic success are typically not relevant. At BHS, administration has often told special education teachers they do not provide enough rigor or differentiation in their classroom environment, however many of the students are rarely able to function independently or even in a small group activity.

The common factor associated with dissatisfaction for teachers of students in special education is that of frustration. Some special education teachers respond to this frustration by withdrawing their personal commitment and involvement to their job, while others stay strongly involved but pay the price of being forced to cope with high stress and its connected dissatisfaction (Billingsley and Cross 1992). At BHS, although students play a part in their frustration, I believe the lack of certified special educators make up most of the dissatisfaction with the job. Most special educators at BHS resign or pursue another teaching position in a charter or smaller school within 3-5 years. Evans (1997) suggested that educators of students with special needs may begin their
careers with high expectations that they will be able to overcome the challenges faced by their students, however when realities set in, a sense of not measuring up to their own professional goals leaves them frustrated and dissatisfied in their job.

Specific stresses and frustrations both within and from outside the classroom were found to be associated with the dissatisfaction. Although stresses within the classroom are what most special educators are known to complain about, some of the outside stressors are more mentally frustrating. For example, at BHS, an outside stressor that can be associated with dissatisfaction could be administrative demands in regards to I.E.P annual reviews, or the pace of academic progress shown on standardized testing. Lack of movement or being rated unsatisfactory for untimely paperwork may definitely leave an educator frustrated and dissatisfied in their career.

Special education teachers commonly perceive a lack of success on their part due to the child’s actual problems or the teacher’s simply having unrealistic goals. This stress lowers the teacher self-confidence which leads to frustration and ultimately job dissatisfaction is followed (Weiskopt (1980), Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978). Whereas in a study conducted by Lobsosco & Newman found that teachers working with gifted and talented students predicted high job satisfaction. The common thread is less successful students are associated with less satisfied teachers. My reason for this study was based on this point. As a social worker, who counsels students with a variety of special needs, I often imagined how the teacher must feel instructing students who give up hope or have no sense of belonging. I believe teachers have to be built for this challenge. Small success nonetheless is still a success. Although administrators are forced to consider
numbers, standards and academic progress, they also need to take into account a
teachers passion and drive to educate young people who may have been told from early
on they were less than. In addition, educators and administrators collectively need to
find ways to reinvent the system and make certain laws work in their favor. For example
many states do not use standardized testing as the absolute criteria for meeting
graduation requirements, there are other levels of mastery such as senior portfolios, or
skills assessments interviews.

Teachers of students in exclusively special education programs cited the importance
of staff colleagues more often than other teachers. At BHS, with their only being 6
special education teachers camaraderie should be a must, however there seems to be a
separation of trust from the new teachers and the veteran teachers. Many of the new
teachers appear to be more concerned with book knowledge while veteran teachers
have the tendency to operate from wisdom and experience. In an ideal world they both
can learn a lot from each other if they were able to put their difference aside. What I
have noticed in my years at BHS, is that the more novice teachers tend to affiliate with
the general education teachers, while the veteran teachers associate with all staff. In
my opinion, the latter is aware that it takes the support of all staff to guide our youth.

Many teachers of students in special education seem to be finding fewer rewards
on the job than their colleagues teaching students in general education. Up until
recently, the special education department at BHS was never taken seriously. Previously
the principal would take the special education department budget and spend it on
general education activities. Special education teachers would not participate in
professorial retreats or workshops. Within the past 5 years, the department has had 4 administrators. There was no sense of stability or support from an administrator. Staff didn’t feel appreciated or acknowledged for their tireless effort and countless hours of work on behalf of their students, therefore many resigned or retired. Although we are not where we need to be, we know how far we have come. Although we are not where we need to be, we know how far we have come. To date, the special education department now has their own yearly retreat, own trips, own workshops, and a supervisor that believes with team work anything is possible.

Gersten and associates (2001) suggest that stress can be reduced by altering job design. Teachers should be provided with sufficient background information on each child. This will allow teachers to see their children progress rather than focusing on their limitations. Refocusing will produce a sense of self efficacy in the teacher. The teachers positive feelings can be reinforced through recognition within the school for the quality of work achieved (Rosenberg and associates (1997).

Ax, Conderman and Stephens (2001) suggests making new teachers aware of the unique challenges ahead and arming them with techniques to deal with these challenges should ease the transition into teaching students with special needs. An example of this could resemble a mentor/mentee collaboration. Both teachers can learn from each other. However, the novice teacher can shadow the more experienced teacher to get ideas about assessments, classroom management, and how to complete special education paperwork such as progress reports and individualized educational plans.
Bos, Nahmias and Urban (1997) found involving teachers in planning strategies and decision-making is a way to maintain enthusiasm about the job. By creating an environment where teachers feel safe to suggest ideas would open the lines of communication between both administrative and teaching staff and allow teachers to feel as if they are valued by their school community. For so long at BHS, there has always been an undertone that teachers are inferior to the supervisory administrative staff. Ironically enough, most supervisors in the school community were once teachers there.

**Special Education Teachers View of Administrative Support:**

The literature on teacher retention indicates that lack of administrative support is an important reason for leaving the profession. I often hear teachers at BHS state they don’t feel they have administrative support or most communication with administrative staff is done in a punitive manner. A study was conducted by Sherri Otto and Arnold, Methylene to describe the level of administrative support perceived by special education teachers in South Texas.

**Data Collection:**

This study examined the factors related to administrator support perceived by over 200 special education teachers in South Texas. Texas A&M University-Kingsville in collaboration with Region 2 Educational Service Center surveyed two hundred twenty eight experienced special education teachers to determine their perception of administration support. The research survey was descriptive in design and considered two sections for the respondents to complete. The first section was a demographic
section that asked for gender, number of years in teaching, current position and information concerning educational level. The second section contained statements to respond using a Likert Scale. The statements on the survey were developed from information requested of systems schools by the Texas A&M University system and information from the professional literature. Once the data was collected from special education teachers it was analyzed to provide insight into what role administrator support of special education teachers employed by South Texas public schools play.

Key Insights/Findings:

A survey of 1000 special educators was conducted by the Council for Exceptional Children and concluded “poor teacher working conditions has contributed to the high rate of special educators leaving the field, teacher burnout, and substandard quality of education for students with special needs” (CEC Launches Initiative on Special Education, 1998). The highest group of special education teachers at risk for attrition is females below the age of 35 with five years of less experience (Singer, 1993). “These induction years, teachers cited discipline, problems with parents, and lack of sufficient or appropriate materials as problems with which they unable to cope” (Brownell & Smith, 1993). Developing an understanding of working conditions of special education personnel and improving them may increase faculty retention and acquiring feedback from experienced (and likely effective) educators can help identify the areas needing reform in order to retain special education teachers.

Indicated needs for administrative support were in the areas of scheduled time to complete special education paperwork, scheduled time for collaboration with general
education teachers, providing meaningful in-service opportunities, lowering class size and caseloads and providing adequate technology and materials for special education students. Billingsley and Cross (1992) reported that unsupported environment that do not promote collegial interactions and fail to support special educators reduce teacher efficacy and attrition.

When administrative support was perceived by the special educator as being present it was considered an incentive for retention. The absence of support from administration was considered a cause for leaving the profession. If administrators place little or no value on special education students or teachers, then it eliminated the opportunity for problem solving and fails to promote collegiality (Marsal, 2001).

The Council for Exceptional Children reported in 2000 that there are several pressing issues effecting special education teachers; ambiguous and competing responsibilities, overwhelming paperwork, inadequate district and administrative support, significant teacher isolation, and insufficient focus on improved student outcome. The report also noted that when administrators lack the knowledge, time, or interest in children with special needs the impact on teacher retention is profound (CEC, 2000). Experienced special educators generally perceive their administrators as supportive. These findings were in contrast to the literature’s description of responses from beginning special education teachers, those who had less than 5 years of experience.

The overall theme of this study is that increased administrative support, meaningful conversations and effective feedback is crucial to a special educator’s retention.
Understanding specific ways administrators can support special education teacher’s helps reduce the frustrations a teacher feels (Gersten, 2001). When special educators feel their administrator engages in meaningful conversations with them they do not feel isolated from other teachers (Gersten, 2001).

**Early Childhood Special Education Teacher’s Perception on Competence**

In my quest to research a special educator’s perspective in teaching special education in the high school setting, it is important to acknowledge the perspective of the early childhood educator. I wanted to research if there were similarities or differences between the two settings, and/or if there was an underlying factor in both environments. This study examined and compared kindergarten and special kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of their own competence in early childhood special education in a Finnish day care. Teachers evaluated their theoretical and practical Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) competence. The aim was to integrate theory, practice, and participation in expect culture by bringing educational research and practical education closer to each. The results reported that special kindergarten teachers assess their knowledge competence more highly than kindergarten teachers.

**Data Collection:**

In this study, special education refers to the day care context in which 0-6 year old children spend a major part of their early childhood. It focuses on ECSE by dividing it into different components and by investigating competence in relation to the child,
family centered work and multi-professional collaboration, and the service system.

According to the Finnish Day Care Act, the task of the day care is to promote every child’s physical social and emotional development, and to provide material for the child’s cognitive, aesthetic and ethical education. In addition, to the guidance of the child’s development and learning, day care shall provide support for home in their task of bringing up children and together with the parents, promote the child’s overall personality development (Day Care Act 304/1983).

The research method is based on the participant’s self-evaluation of their competence in ECSE. The respondents came from 47 different municipalities; 10% of all municipalities in Finland were selected. The data included 208 women and 10 men; the respondents mean age was 42. The majorities were 40-50 years old (51%) over 30% were 30-39 years of age, 13% were over 50 and less than 6% were younger than 30 years of age. The research questionnaire consisted of a total of six areas of competence in ECSE. The respondents assessed their theoretical and practical competence on a Likert scale of 1 to 5. The assessed ECSE areas are: Family initiated work, knowledge of child development, child assessment involving, planning implementation and evaluation of pedagogical activity, identification of special needs, services offered to families and multi-professional collaboration.

The study examined the responding kindergarten and special kindergarten teacher’s theoretical and practical expertise by self-evaluation in a number of substance areas of special education by means of structured questions.
Key Insights/Findings:

There is a great variation in the proportion of children with special needs in public day care (0-49%), the mean being 8.5%. The majority (85%) of these with a written statement from specialist had been placed in ordinary children’s groups. This means that kindergarten teachers are in charge of the pedagogy of children’s with special needs. The inclusive structure, the definitions of early childhood special education (ECSE) and the opinions as to who needs special education vary a lot, which makes day care an interesting study context.

The Finnish day care system that was built up nationally in the 1970’s had the idea that all children should have the same possibilities for day care placement. The structure of the Finnish day-care system is basically inclusive, as there are no special education kindergartens only for children with special needs. Special kindergarten teacher’s perceptions of their overall theoretical and practical competence were higher than those of kindergarten teachers even in their weakest areas. According to the present study, the most challenging areas, for both the kindergarten and the special kindergarten teachers, were children’s special need: sensory, developmental and physical difficulties. Kindergarten teachers gave themselves lower ratings in both fields of competence than did special kindergarten teachers. The kindergarten teacher’s weakest areas of competence were related to physical disabilities, intellectual and developmental disabilities, disabilities connected with the senses and their knowledge of the legislation concerning the service system in Finland. Also the basics of special education were quite low. The special kindergarten teachers weakest fields of
competence were identical to those of the kindergarten teachers except for the basics of special education, but perceptions of their own competence were clearly better according to their assessments.

The results indicated special kindergarten teachers assess their knowledge competence more highly than kindergarten teachers. Overall practical competence was ranked higher than theoretical knowledge. Both groups viewed themselves as having less than excellent knowledge in practice than in theory.

In the Finnish educational system, the content of special education belongs to special teacher training, while in kindergarten teacher training this subject is marginally represented (Karila, 2003; Vitala 2001). However kindergarten teachers with less theoretical education and training educate children who have special educational needs, every day (Vitala, 2001). The kindergarten teachers self-evaluated competence level was surprisingly good even though they have very little knowledge of this subject in their formal teacher training.

This study reveals a picture of early childhood educators who are motivated to collaborate with other professional and who share a relatively realistic view of the basic task of day care. According to these results, the special kindergarten teacher’s higher self-evaluation of their early childhood special education competence reflects differences in theoretical qualification and practical experiences in this field.

Although, this study was conducted in Finland, and surveyed an early childhood daycare, it is important to point out that there was still a difference in what was
considered competent in the view of a special kindergarten teachers compared to a regular kindergarten teacher. Special education teachers felt more equipped to work with the special education population. Since regular kindergarten teachers were still responsible for educating special education students, more research is needed to test if there’s a link between special education kindergarten children receiving formative training from a non-special education teacher, and the correlation of them being placed in special education later in life as a result.

**Preparing Administrators of Special and Gifted Education for the Challenge**

Since 1975 special education has been mandated, funded and regulated by the federal government. There have been both benefits and drawbacks. The most important benefit is that children who require different educational services are identified, and programs with trained personnel are provided. In addition, schools receive federal funding to operate programs for children who are in need of special services. Effective leadership by specialists in both areas of special education is essential to the operation of programs. At the height of overseeing the services for the children, effective leaders ensure that quality programs are implemented. Some key components at the foundation of effective leadership are shared decision making, teamwork, and group problem solving ability (Robinson&Moon, 2003; Woodcock& Vialle, 2010; Zirkel; 2004). Prior to our current administration, there has never been shared decision making, teamwork or group problem solving. All decisions were made from a top down approach.
In recent years, there has been a shift in the field of educational leadership. This shift includes leaders implementing a shared decision making component of group work. There is suddenly an emphasis on teamwork and the need for understanding cultural and environmental influences when addressing decisions that pertain to personnel, stakeholder involvement and student accountability (Bridges & Hallinger, 1995; Mulkeen & Tenenbaum, 1990; Muth 1989). As a result, university training and professional development has shifted to more authentic learning authentic assessment, and reflection model for training educational leaders (Mulkeem & Tenenbaum, 1990; Wiggins, 1993).

Key Insights/Findings:

Shared decision-making teamwork and group problem solving applies to all school leaders, but those of special programs meet a unique set of problems and issues. In both special and gifted education programs, administrators make decisions, relevant to (compliance at the federal state or local levels). Effective identification procedures, 3) maximizing program options to meet individual learning needs, 4) parent involvement to plan and maintain effective individualized services and 5) program changes based on program evaluations (Council for Exceptional Children, 2007; Woodcock & Vialle, 2010; Zirkel, 2004).

Educating children with special needs and or classified gifted and talented is a responsibility of multiple stakeholders. “Collaboration and shared responsibility require the creative use of all staff, as well as the understanding that the greater community may partner in this effort” (Davis, 1997). A strong instructional leader is needed to
create a positive learning climate that embodies a unifying philosophy of respects for all children and all stakeholders in the total community. In addition, administrators may increase their responsiveness by involving all stakeholders—parents, community administrators, and teachers (Rakow, 2007).

Partnerships between stakeholders have been successful in responding to the critical needs of children, families, and schools with high quality methods and materials that their respective constituents find meaningful. Through collaboration they are creating lasting relationships among themselves in which they share information draw insights from one another, and expect diverse voices to be heard.

There are several key elements to ensuring that stakeholders work together for the best of the students. To begin with, there must be an atmosphere of trust. “The school and the stakeholder must surrender some of its defensiveness, and the stakeholder must transcend the limits of is theories and adapt its approaches to the messy realities of public education” (Lutz, 1991). Administrators must also provide a clear vision for the stakeholders and the school. The vision must originate and be owned by administration and a shared understanding of the role of the stakeholder must be clearly communicated for the relationship to be successful. Administrators must be open to embracing relationships and unequivocally associating themselves with the reform and implementation strategies of the stakeholders. In addition, the authors also stated that staff and community buy-in must also be enforced and the administrators
must also be willing to demand change when some teachers and other administrators resist.

The responsibility to plan, prepare, and deliver professional development to classroom teachers and other school administrators so they may be informed lies on programs leaders (Ross, 1993). It is the responsibilities of the specialists, who oversee the programs, to ensure that proper identification and program services are in place. Communication and successful preparation of administrators for special and gifted education are key factors in the ability to solve problems, lead, work effectively with all stakeholders, and provide training and support to classroom teachers.

In both special and gifted education students learn at a different pace and in a different environment. Both programs require effective leadership that improves the unity of advocates and increases the chance for stakeholder supports. Robinson & Moon (2003) reported that successful advocates and stakeholders never become complacent with their efforts and understand that change only occurs with vigilance. An effective leader can improve the unity of advocates and increases the chance for stakeholder support.

By introducing collaborative leadership into BHS, as it relates to special education, it will improve student achievement, compliance monitoring, service delivery and a sense of confidence between administrators and staff will be established because everyone will be playing on one team.
Are Special Education Teachers Special?

I have often asked my colleagues what inspired them to teach Special Education rather than General Education and what special education criteria do they possess. There are few quantitative studies focusing on the special education teacher’s educational background, and this study investigates the general effects of special education programs on achievement of students with disabilities. Hanushek (2002), states that special education boosts the achievement of students with disabilities. Li Feng and Time R.Sass produced a paper which discusses the training of special teachers and how it relates to classroom practice and student achievement. The authors using student level longitudinal data from Florida over a 5-year span estimated the “value-added” models of student achievement. The authors examine the impact of pre–service preparation and in service formal and informal training on the ability to promote academic success among students with disabilities. The relationship between teacher training and student outcome is extremely important given the difficulty schools face in the adequate staffing of special education programs. Over 12 percent of teachers employed to provide special education services to children ages 6-21 are not fully certified compared to 10.5 percent of teachers in general education (Boe& Cook 2006; U.S. Department of Education n.d.a). High percentages of uncertified educators staffing special education programs enter teaching each year (Billingsley, Fall & Williams 2006). However, evidence suggests that these uncertified teachers are less likely to stay in their positions (Miller, Brownell, and Smith 1999) and attrition rates among beginning
teachers with minimal preparation are twice as high compared to those with more extensive preparation (Boe, Cook & Sunderland 2006).

**Key Insight’s/Findings:**

Nationwide, more than three-quarters of students with disabilities score below the overall mean achievement level, compared to half of students in the general population (Wagner, 2006). Billingley and Cross (1991) find that the stress of working with students with special needs and the lack of pupil progress relative to effort expended are common reasons for teachers to switch from special to regular education.

Reynolds and Wolfe (1999) found that children with learning disabilities benefitted less from special education services than did children with other kinds of disabilities. In more recent work Blackorby (2005) found that students who spend most of their day in regular education classrooms tend to perform better on standardized tests. Similarly, students requiring accommodations tend to perform worst on exams than do other children with disabilities who do not receive accommodations.

Research on the performance of the general student population has produced a general consensus that the most important school-based determinant of student achievement is teacher quality (Rockoff 2004; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain 2005; Aaronson, Barrow & Sander 2007; Harris & Sass 2008). While there is little support for the efficacy of in-service professional development courses focusing on a teacher’s contribution to achievement of students with disabilities, a number of studies investigate the relationship between the training of special education teachers and their classroom
practice (Algozine, Morsink, & Algozine 1988; Sindelar, Daunic & Rennells 2004; and Nougaret, Scruggs & Mastropieri 2005) Using observations of classroom performances and principal ratings, Sindelar (2004) find that graduates of a traditional special education teacher program had superior classroom practices compared to their counterparts from a university district partnership and from a district “add on” program. However, in-service professional development for teachers has little effect on their ability to increase the achievement gains of student with disabilities. This finding suggests that monies on outside professional development might be used more efficiently in other ways to enhance teacher quality and student achievement.

The authors of this study found that on-the-job training gained through experience has positive effects on the productivity of teachers who instruct special education students. This includes certification in special education, an undergraduate major in special education, the amount of special education coursework in college, possessing an advanced degree in special education or having a bachelor’s degree in special education among all undergraduate degrees is positively associated with learning gains in reading for students enrolled in special education courses. These experiences are what make special educators special. These findings suggest that reducing certification requirements for special education teachers via alternative certification programs may be counterproductive and that our society is in desperate need of more special educators.
PROCESS

Initial Group Meeting:
Meeting 1
2/5/14

During our initial departmental meeting for the new school term, my supervisor allotted me the first 15 minutes to discuss pertinent issues regarding our special education population with the special and general education teachers who instruct them. In this meeting I brought up the stigma of special education, and the misconceptions regarding special education teachers and staff. I petitioned that we as educators be more collaborative in addressing our student’s with special needs educational progress and life after high school instead up being so divided and cliquish. I discussed my research paper and asked for volunteers to complete a 20 question survey on teaching students with disabilities.

Once the 10 volunteers were selected we informally discussed some of the activities going on in the school building as it pertains to students with special needs and how can we improve the department. Some teachers discussed lack of communication between administrators and department heads but high expectations, some discussed no parental involvement, and others discussed poor planning in selecting collaborative teaching partners. Every participant made excellent points why our department needed revamping.
Meeting 2
2/12/14
I asked to meet with all of the participants the following week after our weekly departmental meeting to complete the consent form and questionnaire. After the participants completed their documents, I asked each participant to schedule a time and date to meet with me to discuss the results. I also informed them after I met with each participant we would all meet again to discuss my findings. We agreed to discuss the findings first with just the teachers then with our supervisor.

Teacher Individual Meetings

(Each teacher was exclusively interviewed to discuss their responses to the survey. They were then asked the lead question: How do we improve special education in our school community. Teachers are identified as Special Educator and General Educator A-E)

Special Educator A:
2/26/14

A. is a Special Education teacher with 10 years teaching experience. She teaches U.S. History and Global studies to Special Education Students. Her grade level is 10 and 11th grade students. She believes the rewards of teaching Special education are the small class size and building closer relationships with her students. The obstacle she faces is lower student skills with high expectations from administration and the state. Her previous background experience is in corporate finance.

She approves of teaching collaboratively and sometimes uses differentiation in her classroom. She enjoys teaching special education students and believes as a special educator she makes a more significant contribution to students with disabilities. She
believes she is an integral part of the school community and has administrative and
departmentally support in ICT and Special Class programs. However, does not believe
administration takes into account student IEP support and accommodations when
scheduling student/teacher programs. She believes there are misconceptions about
general and special education duties and responsibilities and does not think the role of
general and special education teachers are equivalent. In her opinion, special education
students are seldom considered in school wide programming and curriculum, and
believes special educations students prefer working with special education teachers. As
a special educator, she feels solely responsible for the success of special education
students. The success of special education students in of high importance in the
classroom, and admits special education student’s success affect her mood. Special
Education Teacher A rated her job satisfaction as Somewhat Satisfied (5-7).

In the words of Special Educator A: How can we improve Special Education in our
school community?

Overall, I feel that I.S.S students are underserved by the general school
community. More collaboration with I.S.S and General Education teachers is needed to
help General education teachers understand the specific needs of students with
disabilities. I.S.S students sometimes feel alienated/slighted in General education
environments. General Education teachers sometimes don’t take the needs of I.S.S.
students seriously. They assume that an I.E.P = can’t do work.
Special Educator B:  
3/5/14

B. is a Special Education teacher with 27 years teaching experience. She teaches English and Home Economics studies to Special Education Students. Her grade level is 9-12th graders. She believes the rewards of teaching Special education are watching them become advocates for themselves. The obstacle she faces is convincing others i.e administrators or staff to meet them where the students are. She has no other previous background experience; her only career has been a teacher.

She approves of teaching collaboratively and uses differentiation in her classroom. She enjoys teaching special education students and believes as a special educator she makes a more significant contribution to students with disabilities. She believes she is an integral part of the school community and feels she has administrative and departmentally support in ICT and Special Class programs sometimes. She does not believe administration takes into account student IEP support and accommodations when scheduling student/teacher programs. She believes there are misconceptions about general and special education duties and responsibilities and does not think the role of general and special education teachers are equivalent. In her opinion, special education students are seldom considered in school wide programming and curriculum. She believes special educations students have neutral preference in working with special education and general education teachers. As a special educator, she feels solely responsible for the success of special education students. The success of special education students in of high importance in the classroom, and admits special education
student’s success seldom affect her mood. Special Education Teacher A rated her job satisfaction as Highly Satisfied (8-10).

**In the words of Special Educator B: How can we improve Special Education in our school community?**

To help transition everyone to be on the same page: All staff should take a special education class or workshop, teach a class, work with a student with a Learning Disability, Emotional Disability, or other disability on a one on one basis (case study) to help with the understanding of our students. How these students act is a norm and is real.

**Special Educator C:**

3/12/14

C. is a Special Education teacher with 8 years teaching experience. She teaches Science to Special Education Students. Her grade level is 9-12th graders. She believes the rewards of teaching Special education are preparing them for graduation. The obstacle she faces is getting parents more involved in their children education, behavior modifications and transition. Her previous background experience is school safety, banking.

She approves of teaching collaboratively and uses differentiation in her classroom. She enjoys teaching special education students and believes as a special educator she makes a more significant contribution to students with disabilities. She believes she is an integral part of the school community and feels she has administrative and departmentally support in ICT and Special Class programs. She believes administration often takes into account student IEP support and accommodations when
scheduling student/teacher programs. She believes there are misconceptions about
general and special education duties and responsibilities and does not think the role of
general and special education teachers are equivalent. In her opinion, special education
students are often considered in school wide programming and curriculum. She
believes special educations students have neutral preference in working with special
education and general education teachers. As a special educator, she feels solely
responsible for the success of special education students. The success of special
education students in of high importance in the classroom, and admits special education
student’s success often affect her mood. Special Education Teacher C rated her job
satisfaction as Somewhat Satisfied (5-7).

In the words of Special Educator C: How do we improve Special Education in our
school community?

Special education at BHS can be improved on many levels. In my opinion, special
educators should give a professional development to general education teachers
because they don’t know the dynamics of I.S.S (Instructional support services) teacher
responsibilities. General Education teachers isolate special needs students because they
don’t know how to relate to them. General education teachers need a series of
workshops to support I.S.S. teachers. I believe with both sides working together, special
education can be powerful.
Special Educator D:
3/19/14

D. is a Special Education teacher with 11 years teaching experience. His primary program is teaching English to Special Education Students. His grade level is 10th-12th graders. He believes the rewards of teaching Special education are helping a select few students pass the regents exams. The obstacle he faces is low reading and math scores which affect the learning process. His previous employment was in corrections.

He approves of teaching collaboratively and sometimes uses differentiation in her classroom. He feels neutral about teaching special education students and believes as a special educator he does not makes a more significant contribution to students with disabilities. He does not believe he is an integral part of the school community but sometimes feels he has administrative and departmentally support in ICT and Special Class programs. He does not believe administration takes into account student IEP support and accommodations when scheduling student/teacher programs. He does believe there are misconceptions about general and special education duties and responsibilities and does not think the role of general and special education teachers are equivalent. In his opinion, special education students are never considered in school wide programming and curriculum. He believes special education students prefer working with general education teachers. As a special educator, he does not feel solely responsible for the success of special education students. The success of special education students are of high importance in the classroom, and admit special
education student’s success often affect his mood. Special Education Teacher D rated his job satisfaction as Somewhat Satisfied (5-7).

**In the words of Special Educator D: How do we improve Special Education in our school community?**

In my opinion, special education at BHS can be improved by providing adequate teaching material. The material we currently have is outdated. There are a number of nooks and resources that I can use for my students that are not provided or even offered.

**Special Educator E:**
3/26/14

E. is a Special Education teacher with 11 years teaching experience. She teaches Earth Science to special education students in the 9\textsuperscript{th} and 10\textsuperscript{th} grade. She believes the rewards of teaching Special education are the small class size and teaching students through differentiation. The obstacle she faces is high expectations from administration and low self-esteem and motivation from students. Her previous background experience is Retail.

She approves of teaching collaboratively and sometimes uses differentiation in her classroom. She enjoys teaching special education students and believes as a special educator she makes a more significant contribution to students with disabilities. She believes she is an integral part of the school community and has administrative and departmentally support in ICT and Special Class programs. However, does not believe administration takes into account student IEP support and accommodations when scheduling student/teacher programs. She believes there are misconceptions about
general and special education duties and responsibilities and does not think the role of general and special education teachers are equivalent. In her opinion, special education students are seldom considered in school wide programming and curriculum, and believes special educations students prefer working with special education teachers. As a special educator, she feels solely responsible for the success of special education students. The success of special education students in of high importance in the classroom, and admits special education student’s success affect her mood. Special Education Teacher A rated her job satisfaction as Somewhat Satisfied (5-7).

In the words of Special Educator E: How can we improve Special Education in our school community?

In my opinion special education at BHS can be improved by hiring certified special education teachers. This would alleviate the burden of hundreds of I.E.P.’s being distributed among 6 teachers. In addition, students will have qualified teacher instruction by teachers whom have knowledge and or experience with teaching students with special needs.

General Educator A: 2/26/14
A. is a General Education with 11 years teaching experience. She teaches English to Special and General Education Students. Her grade level is 11 and 12th grade students. She believes the rewards of teaching Special education are seeing her students share success mastering a concept or passing their Regents exam. The
obstacle she faces is poor attendance. She believes this is what hinders their student performance. Her previous background experience is teaching at the college level.

She approves of teaching collaboratively and uses differentiation in her classroom. She enjoys teaching special education students and believes as a general educator she makes a more significant contribution to students with disabilities. She believes she is an integral part of the school community and has administrative and departmentally support in ICT and Special Class programs. She is unsure if administration takes into account student IEP support and accommodations when scheduling student/teacher programs. She believes there are misconceptions about general and special education duties and responsibilities and does not think the role of general and special education teachers are equivalent. In her opinion, special education students are seldom considered in school wide programming and curriculum, and believes special educations students have neutral preference when working with special education teachers and general education teachers. As a general educator, she feels does not feel solely responsible for the success of special education students. The success of special education students in of high importance in the classroom, and admits special education student’s success never affect her mood. General Education Teacher A rated her job satisfaction as Somewhat Satisfied (5-7).
**In the words of General Education Teacher A: How can we improve special education in our school community?**

To improve special education greater collaboration is needed to ensure success of all. That is for both general and special education teachers. Most teachers have their own cliques which prevents us from learning each other’s best practices.

**General Educator B:**

3/5/14

B. is a General Education teacher with 14 years teaching experience. Her primary program is teaching English to General Education Students. Her grade level is 10th-12th graders. She believes the rewards of teaching Special education are seeing them graduate regardless of their disability. The obstacle she faces is disciplinary concerns, and low motivation. She has no other previous background experience; her only career has been a teacher.

She approves of teaching collaboratively and sometimes uses differentiation in her classroom. She feels neutral about teaching special education students and believes as a general educator she does not makes a more significant contribution to students with disabilities. She does not believe she is an integral part of the school community but does feels she has administrative and departmentally support in ICT and Special Class programs. She does not believe administration takes into account student IEP support and accommodations when scheduling student/teacher programs. She does not believe there are misconceptions about general and special education duties and responsibilities and does not think the role of general and special education teachers
are equivalent. In her opinion, special education students are seldom considered in school wide programming and curriculum. She believes special education students prefer working with general education teachers. As a general educator, she does not feel solely responsible for the success of special education students. The success of special education students in of high importance in the classroom, and admits special education student’s success seldom affect her mood. General Education Teacher B rated her job satisfaction as Somewhat Satisfied (5-7).

In the words of General Educator B: How do we improve Special Education in our school community?

Firstly, we really have to find a way to remove the stigma from being in a special education environment. As far as teaching, we must enforce accommodations for the students. They learn differently, so I believe that the curriculum must be changed to meet their differences. For example, I taught kite runner but I would use the graphic novel to help supplement my non-readers. (This is the accommodations that all classes need).

General Educator C:
3/12/14

C. is a General Education teacher with 15 years teaching experience. He teaches Social Studies to General Education Students. He teaches 10-12th graders. He believes the rewards of teaching Special education are watching them achieve when they are the minority. The obstacle he faces is administrators, learning new paperwork and not having enough experience/background knowledge in working with students with special
needs. He has no other previous background experience; his only career has been a teacher.

He approves of teaching collaboratively and does not use differentiation in his classroom. His feelings are neutral as it relates to teaching special education students and believes as a general educator he makes a more significant contribution to students with disabilities. He believes he is an integral part of the school community and does not feel he has administrative and departmentally support in ICT and Special Class programs sometimes. He believes administration does not take into account student IEP support and accommodations when scheduling student/teacher programs. He believes there are misconceptions about general and special education duties and responsibilities and does not think the role of general and special education teachers are equivalent. In his opinion, special education students are seldom considered in school wide programming and curriculum. He believes special education students prefer working with special education teachers. As a general educator, he does not feel solely responsible for the success of special education students. The success of special education students in of high importance in the classroom, and admits special education student’s success often affect her mood. General Education Teacher C rated his job satisfaction as Somewhat Satisfied (5-7).

**In the words of General Educator C: How can we improve Special Education in our school community?**

In my opinion special education at BHS can be improved by increased parental involvement and more certified teachers. Parents are not actively involved in their
child’s education. Teachers can only do so much. In my experience, majority of the students I teach who have actively involved parents are doing better than students who don’t have that same support.

**General Educator D:**

*3/19/14*

D. is a General Education teacher with 7 years teaching experience. Her primary program is teaching Math to General Education Students. Her grade level is 9th graders. She believes the rewards of teaching Special education are helping children that learn different excel regardless. The obstacle she faces is low motivation and low academic levels. She has no prior teaching experience; her only career has been a teacher.

She approves of teaching collaboratively and sometimes uses differentiation in her classroom. She dislikes teaching special education students and believes as a general educator she does not makes a more significant contribution to students with disabilities. She does believe she is an integral part of the school community but doesn’t feels she has administrative and departmentally support in ICT and Special Class programs. She does not believe administration takes into account student IEP support and accommodations when scheduling student/teacher programs. She believes there are misconceptions about general and special education duties and responsibilities and is does not believe the role of general and special education teachers are equivalent. In her opinion, special education students are seldom considered in school wide programming and curriculum. She believes special education student prefer working with general education teachers. As a general educator, she does feel solely responsible
for the success of special education students. The successes of special education students are of high importance in the classroom, but admit special education student’s success never affect her mood. General Education Teacher D rated her job satisfaction as Somewhat Satisfied (5-7).

**In the words of General Educator D: How do we improve Special Education in our school community?**

In my opinion, special education at BHS can be improved by giving collaborative teachers the actual time needed to prepare and discuss lesson planning. We have no period off or set time of the day to dedicate to our collaborative lessons. In my experience, there is one main teacher and one support teacher per lesson so that we don’t have double duties. Secondly, I believe both special and general educators need to have similar expectations of student work. This will prevent student/teachers believing they are functioning on a level they truly are not.

**General Educator E:**
3/26/14

E. is a General Education teacher with 13 years teaching experience. His primary program is teaching Global to General Education Students. His grade level is 10th-12th graders. She believes the rewards of teaching Special education are helping students with a disability obtain their H.S. diploma. The obstacle he faces is having large class sizes which limits time spent with students with special needs. He has no prior teaching experience; his only career has been a teacher. He approves of teaching collaboratively and sometimes uses differentiation in her classroom. He dislikes teaching special
education students and believes as a general educator he does not makes a more significant contribution to students with disabilities. He does believe he is an integral part of the school community but doesn’t feels he has administrative and departmentally support in ICT and Special Class programs. He does not believe administration takes into account student IEP support and accommodations when scheduling student/teacher programs. He believes there are misconceptions about general and special education duties and responsibilities and is unsure if the role of general and special education teachers are equivalent. In her opinion, special education students are seldom considered in school wide programming and curriculum. He believes special education students have a neutral preference when working with special and general education teachers. As a general educator, he does feel solely responsible for the success of special education students. The successes of special education students are of high importance in the classroom, and admit special education student’s success seldom affect his mood. General Education Teacher E rated his job satisfaction as Somewhat Satisfied (5-7).

**In the words of General Educator E: How do we improve Special Education in our school community?**

In my opinion, Special Education at BHS can be improved by all teaching/guidance staff having better engagement with I.S.S (Instructional Support Services) staff. Many staff members assume they know a student by reading their academic profile or behavioral history. However, there is more to a student’s background than data. Many educators do not fully assess the needs of a student.
Meeting 3- Teacher Meeting  
4/2/14

I started the meeting off by telling the teachers they are more alike than they are different. Everyone generally does want our students to succeed, however there are a few road blocks set in place preventing our students from reaching their full potential. I discussed all the positives outcomes from the survey results and also touched on some of the negative or needs to improve data. I then asked the teachers to collectively draft up a dream list we could take to our supervisor to get the balls in motion for the next school year. I am aware only a few things would be addressed at a time, but I just enjoyed watching both special and general educators collaborate. Some of the ideas that were most revisited were:

1. General and Special educators must meet regularly to discuss student development, instruction and best practices.

2. When developing CTT courses administrators should request buy-in from the selected collaborative team teaching teachers to plan lessons and work together as a united front.

3. Structure at least 1 meeting/activity per semester outside of the school building to develop a rapport with staff you are not directly linked to.

4. Incorporate a committee with participants from each department to develop school wide initiatives, projects and events to include the whole school community.
Meeting 4-Final Group Meeting  
5/7/14

I shared the results of my findings with all the special education staff and my supervisor at our first departmental meeting coming off of Spring Break. The participants who volunteered for the survey seemed pleased to discuss our brainstorming activity and the plans we had for the school year. My supervisor stated she was in agreement with our recommendations and would discuss a few of them with the other administrative staff and the principal. I believe she was impressed and a little surprised that the special and general educators agreed to work together for the betterment of the special education department. She informed staff there would be at least 2 recommendations she would put into effect the 2014-2015 academic school year.

Data Analysis

Questions were asked to special and general education to discuss the misconception thoughts and feelings behind teaching special education students at BHS.

Question 1:

*How do you feel about the philosophy of ICT (Inter Collaborative Team Teaching)*?

Special Education a=neutral

Special education b=approve

Special education c=neutral

Special education teacher d=approve

Special education teacher e=neutral
General education a=approve
General education b=approve
General education c=approve
General education teacher d=approve
General education teacher e=neutral

Three out of five special education teachers answered neutral to the philosophy of inter collaborative teaching. Four out of five general education teachers answered they approved of the philosophy of inter collaboratively teaching.

This question was asked because in faculty meetings there is a slight discrepancy in teaching collaboratively and working with special education students by general education teachers. General education teachers believe that special education teachers are more like helpers or assistants when teaching a class collaboratively. In most CTT setups, general education teachers are the lead teachers in the classroom.

**Question 2:**

*Do you use differentiation in all classroom environments?*

Special education a=sometimes
Special education teacher b=yes
Special education teacher c=yes
Special education teacher d=sometimes
Special education teacher e=yes

General education teacher a=yes
General education teacher b=sometimes
General education teacher c= no
General education teacher d=sometimes
General education teacher e=sometimes

Differentiation is an approach used by educators to educate students on different levels.
This question was asked because although it is part of the core teaching standards, special education teachers are more subject to provide this standard.

Three out of five special Education teachers stated replied yes. Three out of five general education teachers had a different answer. This shows the inconsistency of a standard teaching requirement by general education teachers.

**Question 3:**

*How do you feel about teaching collaboratively?*

Special education teacher a=approve
Special education teacher b=approve
Special education teacher c=approve
All teachers approved of teaching collaboratively. This response was actually surprising to me because I've heard many teachers state they did not enjoy teaching collaboratively because other teachers did not have the same teaching style or skill set as the other. This was usually the perception of the general education teachers.

**Question 4:**

*How do you feel about teaching special education students in your classroom?*

Special education teacher a=enjoy

Special education teacher b=enjoy

Special education teacher c=enjoy

Special education teacher d=neutral

Special education teacher e=neutral
General education teacher a=enjoy
General education teacher b=neutral
General education teacher c=neutral
General education teacher d=dislike
General education teacher e=dislike

Three out of five special education students stated they enjoyed teaching special education students. Two out of five general education teachers answered dislike and only one general education teacher responded they enjoyed teaching special education students.

The answers to this question were enlightening. Ironically majority of the special educators answered yes, even with all the frustrations and demands of the job, whereas only one general educator responded they enjoyed teaching special education students.

**Question 5:**

*Do you think the certification requirements for General and Special faculty are equivalent?*

Special education teacher a=no
Special education teacher b=unsure
Special education teacher c=no
Special education teacher d=no
Special education teacher e=no

General education teacher a=yes
General education teacher b=no
General education teacher c=no
General education teacher d=no
General education teacher e=unsure

Four out of five special education teachers do not believe they have the same requirements as general education teachers. Three out of five general education teachers do not believe they have the same requirements as special education teachers.

This question allows me to believe if 1 percent of my study is unsure about the certifications of their counterparts, if the study was conducted school wide the numbers would be higher.

**Question 6:**

*As a General/Special educator do you feel you have the opportunity to make a more significant contribution to students with disabilities?*

Special education teacher a=yes
Special education teacher b=yes
Special education teacher c=yes
Special education teacher d=no
Special education teacher e=yes

General education teacher a=yes
General education teacher b=no
General education teacher c=no
General education teacher d=no
General education teacher e=no

Four out of five special education teachers believe they believe they make a more significant contribution to students with disabilities. Four out of five general educations believe they do not make a more significant contribution to students with disabilities.

This answer is a very good point in my survey because mostly all special education teachers answered yes to making a significant contribution to special education students and the general education students mostly answered no.

**Question 7:**

*Do you feel you have administrative support departmentally and interdepartmentally in ICT or Special Class programs?*

Special education teacher a=yes
Special education teacher b=sometimes
Special education teacher c=yes
Special education teacher d=sometimes
Special education teacher e=yes

General education teacher a=yes
General education teacher b=yes
General education teacher c=no
General education teacher d=no
General education teacher e=no

Three out of five special education teachers answered yes to having administrative and departmental support. Three out of five general education teachers answered no to having administrative and departmental support.

This question identifies the fact that both general and special education teachers generally feel supported by administration. I reckon that this question was answered on the basis that there has been a change in special education administration. All teachers who participated in the survey have special education students. However I don't believe this is the consensus of the entire teaching staff.
**Question 8:**

*Do you think the role of general and special education teachers are equivalent?*

Special education teacher a=no
Special education teacher b=no
Special education teacher c=no
Special education teacher d=no
Special education teacher e=no

General education teacher a=yes
General education teacher b=no
General education teacher c=no
General education teacher d=no
General education teacher e=no

All five special education teachers replied no to the teaching roles of special and general education teacher’s roles being equivalent. Four out of five general education teachers replied no to the teaching roles of special and general education teacher’s roles being equivalent.

This question was asked because I often heard general education teachers state special education teachers have it easier because of small class size.
Question 9:

Do you feel there are misconceptions about general and special education duties and responsibilities?

Special education teacher a=yes
Special education teacher b=yes
Special education teacher c=yes
Special education teacher d=yes
Special education teacher e=yes

General education teacher a=yes
General education teacher b=no
General education teacher c=yes
General education teacher d=yes
General education teacher e=yes

All five special education teachers replied yes to there being misconceptions about general and special education responsibilities. Four out of five general education teachers replied yes to there being misconceptions about general and special education responsibilities.
This question speaks to the uncertainty and lack of communication between administration and staff. In addition there is also a gap between staff cohesiveness and the negative stigma a special educator possesses.

**Question 10:**

*Do you believe administration takes into account student IEP supports and accommodations when scheduling student/teacher programs?*

Special education teacher a=no
Special education teacher b=no
Special education teacher c=yes
Special education teacher d=no
Special education teacher e=no

General education teacher a=unsure
General education teacher b=no
General education teacher c=yes
General education teacher d=no
General education teacher e=no

Four out of five special education teachers believe they do not believe administrators take into account student IEP supports. Three general education teachers responded no.
This speaks to the amount of knowledge general education teachers have about special education students and their IEP support and accommodations.

**Question 11:**

*Do you believe special education students are considered in school wide programming and curriculum?*

Special education teacher a= seldom

Special education teacher b= seldom

Special education teacher c= often

Special education teacher d= never

Special education teacher e= never

General education teacher a=seldom

General education teacher b= seldom

General education teacher c= often

General education teacher d= seldom

General education teacher e=never

Two out of five special education teachers seldom believe special education students are considered in school wide programming and two out of 5 responded never. Three out of five general education teachers seldom believe special education students are considered in school wide programming.
This question reiterates the idea that incorporating special education students and programming into the general curriculum is often an oversight by administration.

**Question 12:**

_Do you feel like you’re an integral part of the school community?_

Special education teacher a= yes  
Special education teacher b= yes  
Special education teacher c= yes  
Special education teacher d= no  
Special education teacher e= yes  

General education teacher a= yes  
General education teacher b= no  
General education teacher c= yes  
General education teacher d= yes  
General education teacher e= yes  

All three special education teachers believe they are an integral part of the school community. I believe if this answer was asked 3 years ago, the response would have different. Ironically two out of three general education teachers stated yes and one replied no.
**Question 13:**

*As a general/special educator do you feel solely responsible for the success of special education?*

Special education teacher a= yes

Special education teacher b= yes

Special education teacher c= yes

Special education teacher d=no

Special education teacher e=yes

General education teacher a= no

General education teacher b= no

General education teacher c=no

General education teacher d=yes

General education teacher e=yes

Three out of three special education teachers feel they are solely responsible for the success of special education students. Three out of three general education teachers feel they are not solely responsible for the success of special education students.

The responses from this question identifies the amount of pressure a special education teachers must endure to believe they are solely responsible for the success of special
education students. However, general education teachers do not hold the same standard.

**Question 14:**

*How would you rate your level of special education student’s success in your class?*

Special education teacher a=fair
Special education teacher b=good
Special education teacher c=good
Special education teacher d=fair
Special education teacher e=good

General education teacher a=excellent
General education teacher b= fair
General education teacher c=fair
General education teacher d=fair
General education teacher e=fair

Two out of three special education teachers replied the level of their special education student’s success is good. Two out of three special education teachers replied the level of their special education student’s success is fair.
This question identifies the differences in the overall standard of success in a special education teacher’s classroom in comparison to a general education teacher’s classroom. Many special education students believe they are ready to be mainstreamed because they are doing well in a special education program. However, once they are admitted they regress academically because of the pressure and ask to return to special education or begin to cut classes or school entirely.

**Question 15:**

*Does your special education’s student’s success affect your mood?*

Special education teacher a=often

Special education teacher b=seldom

Special education teacher c=often

Special education teacher d=often

Special education teacher e=often

General education teacher a=never

General education teacher b= seldom

General education teacher c=often

General education teacher d=never

General education teacher e=seldom
Two out of three special education teachers replied theirs special education students success does often affects their mood. Each general education teacher replied a different answer. Only one general education teacher replied often to question 15.

The responses to this question are connected to question 13 because all special education teachers replied yes to feeling solely responsible for their student’s success and two out of three replied their mood is often affected by their student’s success. Special education teachers are generally more connected to the success of their student’s achievement.

**Question 16:**

**As a general/special education teacher do you feel professionally equipped to work with special education students?**

Special education teacher a=definitely

Special education teacher b=definitely

Special education teacher c=occasionally

Special education teacher d=definitely

Special education teacher e=definitely

General education teacher a=definitely

General education teacher b= occasionally

General education teacher c=occasionally
General education teacher d=occasionally

General education teacher e=occasionally

Two out of three special education teachers replied they definitely feel professionally equipped to work with special education students. Two out of three general education teachers replied they are occasionally professionally equipped to work with special education students.

The response to this question speaks to the fact that many of the general education teachers do not feel confident in teaching special education students. In addition, they may also feel unprepared. ALL teachers should be given mandatory professional development and workshops for working with students with special needs.

**Question 17:**

*How important is the success of special education students in your classroom?*

Special education teacher a=High importance

Special education teacher b= High importance

Special education teacher c= High importance

Special education teacher d= High Importance

Special education teacher e=High Importance
General education teacher a = High importance
General education teacher b = High importance
General education teacher c = High importance
General education teacher d = High Importance
General education teacher e = Somewhat Important

Although both special and general education teachers responded the success of special education students is of high importance in their classroom. I question the validity of this answer because in question 15 each general education teacher responded something different when asked if a special education student’s success affected their mood.

**Question 18:**

*Do you believe a general/special education teacher job is easier?*

Special education teacher a = no
Special education teacher b = no
Special education teacher c = yes
Special education teacher d = yes
Special education teacher e = yes

General education teacher a = no
General education teacher b = no
Two out of three special education teachers responded they do not believe that a general education job is easier. One special education replied yes which states that although it is a small percentage there is still a misconception about the roles of general and special teachers. Three out of three general education teachers do not believe a special education job is easier.

**Question 19:**

*In your experience, do special education students generally prefer working with a general or special education teacher?*

Special education teacher a=special

Special education teacher b=neutral

Special education teacher c=neutral

Special education d=general

Special education e=general

General education teacher a=neutral

General education teacher b= general

General education teacher c=general
General education teacher d=general
General education teacher e=neutral

Two out of three special education teachers replied they believe special education students have no preference in learning from special education or general education teacher. Two out of three general education teachers replied they believe special education students prefer to learn from general education teachers.

I believe this question has more to do with the social-emotional aspect of being in a teachers’ class that is known to be in a general education curriculum

Question 20:
If you had to rate your level of job satisfaction? (10 being high and 1 being little or no satisfaction)
Special education teacher a=somewhat satisfied 5-7
Special education teacher b=high 8-10
Special education teacher c=somewhat satisfied 5-7
Special education d=somewhat satisfied 7
Special education e=high satisfaction 8-10

General education teacher a=somewhat satisfied 5-7
General education teacher b= somewhat satisfied 5-7
General education teacher c=high 8-10
General education teacher d=somewhat satisfied 5-7
General education teacher e=somewhat satisfied 5-7

Four out of 5 special education teachers responded they are somewhat satisfied. Similarly, four out of five general education teachers responded they are somewhat satisfied as well.

Overall, the responses to the survey questions would be considered positive. Two out of the 10 participants responded they rate their level of job satisfaction as high and the others rated their level as somewhat satisfied. No one rated their level of job satisfaction as little or none. Although there were some misconceptions about some of the roles special and general educators have amongst each other, by discussing the survey responses and beginning to work together in a collaborative effort, the department and school wide program can benefit tremendously. I would also suggest to my supervisor to present the survey to the entire school community.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Special A</th>
<th>Special B</th>
<th>Special C</th>
<th>Special D</th>
<th>Special E</th>
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<th>General C</th>
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</tbody>
</table>
Do you think the certification requirements for General and Special Education faculty are equivalent?

Question 5
Are there misconceptions of job duties and responsibilities?

Do you believe special education students are considered in school wide programming and curriculum?
Does your special education student’s success affect your mood?

In your experience, do special education students prefer working with a general or special education teacher?
Researchers Final Reflections

Initially, I started this paper in hopes I would identify the differences between general and special education feelings towards teaching students with special needs. However as I began dissecting the research, I soon discovered majority of the teachers have very similar thoughts and perceptions regarding their experiences teaching at BHS.

Although the survey findings indicated several positive responses from both general and special educators as it relates to teaching students with special needs, Questions 9, 11, 15, and 19 confirmed there is some validity to the negative perception of the special educator. Question 9 identified that both special and general educators need to have a better understanding of the roles they play in the school community and the classroom. Question 11 identifies that both general and special educators believe there is a lack of school wide programming for students with special needs. Question 15 illustrates that special educators are more prone to being affected by their student’s success in comparison to their counterparts. Lastly, Question 19 revealed that in the views of both educators, special education students preferred working with general educators. This finding was the most disheartening because although the special educator is most affected by their student’s success, their students would rather work with a general educator.

Moving forward, there are several recommendations I believe will be crucial to the improvement and expansion of the special education department and policies implemented at BHS.

1. ALL teachers’ instructing students with special needs should increase their skills and knowledge about effective instructional strategies.

2. Educators should focus their attention and effort on aspects of a student’s ability they can effectively control.
3. General and Special educators must meet regularly to discuss student development, instruction and best practices.

4. When developing CTT courses administrators should request buy-in from the selected collaborative team teaching teachers to plan lessons and work together as a united front.

5. Parental involvement should be streamlined in all aspects of a student’s education.

6. Administrators should request the recommendations of teachers when purchasing books and software for diversified educational instruction.

7. Incorporating a committee with participants from each department to develop school wide initiatives, projects and events to include the whole school community.

8. Structure at least 1 meeting/activity per semester outside of the school building to develop a rapport with staff you are not directly linked to.

9. Identify a Special Education Liaison

10. Restructure the “special education” instructional format. No more labeled special education teachers and general education teachers. Just teachers!

If we at BHS could implement two to three of the recommendations listed, it is very possible within the next year there could be a noticeable increase in student achievement, and staff attrition for the following school year.
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Milligan, J., Neal, G., & Singleton, J (2012). Administrators of Special and Gifted Education: Preparing Them For the Challenge. Education 133 (1) 171-180


Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network - PTTAN (www.pattan.net)


February 5, 2014

Dear Colleagues:

I am a graduate student at Bank Street College of Education completing my Master’s Degree in Leadership. For my independent study I wanted to survey the level of job satisfaction, stigma and point of view from a special educator’s perspective in comparison to a general education teacher’s point of view.

My hope is that through this process we gain insight into what it takes to be a special education teacher and the important role they play in the school community and the educational success of our students. In the survey I am asking for your honest opinion and perspective on teacher collaboration, student achievement, administrative input and you overall job satisfaction as a teacher at BHS.

All names and identifying details of participants will be kept confidential. Please sign and date this form as consent to your participation in my survey.

Name of participant

Signature

Date
SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER SURVEY

(Please Circle One)

1. How do you feel about the philosophy of ICT?
   - Approve
   - Disapprove
   - Neutral

2. Do you use differentiation in all classroom environments?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Sometimes

3. How do you feel about teaching collaboratively?
   - Approve
   - Disapprove
   - Neutral

4. How do you feel about teaching special education students in your classroom?
   - Enjoy
   - Dislike
   - Neutral
5. Do you think the certification requirements for General and Special Education faculty are equivalent?

   Yes
   No
   Unsure

6. As a special educator do you feel you have the opportunity to make a more significant contribution to students with disabilities?

   Yes
   No

7. Do you feel you have administrative support departmentally and interdepartmentally in ICT or a Special Class program?

   Yes
   No
   Sometimes

8. Do you think the role of general and special education teachers are equivalent?

   Yes
   No
   Unsure
9. Do you feel there are misconception about general and special education duties and responsibilities?
   Yes
   No

10. Do you believe administration takes into account student IEP supports and accommodations when scheduling student/teacher programs?
    Yes
    No
    Unsure

11. Do you believe special education students are considered in school wide programming and curriculum?
    Always
    Often
    Seldom
    Never

12. Do you feel like you’re an integral part of the school community?
    Yes
    No
13. As a special educator do you feel solely responsible for the success of special education students?
   Yes
   No

14. How would you rate the level of special education student’s success in your class?
   Excellent
   Good
   Fair
   Poor

15. Does your special education student’s success affect your mood?
   Always
   Often
   Seldom
   Never

16. As a special education teacher do you feel professionally equipped to work with special education students?
   Definitely
   Occasionally
   Not all
17. How important is the success of special education students in your classroom?
   
   High Importance
   
   Somewhat Important
   
   Low Importance
   
18. Do you believe a general education teacher job is easier?
   
   Yes
   
   No
   
   Equal
   
19. In your experience, do special education students prefer working with a general or special education teacher?
   
   General
   
   Special
   
   Neutral
   
20. If you had to rate your level of job satisfaction? (10 being high satisfaction and 1 being little or no satisfaction)
   
   High -8-10
   
   Somewhat Satisfied-5-7
   
   Little/No Satisfaction-1-4
GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHER SURVEY

(Please Circle One)

1. How do you feel about the philosophy of ICT?
   - Approve
   - Disapprove
   - Neutral

2. Do you use differentiation in all classroom environments?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Sometimes

3. How do you feel about teaching collaboratively?
   - Approve
   - Disapprove
   - Neutral

4. How do you feel about teaching special education students in your classroom?
   - Enjoy
   - Dislike
   - Neutral
5. Do you think the certification requirements for General and Special Education faculty are equivalent?
   Yes
   No
   Unsure

6. As a general educator do you feel you have the opportunity to make a more significant contribution to students with disabilities?
   Yes
   No

7. Do you feel you have administrative support departmentally and interdepartmentally in ICT or a Special Class program?
   Yes
   No
   Sometimes

8. Do you think the role of general and special education teachers are equivalent?
   Yes
   No
   Unsure
9. Do you feel there are misconception about general and special education duties and responsibilities?
   Yes
   No

10. Do you believe administration takes into account student IEP supports and accommodations when scheduling student/teacher programs?
    Yes
    No
    Unsure

11. Do you believe special education students are considered in school wide programming and curriculum?
    Always
    Often
    Seldom
    Never

12. Do you feel like you’re an integral part of the school community?
    Yes
    No
13. As a general educator do you feel solely responsible for the success of special education students in your class?

   Yes
   No

14. How would you rate the level of special education student’s success in your class?

   Excellent
   Good
   Fair
   Poor

15. Does your special education student’s success affect your mood?

   Always
   Often
   Seldom
   Never

16. As a general education teacher do you feel professionally equipped to work with special education students?

   Definitely
   Occasionally
   Not all
17. How important is the success of special education students in your classroom?

   High Importance

   Somewhat Important

   Low Importance

18. Do you believe a special education teacher job is easier?

   Yes

   No

   Equal

19. In your experience, do special education students prefer working with a general or special education teacher?

   General

   Special

   Neutral

20. If you had to rate your level of job satisfaction? (10 being high satisfaction and 1 being little or no satisfaction)

   High: 8-10

   Somewhat Satisfied: 5-7

   Little/No Satisfaction: 1-4