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INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS: ELEMENTARY REGULAR CLASSROOM TEACHERS' PERCEIVED STRESSORS AND SUPPORTS NEEDED TO EFFECTIVELY TEACH STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Nichole W. Gainey
Southeastern University - Lakeland

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STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

By

NICHOLE WHITE GAINEY

A doctoral dissertation submitted to the
College of Education
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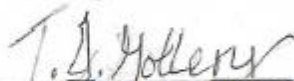By

NICHOLE WHITE GAINEY

Dissertation Approved:

_____
Patty LeBlanc, Ph.D. Dissertation Chair

_____
Thomas Gollery, Ed.D. Committee Member

_____
Lynsey Seabrook, Ed.D. Committee Member

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James Anderson, Ph.D. Dean, College of Education

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DEDICATION

During the introductory week of my doctoral studies' journey, my cohort experienced an uplifting morning with fellowship, prayer, motivational speeches, and song, including the Casting Crown's song, "Thrive". Often, throughout the journey, I have played this song as a source of inspiration, reminder of purpose, and reminder of the One I ultimately serve and am dedicated. Below is the chorus:

Just to know You and

To make You known

We lift Your name on High

Shine like the sun, make darkness run and hide

We know we were made for so much more

Than ordinary lives

It's time for us to more than just survive

We were made to thrive!

I'm deeply humbled by the vast experiences I have been able serve while an educator. I'm extremely grateful for the educators I have been able to meet across the globe whose faith and energy to thrive continues to lift up not only their students but all people around them. This dissertation is a milestone of not only a term of study; the dissertation is an artifact of the mission I continue to serve. I dedicate this dissertation to educators throughout the world who are striving to attain success for all their students. May you continue to thrive!

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ABSTRACT

 The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between the proportions of students with special needs in elementary classrooms and regular elementary teachers' stressors and needs for professional development support. The conceptual framework for the study was derived from critical mass theory and tipping point theory. The design of this dissertation study was non-experimental survey research of a non-random, purposive sample of 52 regular elementary classroom teachers who taught students with special needs. The researcher used a broad definition of students with special needs to include those who were working on a RtI Tier 2 or Tier 3 plan in addition to the students with Individual Education Plans or 504 Plans. In this sample of elementary teachers, the mean proportion of all special needs students to total students was .55 or 55%. Survey respondents indicated the extent to which the domains of student behavior, parent, administrative, classroom, professional competency, and personal competency issues were stressful on a four-point Likert scale. All six of the survey's domains of teachers' stressors were significantly related to the sample's mean composite stressor score (Mean = 2.52; $p \le .001$); however, there was no significant relationship (p < .34) between the proportion of students with special needs and teachers' stressors. Seventy-six percent of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed on the need for more professional development related to meeting the needs of special learners. The relationship between the proportion of students with special needs and teachers' needs for professional development approached significance ($p < .07$). Teachers reported that their greatest stressors were related to work required outside contract hours.

Keywords: teacher stress; teacher burnout; critical mass theory; tipping points; inclusive education; teacher attrition; teacher turnover; teacher churn

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I. INTRODUCTION

American education has evolved into a complex system of national, state, and local policy networks. An outcome of this complexity is a growing concern for equity in education. As policy and reform continue to forge shifts in the educational landscape at all levels, teachers face many challenges that are amplified by the increasing needs in classrooms. A number of research studies suggest that many classroom teachers are not adequately prepared to support the diverse academic, social, physical, and emotional needs of today's fully inclusive classrooms (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Kosko & Wilkins, 2017; LeDoux, Graves, & Burt, 2012; Pavri & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006; Zentall & Javorsky, 2007).

Teachers are on the front line of educational reform and work relentlessly to meet the many demands of the profession; unfortunately, teachers often experience high levels of stress and exhaustion as they strive to provide equitable education for all students in their classrooms. When the perceived demands of the profession exceed the physical and emotional resources of teachers, these professionals often decide to transfer to a different school or to different positions that they perceive as having more manageable work environments. Unfortunately, many teachers leave the profession of education entirely (Wood & McCarthy, 2002).

This disturbing level of "churn" (teacher turnover and attrition) has a direct and measurable impact on students' academic achievement and the quality of schools (Rondfelt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2012). This study was designed to examine the perceived stressors that

regular classroom teachers experience in inclusive classrooms and the types of support they need.

Background of the Study

According to the National Council on Disability (2018), an average of 63% of all students with disabilities receive the majority of their education in general education classrooms (known as regular education). United States education reform history includes federal statutes to address rights and protections for students with disabilities. The current law, known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, includes amendments and reauthorization of components from prior legislation, including the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. ESSA includes reference to the Education for All Handicapped Children Education Act (Public Law 94-142) signed on November 29, 1975 that later evolved into what became known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA). Legislation has continued to be developed and amended to outline and strengthen educational policies that promote proactive measures to achieve equity in education for all students. These measures have included legislative reform efforts to promote curricular models, systems, and approaches that provide equitable access, engagement, and realistic assessment for all students. The purpose statement for the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) states education is to "provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high quality education and to close educational achievement gaps" (20 U.S.C. 6301). Legislation supports one such model labeled "full inclusion," in which all students, regardless of handicapping condition or severity, are served in a regular classroom of program full-time. All services must be provided to the child in a least-restrictive environment, which typically is the regular classroom. In this model, the teacher delivers instruction to all students and makes accommodations as necessary for

learners with special needs; in many cases, additional services may be provided by special educators who instruct the special needs students in collaboration with the regular classroom teacher. This inclusive model essentially replaced the predominate instructional model implemented prior to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142) which consisted of "pull-out" programs that removed the student from the regular classroom for certain periods of the day in order to provide intensive instruction in one or more of the core curricular areas, such as reading/language arts. As is described in the IDEIA of 2004, prior to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, students were often removed from their peers and did not receive equitable services.

Another instructional model designed to keep students in regular education classrooms is *Response to Intervention* (RtI). Response to Intervention models guide teachers and schools in their efforts to provide differentiated curricula and teaching strategies for students who struggle to learn in the classroom. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc. (2010) described RtI foundations through research, support of RtI through federal law, core principles, and essential components. Implementation of the essential components of RtI includes universal screening and progress monitoring systems to monitor students' success and progress on academic and behavioral expectations during regular core instruction (tier 1). Students who do not make adequate progress in tier 1 are placed in small group interventions (tier 2). When adequate progress is not achieved through tier 2 interventions, individualized intensive intervention (tier 3) is provided. The widespread implementation of the RtI model in education has been instrumental in its advocacy for adequate differentiated supports for all students in order for them to be successful and to demonstrate satisfactory progress. "RtI provides a unified system of studying student difficulties and providing early intervention prior

to referral for formal evaluation for special education or allowing such evaluation only as a last resort" (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009, p. 19).

Given the national movement to place students with disabilities in general education classrooms full-time, teachers' attitudes and beliefs regarding inclusive education have been researched, challenged, and tested. Teachers routinely face challenges as they plan and implement strategies and interventions as part of differentiation and RtI plans to serve the diverse needs of general education students who exhibit variability in learning profiles. These efforts, combined with meeting the expectations of *Individualized Education Programs* (IEPs) and 504 plans (instructional plans to ensure that children who have a disability receive accommodations to ensure their academic success and access to learning environments), present additional challenges to regular educators. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) concluded in their review of the literature that teachers' attitudes were "strongly influenced by the nature and severity of the disabling condition presented to them" in their classrooms (p. 129).

In an early study, Bunch, Lupart, and Brown (1997) examined 1,492 Canadian educators' attitudes about inclusive education by means of a survey. The researchers found that teachers were generally supportive of inclusion. However, the same teachers also reported that the demands placed on regular classroom teachers by inclusive education raised substantial concerns. Specifically, the teachers reported the need for more professional development to effectively meet the needs of the inclusion students and that the workload inherent in differentiating instruction was higher than average. Additional assistance needed was identified by the teachers: greater planning time, addition of support personnel, additional classroom resources, and decisive administrator leadership and mentoring.

In her survey study of Canadian educators, Brackenweed (2008) found that teachers reported substantial levels of stress related to the lack of support for inclusive education. The primary stressor identified in the study of inclusion teachers were those tasks that interfered with the teachers' instructional time, such as amount of paperwork, extra-curricular demands, and interpersonal conflicts. Other stressors included workload, time management, lack of general support, and insufficient teacher preparation for managing learners with special needs.

Brackenweed's (2008) findings suggest that the critical mass of special learning needs in a classroom can be tipped to a point beyond which the teacher is able to effectively meet each learner's needs without experiencing undue stress and exhaustion. This study was designed to examine the tipping points at which regular elementary classroom teachers become unduly stressed by the demands of teaching in inclusive classrooms. In addition, this study investigated the types of support regular elementary classroom teachers need to effectively meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of all learners.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Educators across the US are concerned about the need to retain and support highly effective teachers. Unfortunately, effective teachers leave the field of education every year largely due to the increased demands of accountability, evaluation, and intervention expectations to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of students (Dewhurt-Savellis, Parker, & Wilhelm, 2000; Dwyer, 2014; Shaw & Newton, 2014).

The current researcher observed high levels of low teacher morale, discontent, stress, and burnout in schools across the US and Canada when she served as a school improvement consultant. These observations led to preliminary research on possible reasons for the problems she witnessed firsthand. During her doctoral program, she developed and piloted a survey

designed to measure sources of teacher discontent and concern as well as teachers' needs for professional development. This survey was piloted in 2016 with a sample of convenience; 35 teachers completed the survey.

Analysis of personal observations and the results of the pilot survey led the researcher to several conclusions and ideas for further research:

- Teachers were overwhelmed with paperwork and accountability measures.

- Teachers experienced increased numbers of students with challenging behaviors and social-emotional needs that were difficult to manage.

- Supports from administrators and guidance counselors were frequently insufficient to effectively assist teachers in meeting the needs of students.

- Much of the professional development provided at the school and district levels did not effectively help teachers to meet the needs of their exceptional and challenging learners.

This dissertation study is a direct outgrowth of the pilot study. Using the theoretical underpinnings of critical mass theory (Oliver, Marwell & Teixeira, 1985), teacher burnout research (Lopez, 2017), and Malcolm Gladwell's (2002) book on Tipping Points, the researcher examined the relationships between proportions of inclusion students in regular elementary classrooms, teacher stressors, and professional development support needs. The theoretical basis for the study is covered in depth in chapter two.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between the proportions of students with special needs in regular elementary classrooms and elementary teachers' stressors and needs for professional development supports.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The study was designed to answer the following research questions:

Q1: What is the relationship between numbers of special needs students in an elementary classroom and regular elementary teachers' perceptions of stress?

H1: There is a significant correlation between the mean proportion of elementary special needs students to total number of students and the mean composite score of this sample of elementary teachers' perceptions of stress.

Q2: What is the relationship between the numbers of special needs students in regular elementary classrooms and the professional development regular elementary teachers need to successfully teach special needs students?

H2: There is a significant correlation between the mean proportion of elementary special needs students to total number of students and the mean composite score of this sample of elementary teachers' perceptions of needs for professional development.

Overview of Methodology

Research Design

The design of this dissertation study was non-experimental survey research using a purposive sample of regular elementary classroom teachers who taught in inclusive classrooms. The researcher's survey (see Appendix A) asked elementary teachers to indicate the extent to which the allocation or lack of resources (instructional materials and support personnel) was stressful. In addition, the survey asked respondents to indicate the extent to which concerns about student behavior, parents, administration, classrooms, professional competency, and personal competency were stressful. Responses to the survey items not only provided insight

into the types and extent of teacher stressors in inclusive classrooms, but also to needs for additional support in order to be effective as instructors.

This research study was an adapted replication of two studies of inclusive education, teacher stressors, and coping strategies conducted by Forlin (2001) in Churchlands, Western Australia and by Brackenweed (2011) in Canada. For purposes of this dissertation study, Forlin's original questionnaire was modified by the researcher to consist of five parts (see Appendix A). Part A requested general demographic details of the school and teachers' personal information. Part B sought information about the numbers and types of children with special needs in the teacher's classroom. Part C asked teachers to identify stressors associated with teaching students with special needs in an inclusive classroom as measured by a 4-point Likert scale. Part D included a range of coping strategies employed by teachers to reduce stress related to teaching special needs learners using a 4-point Likert scale. Part E included information on the types of professional development teachers had completed and their perceived usefulness of the professional development using a 4-point Likert scale. Open-ended survey items created by the researcher also requested further information from teachers to elaborate on selected item responses.

This dissertation study focused primarily on the relationships between proportion of special needs learners in elementary classrooms and results of teacher perceptions from Part C (stressors) and Part E (needs for professional development) to address the research questions and hypotheses. The researcher's adapted survey instrument was reviewed by a panel of judges and revised as appropriate to establish validity.

Data Collection

After approval by Southeastern University's Institutional Review Board, the adapted

survey was piloted with a small group of teachers to determine internal reliability and revised as

appropriate. After the validity study was completed and revisions were made to the adapted

survey, the online survey link was distributed to teachers in the U.S. by means of school-wide

distributions, email, social media, and word-of-mouth. Survey data were collected and compiled

for all grade levels and all teachers for purposes of future research studies, but the dissertation

study focused solely on responses from 52 regular education elementary teachers who served

inclusion students.

Data Analyses

Survey responses were cleaned, compiled, analyzed, and reported as (a) teacher

demographic responses, (b) descriptive statistics for each item and item correlations, (c) Pearson

r correlational statistics to address the research hypotheses regarding the relationships of

proportions of inclusion students and teacher stressors and needs for professional development,

and (d) ancillary analyses to further explore the teachers' responses.   The researcher also

qualitatively categorized open-ended survey items qualitatively according to themes.

Limitations

The researcher surveyed a non-random, purposive sample of convenience of elementary

regular classroom teachers ($n = 52$) who taught students with special needs. Responses to

surveys typically deal with an individual's thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs at any given moment

in time. Therefore, the results of the study may not reflect teachers' perceptions over the course

of an academic year. Students who are eligible for special services and interventions may

present wide variability in abilities and needs. The perceptions of the teachers who participated

in the study may not be representative of all general education teachers who serve students with special needs.

Definition of Key Terms

Burnout

Teacher burnout "results from the chronic perception that one is unable to cope with daily life demands" (Wood & McCarthy, 2002, p. 5). Researchers agree that teacher burnout is characterized by a state of exhaustion in which teachers become cynical in relation to their perceived chronic stress at work, resulting in decreased professional efficacy (Bettini et al., 2017; Brown & Roloff, 2011; Fernet, Guay, Senecal, & Austin, 2012; Friedman, 1992; Mojsa-Kaja, Golonka, & Marek, 2015; Nuri, Demirok, & Direkto, 2017; Parker, Martin, Colmar, & Liem, 2012). Burnout can be summarized as a combination of three components: emotional exhaustion (feeling one's emotional resources are used up), depersonalization (felt distance from others), and diminished personal accomplishment (decline in feelings of job competence and achievement) (Brown & Roloff, 2011).

Differentiation and Differentiated Instruction

According to the Innovative Resources for Instructional Success (IRIS) Center at the Peabody College at Vanderbilt University, differentiated instruction is:

an approach whereby teachers adjust the curriculum and instruction to maximize the learning of all students: average learners, English language learners, struggling students, students with learning disabilities, and gifted and talented students. Differentiated instruction is not a single strategy but rather a framework that teachers can use to implement a variety of strategies, many of which are evidence-based. These evidence-based strategies include:

- Employing effective classroom management procedures

- Grouping students for instruction (especially students with significant learning problems)

- Assessing readiness

- Teaching to the student's zone of proximal development (The IRIS Center, 2010, p. 1)

Inclusion

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act of 2004, students who have been formally evaluated to determine whether they require specified services and instructional delivery have the right to receive necessary curricular adaptations in the general education classroom setting. Adaptations include accommodations and modifications designed to provide a least-restrictive environment and instruction. Curricular adaptations and modifications vary based upon each learner's individual needs as defined in Individualized Education Program (IEP) documentation. The primary provider of accommodations and modifications on the IEP is generally the regular education classroom teacher.

Special Needs Students

This study utilized a broad definition of special needs to include students with IEPs as well as additional students officially designated as requiring prescribed support, modifications, accommodations, or support provided in small group intervention settings. In the survey, the regular education teachers identified students with special needs as students who were categorized as those with RtI Tier 2 or Tier 3 plans, IEPs, or 504 plans (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc., 2010).

Regular Education Students

  For purposes of this study, regular education students are defined as students in the general education classroom who do not receive services as required by a 504 plan or IEP.

Significance of the Study

  The results of this replication study will help educators and policy makers determine the primary stressors in inclusive educators' lives and possible ways to alleviate the stressors, thus helping to reduce teacher turnover and attrition. While correlational research does not imply causality, this study examined the relationships between critical mass and tipping points related to inclusive education and to teachers' perceived needs for support to effectively teach in inclusive environments.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between the proportions of students with special needs in a classroom and elementary teachers' stressors and needs for support. This review of literature presents the theoretical basis for the study and discusses relevant and recent research studies related to teacher attrition, teachers' stressors, and teachers' perceived needs for support to adequately serve their students, especially those with special needs.

Teacher Attrition

A growing crisis in the United States' educational system exists with regard to teacher and administrator supply, demand, and anticipated shortages as educators leave the profession or approach retirement age. In contrast to countries such as Finland and Singapore where approximately 4% of teachers leave in a given year, the authors of a recent Learning Policy Institute report stated that U.S. teacher attrition rates hover near 8% (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Sutcher et al. (2016) analyzed the U.S. government's School and Staffing Surveys and Teacher Follow-Up Survey databases from 2012 and 2013, along with Baccalaureate and Beyond 2008:2012 databases, and the Higher Education Act Title II data from 2005 through 2014 to examine the reasons and the types of teachers who were leaving the profession, locations and environments in which teacher attrition was greatest, and the factors associated with different rates of teacher attrition. Sutcher et al. (2016) summarized their findings as follows:

- **Why**. Contrary to common belief, teacher retirements generally constitute less than one-third of those who leave the profession in a given year. Of those who leave teaching voluntarily, most teachers list some type of dissatisfaction as very important or extremely important in their decision to leave the profession.

- **Who**. Attrition varies by teachers' subpopulations: teachers with little preparation tend to leave at rates two to three times higher than those who have had comprehensive preparation before they enter. Teachers in high-poverty and high-minority schools tend to have higher rates of attrition, and teachers of color are disproportionately represented in those schools. In addition, teachers in the subject areas of special education, bilingual education, English for Speakers of Other Languages, mathematics, and science were already in scarce supply in 2016.

- **Where.** Teacher attrition rates vary considerably across the U.S. The South has particularly high turnover rates (movers and leavers) compared to the Northeast, Midwest, and West. For most regions, teacher turnover is higher in cities than in suburban or rural districts.

- **Associated Factors.** Administrative support was the factor most consistently associated with teachers' decisions to stay in or leave schools. The authors' analyses found that teachers who described their administrators as unsupportive were more than twice as likely to leave as teachers who feel well-supported. The perception of support was connected to the communication loop between teachers and administration. Specifically, teachers' needs for resources, including

instructional materials and decision making regarding professional development

were indicated as ignored. (p. 4)

Many other factors emerged from the archival research conducted by Sutcher et al. (2016) related to teacher attrition: quality of school leadership, access to relevant professional learning opportunities, quality of instructional leadership, time for collaboration and planning, collegial relationships, and input into decision-making. Sutcher et al. (2016) also reported national findings that in 2013-14, high-minority schools had, on average, four times as many uncertified teachers as low-minority schools. Inequities related to certified vs uncertified teachers or teachers who were teaching out of field were also reported between high-poverty and low-poverty schools. These findings are troubling considering the ways that teacher shortages influence teaching and learning: schools operate with limited human resources, stressors lead to higher levels of teacher turnover, and students tend to underachieve.

Impact of Teacher Turnover

Teacher turnover can have broad impacts on educational systems. Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2012) studied the ways that turnover can influence student achievement using administrative data from the New York City Department of Education and the New York State Education Department. Their database analyses focused on approximately 850,000 observations of fourth- and fifth-grade students across all New York City (NYC) elementary schools over eight academic years (2001–2002 and 2005–2010). The databases allowed the researchers to link student test scores in math and English language arts (ELA) to individual student, class, school, and teacher characteristics. Ronfeldt et al. (2012) concluded that "the effect of [teacher] turnover is driven by the relative effectiveness of the teachers who leave a school, as compared to those who replace them" (p. 18). Ronfeldt et al. (2012) found statistically significant negative

relationships ($p < .01$) between fourth- and fifth-grade students' achievement in math and ELA and rate of teacher turnover, especially in lower-achieving schools. In other words, the higher the rate of teacher turnover, the lower the students' achievement in math and ELA. Ronfeldt et al.'s (2012) analyses of hiring trends in NYC revealed that "underserved schools tend to fill vacancies with less effective teachers" (p. 2). The researchers also uncovered negative relationships between student achievement and teacher turnover related to the instructional burden on experienced staff and the disruptive impact on overall staff collegiality, community, and trust. The authors observed the following trend in the data: "Experienced staff usually bear most of the responsibility for mentoring new teachers and tend to receive limited professional development and support due to the needs of new hires" (Ronfeldt et al., 2012, p. 6). The researchers further described the financial costs associated with recruiting, hiring, and training new teachers; those resources might otherwise be invested in program improvement or working conditions to benefit everyone. Unfortunately, "new hires…often leave before gaining necessary expertise" (Ronfeldt et al., 2012, p. 6).

Educator Stress and Burnout

Teachers often decide to leave a teaching assignment for a variety of reasons including workplace stress and burnout. The results of a comprehensive review of literature on teacher stress and burnout can be summarized by a set of common findings (Bermejo-Toro, Prieto-Ursula, & Hernandez, 2016; Brackenreed, 2011; Dewhurst-Savellis, Parker, & Wilhelm, 2000; Friedman, 1992; Greenberg, Brown, & Abenavoli, 2016; Leiter & Maslach, 2005; Lopez, 2017; Mojsa-Kaja, Golonka, & Marek, 2015; Steinhardt, Faulk, & Gloria, 2011; and Wood & McCarthy, 2002). The review of literature uncovered variations of the same themes regardless

of the teachers' ages, number of years of teaching experience, class sizes and composition, geographic locations, and perceptions of satisfaction.   The common themes included:

- Teachers need to feel satisfied by their work to avoid burnout;

- Teachers' sense of professional self-worth and competence is related to their perceptions of ways that others in the workplace view them;

- Burnout is more likely to occur if the teachers' self-esteem and belief in their competence does not sustain their efforts in the face of the stresses and frustrations experienced when teaching;

- Continuous changes in curricula and increased accountability requirements are sources of disillusionment among teachers, and lack of support in these areas often provided the impetus to leave the teaching profession;

- Most teachers who leave the teaching profession leave in the first five years of teaching;

- Teachers' personality traits are related to their ability to avoid burnout when faced with certain situations including challenging behavior from students, work overload, lack of time due to job demands, role conflict, and personal ambiguity regarding expectations (self-efficacy);

- Teachers experience burnout stemming from chronic mismatches between people and work environments.

Brackenreed (2011) surveyed a sample of 269 Canadian teachers to determine teachers' strategies for coping with their levels of stress with respect to teaching students with an identified exceptionality in their inclusive classroom. Brackenreed (2011) described teachers' personal coping skills and job resources (administrative support, support from colleagues,

sufficient training, and feedback) and their relationships to teachers' sense of well-being. Other researchers have examined the relationships between insufficient job resources and job-related autonomy on emotional exhaustion (Leiter & Maslach, 2005; Lopez, 2017; Steinhardt et al., 2011). In these studies, emotional exhaustion was described by teachers as a feeling of extreme fatigue. Further, teachers described that they were often overextended by work; over time, the exhaustion led to breakdowns in workplace relationships, depersonalization, cynical and irritable attitudes, and feelings of depletion (Leiter & Maslach, 2005; Lopez, 2017; Steinhardt et al., 2011). Increased levels of burnout are also related to health-related problems among teachers (Greenberg et al., 2016). The results of these studies offer important insights into the phenomenon of teacher burnout and possible ways to decrease teachers' stress, burnout, and attrition.

Theoretical Foundations of the Study

To provide insight into teacher stress and burnout, this section includes an overview and application of critical mass theory (Oliver, Marwell & Teixeira, 1985) and Malcolm Gladwell's (2002) theory of tipping points. Each theory describes the ways that situational contexts can influence human behavior.

Tipping Points

In his book, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference,* Malcolm Gladwell (2002) described his model or theory of social change as tipping points, which he derived from a comprehensive review of research on a number of historical and current phenomena. Gladwell worked in advertising as a young man; he was interested in the characteristics of a product or service that promoted its sale to the general public and in the phenomena of brand-loyalty of consumers. According to his book (Gladwell, 2002), he

ultimately became a journalist; in this line of work, he was expected to research and write knowledgeably about a number of disparate products, ideas, situations, and phenomena which he subsequently connected to broad theories of social science and human behavior. Gladwell's (2002) research began with hypothetical premises or connections between knowledge for which he found case studies that validated his hypotheses. As such, he has been criticized by social scientists for his irregular, almost opposite, approach to the scientific method (Chabris, 2013). However, one reviewer of his book, a social psychologist, wrote:

> Other reviewers have done an excellent job of reviewing the book's thrust and content, so I'm going to assume I don't need to do that here. I do want to say I did not expect a scientific journal article. What I anticipated is what I got – a delightful application of fascinating social psychological evidence to ways of approaching and understanding real life problems.
>
> With a [graduate] degree in social psychology, I can't help being excited and impressed by the research contributions to the field. The findings [Gladwell] cites often seem obvious and "of course" once the results are in. And sometimes the results contradict "common sense." Always they require clever design by those who create the hypotheses and methods of measurement.
>
> But this book does not claim to produce new research. What the author does is present interesting and validated findings in a way that organizes them for potential application to a given range of problems. Readers who want more scientific journal type evidence are free to take the suggestions and create their own statistically designed clever research. (Affinito, 2014, para. 1-3)

Gladwell (2002) described the theory of tipping points as "the name given to that one dramatic moment…when everything can change all at once" (p. 9), much like a virus, and the effects can be far-reaching. Gladwell (2002) stated in his book:

The best way to understand the dramatic transformation of unknown books into bestsellers, or the rise of teenage smoking, or the phenomena of word of mouth or any number of the other mysterious changes that mark everyday life is to think of them as epidemics. Ideas and products and messages and behaviors spread just like viruses do. (p. 7)

Epidemics start small and often cause large consequences. Gladwell (2002) thus defined a tipping point as the point at which an idea, trend, or social behavior crosses a threshold, tips, and spreads like a virus or epidemic to a critical mass of users or responders. Gladwell (2002) described a business setting, for example, in which a new product typically followed an upward trend line in sales after comprehensive and creative advertising floods targeted consumer markets. Gladwell (2002) further explained how the new product's tipping point occurred when large numbers of consumers in all the targeted markets and even untargeted markets bought the product repeatedly and were brand-loyal to that product in spite of competition. Even when the product was replaced by a better, cheaper, or more glamourous product, the original product nevertheless influenced change or "tipped" consumer and entrepreneurial behavior.

In his book *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference,* Gladwell (2002) applied his ideas to a number of highly varied contexts, such as the drop in violent crime in New York City associated with neighborhood urban renewal and police foot patrols, teenage suicide patterns, and the efficiency of small work units in business, higher education, and the military. For many, Gladwell's theories were considered controversial, faddish, and were even

called "pop psychology and sociology" (Chabris, 2013, para. 6). However, when one considers today's influence of videos, podcasts, Ted Talks™, and social media almost twenty years after the publication of *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference,* the critiques may be quieted. Gladwell (2002) himself prophetically pointed out the dramatic ways that technology could influence human behavior. Many researchers now consider Gladwell's ideas about tipping points to be instrumental to the advancement of the study of sociology, psychology, and human-machine interactions (e.g., Xie et al., 2011).

According to Gladwell (2002), three "agents of change" (p. 19) influence tipping points: The *Law of the Few*, the *Stickiness Factor*, and the *Power of Context* (p. 19). The Law of the Few theorizes that very few people as individuals (novices) can function as an influential agent of change in most situations; change must first achieve a certain level of critical mass before it will be accepted by others.

The Stickiness Factor is described as the characteristics of ideas that make them "stick" in the mind of a person; the stickiness of an idea, product, or trend can lead to the acceptance of the idea, product, or trend by large numbers of people, thus leading to a tipping point. Gladwell (2002) held that even minor changes in a stickiness factor could produce massive results; even slight changes could change individuals' perceptions of an idea and get the idea "to stick". For example, Martin Luther King was an exceptional individual who garnered support for social justice among a few equally exceptional individuals to produce a tipping point that resulted in dramatic changes in legislation, policy, behavior, and attitudes of the general public. In other words, King's ideas and the means by which he communicated them were "sticky"; he was a connector who was able to create a critical mass of advocates for his ideas of non-violent protest to promote change that forced a tipping point throughout the entire U.S.

The third agent of change described by Gladwell (2002) in his book on tipping points is the Power of Context or the ways that people become sensitized and enculturated to their environments and the situations that occur within their environments. He suggested that "our inner states are the result of our outer circumstances" (p. 152). According to Gladwell, context can "powerfully affect [people's] behavior merely by changing the immediate details of their situation" (p. 155). For example, in his chapter on context, Gladwell comprehensively described the "Rule of 150" in the social dynamics related to the size of groups. Gladwell (2002) referenced the military and the limit placed on the number within a company of soldiers (p. 180). Gladwell explained that the military discovered over time how difficult it was for more than 200 men in a company to become sufficiently familiar with each other to work together as a functional unit. Gladwell wrote in his book about the Rule of 150:

> Beyond that point, there begin to be structural impediments to the ability of the group to agree and act with one voice. If we want to, say, develop schools in disadvantaged communities that can successfully counteract the poisonous atmosphere of the surrounding neighborhoods, this [sic] tells us that we are probably better off building little schools than one or two big ones. (p. 182)

Gladwell's (2002) expansion of the Rule of 150 claimed that when groups get too large and the individuals in the group have little in common, the people in the group become strangers, and close-knit fellowship is lost. Thus, tipping points within groups are often related to both size and the perceived lack of cohesiveness. Gladwell (2002) further explained that when connectedness exists, interpersonal knowledge and a network of support exists.

> It's knowing someone well enough to know what they know and knowing them well enough so that you can trust them to know things in their specialty…it's the re-creation,

on an organization-wide level, of the kind of intimacy and trust that exists in a family. (p. 190)

The successful company that created Gore-Tex™ water resistant fabric achieved success in part from the application of the Rule of 150 (Gladwell, 2002). Keeping the production plants at a cap size of 150 employees who focused on specific company products kept common mission and vision at the forefront, yielding high quality products, employee, and customer satisfaction.

Tipping point theory can apply to classroom teachers as well as to organizations. For example, educators observed that when a classroom is numerically large, it is typically more difficult for a teacher to manage. Do the size and composition of a classroom make a difference to the overall success and performance of learners and the overall stress levels of teachers? Carefully designed research can inform educators to make even small changes that can positively influence student learning and teachers' well-being.

With the increasing rate of teacher attrition and turnover in the United States, Gladwell's (2002) theory presents interesting explanations of the ways that tipping points can lead to burnout in the classroom. A number of contexts and internal and external circumstances in education may lead to tipping points among educators' perceived levels of stress: school leadership, faculty or staff, student enrollment numbers and class size, additional accountability measures, extra-curricular duties, new curricular expectations, and other circumstances too numerous to mention. When stress-related tipping points occur and when teachers' state of stress is heightened, one might expect a greater likelihood of burnout, defined as a state of total physical, emotional, and physical exhaustion. This relationship is explored in chapter four and discussed in chapter five. Gladwell (2002) wrote, "When it comes to interpreting other people's behavior, human beings invariably make the mistake of overestimating the importance of

fundamental character traits and underestimating the importance of the situation and context" (p. 160). Gladwell (2002) also reported that individuals' tipping points vary according to their personal and professional abilities to adapt and adjust to new situations, demands, and contexts. In other words, the personalities and character traits of teachers may not be the primary factors influencing teacher stress and burnout; one must also look to contexts and environments.

The theoretical models forwarded in Gladwell's (2002) work provide an interesting conceptual framework for the current study. In most of the examples Gladwell (2002) shared in his book, the tipping points led to more positive outcomes such as higher consumer sales, reduced crime, fewer teen smokers, and greater social justice for oppressed people. However, tipping points may also lead to negative outcomes, including stress and burnout.

In the current study, the researcher chose to replicate and expand upon Forlin's (2001) and Brackenweed's (2008) research on elementary regular education teachers' stressors related to meeting the needs of inclusion students. Specifically, the current study used tipping point theory to hypothesize the relationships between the numbers of special needs students compared to the numbers of "regular" students in regular education classrooms and the teachers' perceived stressors and needs for professional development and support. Tipping points occur at different times for each individual and are dependent on context (Gladwell, 2002). In Brackenweed's (2008) study, certain demographic groups expressed varying levels of stress on the survey of stressor items, confirming Gladwell's ideas regarding contexts that influence phenomena.

Critical Mass Theory

Parallels exist between burnout research (Lopez, 2017), Gladwell's (2002) theory of tipping points, and critical mass theory (CMT; Oliver et al., 1985). Critical mass is a concept used in a variety of contexts, including physics, group dynamics, politics, public opinion, and

technology. The term critical mass is borrowed from nuclear physics to describe the amount of

substance needed to sustain a chain reaction. The concept of critical mass also grew out of social

science research on the bandwagon effect.

The bandwagon effect in social science describes the rate of adoption of beliefs, ideas,

and trends in response to their adoption by others. In other words, researchers can actually

quantify the band wagon effect by calculating the probability of the increase of an individual's or

group's adoption of an idea or trend in response to the proportion of individuals or groups who

have already responded. For example, during the 1992 US presidential election, Vicki G.

Morwitz and Carol Pluzinski (1996) conducted an experimental study which was published in

The Journal of Consumer Research to examine the influence of presidential polls and media

publication of poll results on predicted voter behavior. At a large northeastern university, 96

graduate business students in a marketing course were given the results of student and national

presidential voter polls prior to the closing of the polls during class; the actual polls correctly

indicated that Bill Clinton was in the lead over George H.W. Bush and Ross Perot. Students in

other sections of the marketing course ($n = 118$) were not exposed to the results of the polls

during class and were considered the control group. Among other findings, the results of the

experiment revealed that statistically significant numbers of students in the experimental group

that were given actual poll numbers indicating Clinton's lead reported that they had switched

their preference from Bush to Clinton ($p < .001$). The researchers suggested that for individuals

whose attitudes about the candidates were not solidified (i.e., who experienced cognitive

dissonance related to their vote), their attitudes related to the candidates could be changed rather

quickly based on polling results that indicated the expectation of a certain winner. In other

words, a bandwagon effect was observed. The bandwagon effect and Gladwell's (2002) tipping point theory resemble each other.

With regard to social dynamics, critical mass occurs when a sufficient number of adopters of an idea or innovation reaches sufficient size or influence so that the rate of adoption becomes self-sustaining and creates further growth (Oliver et al., 1985). The critical mass could relate to individuals, organizations, or nations. Social factors that can influence critical mass include the size of the critical mass, social stigma related to the concepts, level of public advocacy, and the level of communication in a society or its subcultures (Oliver et al., 1985).

Beginning in approximately 1983, authors Pamela Oliver and Gerald Marwell, in collaboration with several graduate students from the University of Wisconsin, conducted research that led to the development of critical mass theory (Oliver & Marwell, 1988). The researchers wanted to know the reasons that people adopt or fail to adopt a product or behavior that is beneficial to them or to the collective good of the whole of an organization or society. The project involved writing, exploring, and conducting social simulations in which collective action was needed, required, or occurred. The intent of the research was to develop a theory that would allow the research team to make predictions about the conditions under which collective action by groups of people would and would not emerge. Like Gladwell (2002), Oliver and Marwell's research team reported that, in many cases, a few people, organizations, or nations used the resources available to them to provide the common good for many while others simply enjoy the common good for "free."

Oliver and Marwell (2001) described critical mass theory as a "deeply theoretical enterprise" which, when applied, is "complex, interactive, and conditional" (p. 293). This claim was articulated in a series of articles Oliver et al. (1985) authored describing the role of social

networks, group interdependence and group heterogeneity, and the paradox of group size in collective action (Oliver & Marwell, 1988). In a 2001 literature review of the citations of critical mass theory, Oliver and Marwell presented archival research of CMT that pointed out that the majority of citations that referenced CMT involved isolated points of the theory, not necessarily the central points to the theory. Oliver and Marwell (2001) stated, "We stand by the empirical claim that relatively small groups of people are often at the core of action" (p. 308). The current research study applied the larger intent of critical mass theory as originally described: "complex, interactive, and conditional" (Oliver & Marwell, 2001, p. 293); this study focused on today's classrooms in relation to classroom teachers' perceived stress and need for support to effectively serve students with special needs.

Although critical mass theory has been used in sociology to explain collective action for a collective good, this research study proposes that critical mass can be achieved and have negative outcomes. Critical mass theory (Oliver et al., 1985) and tipping point theory (Gladwell, 2002) promote the notion that social scientists can describe and sometimes predict the nature of group behavior as well as the influence select individuals can have in any environment. Both CMT (Oliver et al., 1985) and tipping point (Gladwell, 2002) theorists reported that the size of a group is not necessarily the most important factor, but that heterogeneity and interdependence of the group are more likely to influence outcomes. The nature and needs of the collective good are positively or adversely altered by the makeup, interactions, and engagement of the group. The current researcher discusses these theories further in chapter five as they relate to the results of the survey of teachers' perceived challenges and stressors as they strive "to provide effective and consistent services for all children, with and without disabilities, and their families" (Brand, Favazza, & Dalton, 2012, p. 134).

Inclusive Classrooms

As mentioned in chapter one's definitions, educational inclusion can be described as the full integration of students who have been formally evaluated and who must, by law, receive necessary, appropriate services within the general education classroom setting (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). The primary provider of accommodations and modifications is generally the regular education classroom teacher (Brackenreed, 2008; Brackenreed, 2011; Forlin, 2001). The U.S. Department of Education (2019) reported that "the number of students ages 3–21 who received special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was 7.0 million, or 14 percent of all public-school students" (p. 1). According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics, in 2015 approximately 62.5% of the identified special needs students in public schools nationwide spent 80% or more of their school day in regular classrooms (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Teaching in full inclusion classrooms makes many demands on regular education teachers, especially if they have not been adequately prepared to serve inclusion students effectively and efficiently (Brackenreed, 2008; Brackenreed, 2011; Forlin, 2001).

In his research of the 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), Cooc (2019) reviewed teachers' survey responses (n = 121,000) related to their working conditions in 38 countries. Cooc (2019) uncovered a number of interesting results in his explorations, but he chose to focus one of his articles on the teachers' reported amount of instructional time and its relationship to teaching students with disabilities. The results of Cooc's study revealed that teachers who reported having no students with disabilities in their classroom spent 81% of their time on actual teaching. In contrast, teachers having 31% or more students with disabilities in their classroom reported that actual teaching time was 69%. In addition, teachers who had no

special education students in their classroom reported spending about 10% of their time on keeping order. Teachers who had 31% or more students with disabilities in their classroom reported that they spent 23% of their time keeping order. Cooc's findings point to the extremely important role of pre-service and in-service education to assist teachers to effectively serve all the students in their classroom, especially with regard to disruptive behavior of students.

Today's general education classrooms are filled with students who have diverse academic, social, and emotional needs. To meet these needs, policies are in place to implement and document preventative and intervention programming. Response to Intervention (RtI) (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc., 2010) is an example of educational policy designed to both meet standards and remediate instruction so that all students learn and are successful. Blad (2017) stated, "around the country, more schools are experimenting with social-emotional learning, buoyed by research that correlates it with positive outcomes, like academic gains and reduced disciplinary incidents" (p. 2).

Some Florida school districts have adopted social-emotional curricula (SEL) as part of their attempts to comply with the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Public Safety Act. This act was passed by the 2019 Florida legislature as Senate Bill 7026, Implementation of Legislative Recommendations of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission. The bill is designed to comprehensively address school safety and to reduce school violence. Many students demonstrate difficulties related to affective functioning, particularly in the areas of self-concept and social relationships. Although the research on SEL programs is compelling, teachers report that they find it challenging to integrate SEL curricula into daily instruction along with the other academic requirements that demand differentiation and documentation (Blad, 2017; Pavri & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006; Spencer, 2011). Today's inclusive classrooms contain

wide ranges of learners, including students with disabilities, students who are gifted or talented, children from poverty or who have experienced other types of trauma, English language learners, children and youth with attention or emotional problems, and more (Spencer, 2011). All of these students need support for their academic, social, and emotional development.

Gladwell (2002) also weighed in regarding humans' abilities to manage social relationships in groups. He quoted other researchers who claimed that humans can manage somewhere between 10 and 15 social relationships effectively, calling this concept "social channel capacity" (p. 182). Gladwell wrote that belonging to a group of 20 people created 190 two-way relationships and a 20-fold increase in the amount of information needed to know the members of the group (pp. 182-183). When one considers the magnitude of changes in social group dynamics, size of groups, and the heterogeneity of groups, the demands on an elementary classroom teacher, who is responsible for 20 or more students, becomes evident.

Sousa and Tomlinson (2011) discussed the ways that immigrant populations have increased in the United States; with this increase, more languages and cultures exist in school communities. The authors further acknowledged that meeting the academic and social needs of an increasingly diverse population has been a challenge for teachers. "While school districts across the country were becoming more alike in their curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices, the school population was becoming more diverse" (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011, p. 2). The diversity in today's classrooms requires differentiation, different levels of instruction, and diverse strategies. "Some school districts have long sought ways to maintain differentiation in their classrooms despite the driving forces of unreasonable amounts of content to cover and the accompanying high-stakes testing" (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011, p. 3).

Another challenging variable in many classrooms today is the number of homeless and students from families living in poverty (low-socio-economic) students. Eric Jensen is one of the nation's foremost educational professional development providers. He dedicated his work to synthesizing gold-standard research, including brain research; he then applied high-impact research to create and deliver professional development for teachers and other educational stakeholders, with a special emphasis on teaching and learning among students from poverty. Jensen (2013) stated, "Teaching is easy; teaching well is hard work" (p. xi). He described seven engagement factors in his book, *Engaging Students from Poverty*. The following seven areas were highlighted as areas of special concern for students from low socio-economic (SES) families: health and nutrition, vocabulary, effort and energy, mindset, cognitive capacity, relationships, and stress level. Each of these factors presents a challenge for classroom teachers when striving to meet students' needs while simultaneously teaching and assessing rigorous standards-based curricula. "Teaching students who live in poverty, especially teaching in a school with a high-poverty student population, like a Title I school exposes every single weakness a teacher has" (Jensen, 2013, p. x). Jensen (2013) stated the need for teachers to learn ways to adapt to the demands of differentiation in order to be successful as an educator and to help students to be successful as well.

Teachers' Perceptions and Attitudes Regarding Inclusion

"Kindergarten through 12th-grade classrooms are almost exclusively inclusive instructional settings" (Gaines & Barnes, 2017, p. 1). Since inclusion has become almost universally accepted as a best practice in education (Gaines & Barnes, 2017), regular education teachers increasingly instruct students with an array of disabilities who may spend the entire school day in the regular education classrooms with little or no assistance from special education

resource teachers. In this reality, meeting a diverse set of social, cognitive, and affective needs

becomes the responsibility of the classroom teacher; in addition, the regular education teacher is

held accountable for the progress of all students. Many teachers are not prepared, or feel that

they are not prepared to meet the needs of the diverse array of students in their classroom; this

attitude may contribute to teachers' perceptions of reduced self-efficacy and lead to higher levels

of perceived stress (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Bunch et al., 1997; Forlin, Chambers,

Loreman, Deppler, & Sharma, 2013; Gaines & Barnes, 2017; Hornby, 2015; Kosko & Wilkins,

2009; LeDoux et al., 2012; Logan & Wimer, 2013; Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori, &

Algozzine, 2012; Sideridis & Chandler, 1997;).

Avramidis and Norwich (2002) published a literature review synthesizing research

studies and articles regarding teacher attitudes towards inclusion, integration, and

mainstreaming. Reports were included only if their main research focus was teachers' attitudes.

The following international journals were searched for relevant reports: *British Journal of*

Educational Psychology, British Journal of Special Education, Educational Psychology,

European Journal of Special Needs Education; Exceptional Children; International Journal of

Disability, Development and Education, Journal of Learning Disabilities, and *Journal of Special*

Education. The studies included in the literature review were conducted between the years of

1984 and 2000. Results of the review suggested that "teachers' attitudes might be influenced by

a number of factors which are, in many ways, interrelated" (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002, p.

134). Connecting to the ideas of critical mass theory, the authors concluded that there were

strong relationships between context and environment, demographic variables, and personality

traits of teachers. "A number of studies examined environmental factors and the influence in the

formation of teachers' attitudes towards integration [and] inclusion" (Avramidis & Norwich,

2002, p. 140). Interestingly, Avramidis and Norwich's (2002) review found that the number of

years of teaching experience was not conclusively related to teachers' attitudes towards

inclusion. In the same study, professional development was frequently reported as a means of

improving teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. A synthesis of the results of the research by

Avaramidis and Norwich (2002) reported that the availability of support services was

consistently associated with teachers' positive attitudes toward integration, inclusion, and

mainstreaming.

Further describing the need for teachers to have access to effective professional

development, Hornby (2015) wrote that full inclusion implies that teachers can effectively and

efficiently education all children in mainstream classrooms. However, he stated that "the reality

of the situation in mainstream schools is that many teachers do not feel able or willing to

implement this scenario" (p. 244). Hornby (2015) further explained that many teachers do not

feel competent to teach children with special educational needs and disabilities because of

insufficient training and inadequate resources. This conclusion aligns with the general trend in

the current researcher's literature review suggesting the need for ongoing professional

development and support of teachers to effectively meet the demands of teaching in an inclusive

classroom.

LeDoux et al. (2012) described a major challenge in schools regarding the number of

students labeled as special needs under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). The

research design used for their study was mixed methods to include a survey and a focus group.

The survey utilized a Likert-type scale 1 (*not at all challenging*) to 5 (*very challenging*) to

determine the difficulty level of challenges experienced by inclusion teachers. The survey was

completed in Texas at a Title I elementary school by 56 teachers varying in years of teaching

experience and types of programs during pre-service teacher education. Results of the survey

indicated that teachers felt that inclusion students' needs were often not met in the general

education classroom; the teachers also agreed that more professional development was needed to

increase teachers' abilities to differentiate curricula and to implement appropriate instructional

practices for varying disabilities. In addition, the teachers reported that poor communication and

the disconnect between special education and regular education teachers was problematic and

needed remediation. Teachers also reported that special needs students' ability to keep up with

the pace of curricula and that teachers' time to meet special education students' needs were

significantly more challenging ($p < .001$) than modifying the curriculum or making appropriate

accommodations. While the sample size of this study was small, the results point to significant

concerns of teachers who teach in inclusive settings, especially the teachers' concerns that the

students' needs were not being met in the regular classroom.

Kosko and Wilkins (2009) conducted an archival research study using data from the

Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE). Data were originally gathered

through interviews over the phone during the 1999-2000 school year. Kosko and Wilkins used

the data collected from 1,126 general education teachers (14% of the total sample in the overall

SPeNSE study) to investigate the relationships between teachers' professional development

hours, number of years of teaching students with IEPs, and teachers' self-reported ability to

adapt instruction for students. The results revealed that when teachers participated in more hours

of targeted professional development, they reported that they were better able to adapt instruction

for students with special needs. The authors also concluded that eight hours or more of

professional development was more than twice as effective as less than eight hours in improving

teachers' self-perceived ability to adapt instruction (B = .39, $p < .01$). Further, the results

revealed a significant correlation ($r = .25$, $p < .01$) between level of pre-service teacher preparation and teachers' perceived ability to adapt instruction. In Kosko and Wilkins' study, professional development was a better predictor of teachers' improved perceptions of their ability to adapt instruction for students with special needs than years of experience teaching such students.

Obiakor et al. (2012) reported two qualitative case studies describing the realities of schools that implemented inclusion. One case study focused on an eight-year-old bilingual student diagnosed with a learning disability. The student was provided with pull-out special education services; however, the student manifested behavior problems as he progressed to middle school. The researchers discussed the idea that some student needs are best served in the inclusive classroom rather than in a resource room. Discussion of the case further described the child's need for a culturally responsive teacher who understood, valued, and incorporated the student's culture and language in the classroom. Obiakor et al.'s second case study examined a seventh-grade student with a learning disability who attended an urban elementary school. This student sat in the back of the room with other students with learning disabilities and received special instructional services from a special education teacher who visited the classroom frequently. Initially, the students with learning disabilities were not engaged in learning; however, the special education and general education teacher began team teaching and arranged for provision of scaffolds and supports to differentiate the students' learning experiences. The case study target student became one of the leaders in the classroom, and the students with learning disabilities began working successfully with other regular education students in the class. The researchers discussed ways that regular and special educators can make inclusion work effectively in general education classrooms despite continuing concerns about its

practicality. The authors of the study stated, "the burden of inclusion should not rest on the shoulders of teachers and service providers alone" (Obiakor et al., 2012, p. 487). Further, the researchers stated the necessity to move away from "bureaucratic management and communication processes that have district support…to one sharing from the building level to the district level" (Obiakor et al., 2012, p. 486). In other words, teachers' voices from the trenches must be heard and valued, and collaboration between teachers and district personnel is vital to the successful implementation of inclusive practices in regular education classrooms. "Inclusion can be successful when students are involved and empowered and when teachers and service providers collaborate and consult using some guiding principles (Obiakor et al., 2012, p. 485).

Bunch et al. (1997) conducted a study of 1,492 educators to determine the ways that educators react when they consider the concept and practice of including students with challenging needs in regular classrooms. Three data sources were used in this research: an educator opinion questionnaire, voluntary spontaneous written comments on the survey, and in-depth interviews of regular classroom teachers, administrators, resource teachers, and special education teachers across Canada. Educators at both the secondary and elementary levels of traditional and inclusive school systems participated in the study. Results of the study indicated that educators' attitudes toward inclusion were generally positive; however, their concerns included teacher workload and the effect of inclusion on regular classroom teachers; adequacy of preservice and in-service professional development; and administrator support for teachers who included special education students in their classrooms. The authors also discussed the need for greater collaboration among stakeholders, which the participants described as a missing element and a necessary component for effective practice in an inclusive classroom.

Logan and Wimer (2013) conducted a survey to investigate 203 elementary, middle, and high school teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. The researchers found that teacher experience was not a statistically significant factor in teachers' perceptions of educating students with special needs. The teachers suggested that more hands-on training was needed in order to feel more confident teaching students with special needs in the regular education classroom. In other words, although teacher experience did not necessarily play a role in teachers' perceptions of and attitudes toward inclusion, context mattered.

Forlin et al. (2013) and Loreman et al. (2013) reported on their survey research of 380 pre-service teachers in undergraduate teacher education programs in four countries to determine their attitudes toward inclusion and their preparedness to teach inclusion students. The survey was designed to measure pre-service teachers' knowledge about inclusion law and policy; previous interactions with people with disabilities; confidence levels in teaching people with disabilities; and prior teaching experience and training in working with students with disabilities. The results of the survey analyses revealed that students who reported low or no knowledge of inclusion law and policy, no experience interacting with people with disabilities, and no prior teaching experience or training in working with students with disabilities also reported lower feelings of confidence and self-efficacy for teaching inclusion students than classmates who reported average levels of the key variables. The authors provided a number of implications for ongoing development of teacher preparation programs in order to improve pre-service teachers' self-efficacy with regard to inclusive education. These suggestions included recognition of the importance of contextual and cultural differences within and between classrooms and the need for hands-on experiences of pre-service educators to build awareness and understanding of the needs of students as well as other educators with whom they would be required to collaborate.

The researchers (Forlin et al., 2013) also discussed the ways that teachers' perceptions of their own personal and professional capabilities were important to develop in inclusive classrooms. In addition, the authors concluded that self-efficacy of the pre-service teachers was "inversely proportional to the perceived severity of the disabilities of students included in the class, i.e. the more severe the disabilities, the less efficacious preservice [intern] teachers feel" (p. 28).

Stressors in Inclusive Classrooms

Teaching in inclusive settings can create additional challenges for teachers, especially if they are not adequately prepared to address the varied needs of exceptional students in full inclusion classrooms (Forlin, 2001). Three seminal studies of the relationships between teacher stress and inclusive education were conducted in Australia and Canada to determine the stressors and coping strategies of inclusion teachers. These studies are directly related to the purpose of the current study and its research questions.

Forlin (2001) conducted a detailed meta-analysis of 72 research studies identifying stress among inclusion teachers and the extent to which teachers experienced stressors in their work. The author classified the findings from the literature review into three general categories of stressors: administrative, classroom-based, and personal. In the review, teachers reported that the most stressful situations in inclusive classrooms were those that interfered with teachers' instructional time. Forlin further observed that inclusion teachers reported disruptive behavior and lack of student discipline as more stressful than lack of materials or resources.

After the comprehensive literature review, Forlin (2001) developed a survey to measure stressors of inclusion teachers based on the significant indicators of stressors she found in the meta-analysis. She then conducted a survey research study of 571 primary (elementary) inclusion teachers in Australia to determine their perceptions of a number of concerns related to

teacher stressors and inclusive education. Using a four-point Likert scale (not stressful, somewhat stressful, quite stressful, and extremely stressful), the researcher asked the inclusion teachers to rate their level of stress on a number of categories including administrative support, parent support, personal and professional competency, student behavior, and professional development.

Although the teachers in this sample were supportive of inclusive education, Forlin's survey results indicated that the teachers' perceptions of their professional competence and the behaviors of children with special needs were stressful. Eighty-nine percent of the inclusion teachers reported stress related to inadequate preservice training (mean stress level = 2.32 out of 4). Ninety-one percent of the survey respondents also considered their in-service training to be inadequate to meet the educational needs of inclusive students and their specific disabilities (mean stress level = 2.36). More than 70% of the teachers reported that their inclusion children disturbed others in the class and influenced the teachers' stress levels. These research results served to make recommendations to school and district administrators so that they could address the key issues teachers rated as most stressful.

Brackenreed (2008) replicated Forlin's (2001) study in Ontario, Canada; however, Brackenreed adapted Forlin's survey to include not only teachers' ratings of stressors in inclusive settings, but also their coping strategies to reduce stress. Thirty coping strategies were presented to survey participants using a Likert scale 1 (*do not use*) to 5 (*high level of usefulness*). Seventeen strategies were classified as personal coping strategies, three strategies were categorized as professional, two social, and thirteen institutional. Two hundred sixty-nine elementary and secondary teachers participated in the Canadian study (Brackenreed, 2008) of inclusion teachers' stressors and coping strategies. Ninety percent of the teachers indicated that

discussing stressful situations with colleagues was the most valuable institutional coping strategy (Mean = 3.04). Ninety-four percent of the teachers indicated that using different solutions (Mean = 3.56) and concentrating on putting the resources needed in place (Mean = 3.64) were the two most valuable professional coping strategies.

The perceptions of teachers' stressors were similar between the Australian and Canadian studies, including lack of communication with staff and all other stakeholders and lack of instructional time and resources. Brackenreed (2008) also found that inadequate preparation in pre-service and in-service professional development programs were associated with low perceptions of teacher self-competency, understanding and management of student behaviors, insufficient daily support in the classroom, and meeting the expectations of others such as parents.

Summary

The demands placed on inclusive classroom teachers are challenging, often leading to stress, burnout, and attrition. The research literature generally supports the idea that teachers' perceptions and attitudes about inclusion are influenced by the context of teachers' school-based systems of support. Teacher perceptions of self-efficacy are influenced by the types of support, professional development, stressors, and coping strategies individuals need. In addition, a great deal of variability exists between and among individual teachers. However, commonalities in the research include greater needs for professional development and teacher support. When stress and burnout among teachers increase, educators tend to move between work environments in order to find manageable workloads (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Bunch et al., 1997; Forlin, Chambers, Loreman, Deppler, & Sharma, 2013; Gaines & Barnes, 2017; Hornby, 2015; Kosko

& Wilkins, 2009; LeDoux et al., 2012; Logan & Wimer, 2013; Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori, & Algozzine, 2012; Sideridis & Chandler, 1997).

The conceptual framework for this study was developed from the theories of critical mass (Oliver et al., 1985) and tipping points (Gladwell, 2002). Both theories explore the phenomenon of human behavior and ways behavior is influenced by the contexts of situations, environments, and the networks of people surrounding individuals. Although the theories have been applied most often in the business sector, the tenets of the theories can be applied to the discussion of their implications for teacher attrition rate, stress and burnout among teachers, and teachers' perceived needs for professional development.

Based on the theories of critical mass and tipping points and previous research, this study hypothesized that the proportion of special needs students in regular elementary classrooms was significantly related to teachers' stressors and needs for professional development. In other words, as relative proportions of students with special needs increase in a classroom, the teachers' perceived levels of stress and needs for supports increase. The research methods used in this study, analysis of results, and discussion of results follow in the remaining chapters.

III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between the proportions of students with special needs in elementary classrooms and elementary teachers' perceived stressors and needs for professional development supports. The design of this dissertation study was non-experimental descriptive research using an online survey disseminated to regular elementary classroom teachers who taught inclusive classrooms.

Data Collection

Sample

The researcher requested a sample of convenience from multiple states representing a variety of schools and districts. Survey data from 232 respondents were collected, cleaned, and compiled for all grade levels and all teachers for purposes of future research studies; however, this dissertation study focused solely on 52 responses from regular education elementary teachers who served inclusion students. Data from 52 respondents to the survey were compiled and analyzed by the researcher to address the research questions and hypotheses.

Instrumentation

This research study is an adapted replication of two studies of inclusive education, teacher stressors, and coping strategies conducted by Forlin (2001) in Churchlands, Western Australia and by Brackenweed (2011) in Canada. Forlin's Teacher Stress and Coping Questionnaire was adapted from the original questionnaire by the researcher in collaboration

with the dissertation committee to more accurately reflect the language and practice of inclusion and Response to Intervention (RtI) in the United States and to gather information regarding teachers' need for professional development (see Appendix A). In addition, the researcher's adapted survey was developed in an online format for easier data compilation purposes and was renamed Inclusive Classrooms: A Survey of Stressors and Support Needs. Permission was granted by Forlin to replicate the study with modifications for use in this study in America.

Forlin's original questionnaire contained four parts and was based on focus group interviews with 17 primary (elementary) classroom teachers and principals from 13 schools within one region in Queensland, Australia in 1998. Part A of Forlin's survey requested demographic details. Part B requested information regarding the types of special need students in the teacher's class. Part C measured teachers' perceived stressors in inclusive classrooms using a Likert scale of 1-5, with 1 referring to *not stressful* and 5 referring to *extremely stressful*. Part D of the survey contained a range of coping strategies. Teachers indicated the usefulness of the coping strategies using a Likert scale of 1-5, with 1 referring to *not useful* and 5 referring to *extremely useful*.

In 2011, Forlin's Australian study was replicated in Canada. The Teacher Stress and Coping Questionnaire was adapted to reflect the language and practice of inclusion in Ontario, Canada (Brackenreed, 2008). The adapted questionnaire contained four parts. Part A requested information about students who had been identified by a placement review committee, those waiting to be identified, or students who were considered "at risk" for academic failure. Part B requested information about potential stressors associated with inclusive education. Part C consisted of a variety of coping strategies teachers might utilize, and Part D requested general information on external variables such as demographic details of the school and personal

information. The internal reliability of the Canadian instrument was calculated using Cronbach's alpha ($a = .80$), indicating high levels of internal consistency and reliability.

For purposes of this dissertation study, the researcher modified Forlin's original questionnaire to consist of five parts (see Appendix A). Part A requested general demographic details of the school and teachers' personal information. Part B sought information about the numbers and types of children with special needs in the teacher's classroom. Part C asked teachers to identify stressors associated with teaching students with special needs in an inclusive classroom as measured by a 4-point Likert scale with 1 referring to *not stressful* and 4 referring to *extremely stressful*. Part D included a range of coping strategies employed by teachers to reduce stress related to teaching special need learners using a 4-point Likert scale with 1 referring to *not useful* and 4 referring to *extremely useful*. Part E included information on the types of professional development teachers had completed and the perceived usefulness of the professional development using a 4-point Likert scale with 1 referring to *not useful* and 4 referring to *extremely useful*. Additional open-ended items also requested further information from teachers to elaborate on selected item responses. The researcher included four additional items in the survey to measure the teachers' perceived levels of burnout. These items were created by the researcher based on similar items in the Maslach Burnout Inventory for Educators (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996), a widely used inventory designed to measure burnout using norms developed specifically for educators and other professionals. The items included the following statements: I am emotionally drained; I feel tired when I get up in the morning; I feel burned out from my work; I feel like leaving the teaching profession. The burnout items were rated using a Likert scale of 0 *never* to 6 *every day*.

This dissertation study focused primarily on the relationships between proportion of special needs learners to regular education learners in elementary classrooms and the analysis of the results of teachers' responses from Part C (stressors) and Part E (needs for professional development) of the adapted survey to address the research questions and hypotheses. The researcher's adapted instrument was reviewed by a panel of subject matter experts and revised as appropriate to establish content validity before dissemination.

After approval by the Southeastern University Institutional Review Board, the adapted survey was piloted with a small group of teachers ($n = 8$) to determine the survey items' clarity and then revised by the researcher. After the pilot study was completed and revisions made to the adapted survey, the online survey link was distributed to a sample of teachers in the U.S. by means of school-wide distribution, email, social media, and word-of-mouth. The online survey was created and delivered to participants via SurveyMonkey™.

Data Analyses

Preliminary Analyses

After the survey data from the adapted survey were collected, the researcher compiled and cleaned the respondents' data. The data set was filtered to include only those respondents who completed all parts of the survey. Further filtering reduced the data set to a purposive sample of 52 elementary, regular education teachers who had students with special needs in their current or most recent classroom. The cleaned dataset was used for all the analyses described below.

Prior to the analysis and reporting of findings for the research questions posed in the study, preliminary analyses were conducted, including evaluations of the survey's missing data, internal reliability, and essential demographic information. Missing data were analyzed using Little's MCAR to determine the randomness of missing data. The internal reliability of

participants' responses across the study's domains of stressors was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (a). Frequencies (n) and percentages (%) were computed for all the survey items except the open-ended responses.

In order to complete the analyses for the research questions, the researcher calculated the ratio of special need students by first ascertaining the total number of students in the respondent's current (or most recent) classroom with an IEP, a 504 Plan, Tier 2 RtI support, or Tier 3 RtI support (item 17 in Part A of the survey). This total number was used as the numerator to calculate proportions of special needs students to total number of students (denominator) in the respondents' classrooms. This proportion was a ratio-level variable and was subsequently used in correlation analyses to address the research questions and hypotheses.

Descriptive Analyses

Analyses of the data included frequencies, means, and percentages computed for items related to teachers' demographic information. Descriptive statistics were computed to determine the means and standard deviations of each of the Likert-scale survey items in Parts C (teachers' stressors) and E (teachers' needs for professional development). Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to correlate the mean proportions of inclusion students to regular education students and the mean composite stressor scores in Part C (teachers' stressors) and also the mean composite score for Part E (teacher needs for professional development). Frequencies, percentages, and means were computed and analyzed for each of the four burnout items and a composite burnout score was computed for the sample.

Qualitative Analyses

Responses to open-ended survey items were recorded, categorized, and analyzed according to themes and triangulated with the quantitative survey results to obtain a

comprehensive picture of teacher perceptions of stressors in inclusive classrooms and types of supports needed to effectively teach students with special needs.

Inferential Analyses

The current study was designed to address the following research questions and hypotheses.

Q1: What is the relationship between numbers of special needs students in elementary classrooms and regular elementary teachers' perceptions of stress?

H1: There is a significant correlation between the mean proportion of elementary special needs students to total number of students and the mean composite score of this sample of elementary teachers' perceptions of stress.

 To address research question 1 and hypothesis 1, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to correlate the mean ratio of special needs students to regular education students and the mean composite score on the teacher stressors (item 38 of Part C of the survey). The alpha level for determining significance was $p < .05$.

Q2: What is the relationship between the numbers of special needs students in regular elementary classrooms and the professional development regular elementary teachers need to successfully teach special needs students?

H2: There is a significant correlation between the mean proportion of elementary special needs students to the total number of students and the mean composite score of this sample of elementary teachers' perceptions of needs for professional development.

To address research question 2 and hypothesis 2, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to correlate the mean ratio of numbers of students with special needs in regular elementary classrooms and the mean overall composite score of regular education

teachers' perceived levels of need for professional development to effectively serve special learners (item 45 of Part E of the survey). The alpha level for determining significance was $p < .05$.

Ancillary Analyses

The researcher also conducted multiple linear regression analyses to determine the predictive relationships between the mean scores on the five stressor domains measured by the survey (administrative, support, student behavior, classroom issues, and parent issues) and the dependent variable of the sample's mean composite stress score ($n = 52$). In addition, the researcher used multiple linear regression analyses to evaluate the predictive abilities of the means of three demographic predictor variables: years of teaching experience, teachers' age, and school district type for this sample of regular elementary teachers; the dependent variable in the regression model was the mean composite score of participants' stress.

The researcher also utilized multiple linear regression to determine whether the mean scores on the survey's stressors related to personal competency and professional competency predicted the overall composite score of teacher stressors. Personal competency survey items were disaggregated to determine frequencies and means of this sample of teachers' most stressful items within the personal competency and professional competency survey categories. Additionally, a one-sample *t*-test was used to compare the survey's individual stressor domain scores to the mean composite stressor score.

Finally, the mean composite scores on the burnout items were computed to determine the mean composite score for item 37 in Part C of the survey. These items were designed to measure teachers' perceptions of their overall sense of well-being: being emotionally drained,

tired, burned out, and readiness to leave the teaching profession. The results of the study's

analyses are presented in chapter four.

IV. RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between the proportions of students with special needs in regular elementary classrooms and elementary teachers' stressors and needs for professional development. The researcher utilized a broad definition of inclusion to include all students with special needs, including those who were working on a RtI Tier 2 or Tier 3 plan in addition to those with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or 504 Plans.

The design of the dissertation study was non-experimental survey research (see Appendix A) of a purposive sample of 52 regular elementary classroom teachers who taught students with special needs in inclusive classrooms. The design was influenced by two similar studies of stressors of inclusion teachers conducted by Forlin (2001) in Australia and Brackenweed (2008) in Canada. Using a Likert scale 1 (*not stressful*) to 4 (*very stressful*), the current researcher's survey asked respondents to indicate the extent to which student behavior, parent interactions, administrative concerns, classroom concerns, professional competency concerns, and personal competency concerns were stressful. In addition, the researcher asked subjects to indicate their needs for professional development related to working with special needs students.

Research Questions

The following research questions and hypotheses guided the research design and methods used in the study.

Q1: What is the relationship between the numbers of special needs students in an elementary classroom and regular elementary teachers' perceptions of stress?

Q2: What is the relationship between the numbers of special needs students in regular elementary classrooms and the professional development regular elementary teachers need to successfully teach special needs students?

Research Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant correlation between the mean proportion of elementary special needs students to total number of students and the mean composite score of this sample of elementary teachers' perceptions of stress.

H2: There is a significant correlation between the mean proportion of elementary special needs students to total number of students and the mean composite score of this sample of elementary teachers' perceptions of needs for professional development.

Preliminary Results

Prior to the analysis and reporting of the results of the data analyses for the research questions posed in the study, preliminary analyses were conducted. Evaluations of missing data, internal reliability, and essential demographic information were conducted. Little's MCAR was used to evaluate the randomness of missing data in the dataset. Approximately one percent of the final dataset of the 52 regular elementary teachers was missing ($n = 4$). The study's minimal level of missing data was sufficiently random in nature (MCAR $x^2_{(18)} = 10.29$; $p = .92$) to proceed with data analysis.

The internal reliability of participants' survey responses was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (a). The resulting F values of $p < .05$ were statistically significant. The overall internal

reliability of participants' responses to survey items was considered very high ($a = .87$) and was significant ($p = .003$).

Essential demographic survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies (*n)* and percentages (%). After data filtering and cleaning, the total number of participants was 52 regular elementary teachers with special needs students in their classrooms.

<div align="center">

Demographic Results

</div>

The total number of survey respondents was 252. After purposive sampling, the researcher reduced the sample to 52 general education elementary teachers who taught special needs students in their current or most recent classroom. Nearly three-quarters of the study's participants (71.2%; *n* = 37) were public school teachers. In addition, this sample was disproportionately female 98.1% (*n* = 51). The following tables share demographic data gathered from the survey.

Table 1

Ages of Regular Elementary Inclusion Teachers

Age	*n*	Percentage
20-29	7	13.46%
30-39	21	40.38%
40-49	15	28.85%
50-59	7	13.46%
60+	2	3.85%

Note. n = 52.

Approximately 69% of the teachers in this sample were between the ages of 30-49 (*n* = 36). Only 13% (*n* = 7) of the sample was between the ages of 20-29. The distribution of ages is similar to a normal curve. Table 2 depicts the number of years of teaching experience

reported by regular elementary teachers in this sample.

Table 2

Number of Years Teaching Experience

Number of Years Teaching Experience	*n*	Percentage
0-5	12	23.08%
6-10	19	36.54%
11-15	8	15.38%
16-20	7	13.46%
21-25	4	7.69%
26+	2	3.85%

Note. n = 52.

Approximately 60% of the sample's teachers (*n* = 31) reported service in the field of

education as a teacher for 10 years or less. Twelve of the respondents, almost one-quarter of the

teachers, had five or fewer years of experience as a teacher. Only six study participants (11.5%)

reported having served in the field of education as a teacher for more than 20 years. Table 3

displays the educational credentials held by the teachers in this sample.

Table 3

Highest Degree Held

Highest Degree	*n*	Percentage
Bachelor's	29	55.8%
Masters	20	38.5%
Ph.D.	1	1.9%
Ed.D.	2	3.9%

Note. n = 52

A majority of respondents (56%) in this sample held a Bachelor's degree as their highest degree. Approximately 40% of the respondents held a Master's degree or higher. Table 4 displays the numbers and percentages of responses to the survey item about professional development related to teaching special needs students that teachers had accomplished since initial teacher certification. The reader will note that the results are not mutually exclusive. In other words, teachers who indicated college classes or in-service training might also have achieved certification or a degree in exceptional student education. In addition, the total number of responses adds up to more than 52, the total number of respondents.

Table 4

Professional Development in Exceptional Student Education Since Initial Teaching Certification

Type of Professional Development	*n*	Percentage
College classes	23	44.23
State or district in-service training	36	69.23
Degree in exceptional education	6	11.54
Certification completed in exceptional education	10	19.23
Certification in progress in exceptional education	0	0
Degree in progress for exceptional education	0	0
None	8	15.38

Note. n = 52.

Almost 70% of the teachers reported that their professional development focused on teaching students in an inclusive classroom had been in the form of district or state in-service training classes. Approximately, 15% of the teachers reported no formal education related to teaching students in an inclusive classroom since initial certification.

The researcher was interested in finding out the types of schools represented in the sample. These results are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5

School Type

Type of School	*n*	Percentage
Suburban	23	44.23%
Urban	14	26.92%
Rural	10	19.23%
Reservation/Aboriginal	1	1.92%
Military Base	2	3.85%
Other	4	7.69%

Note. n = 52.

Nearly half (44%; *n* = 23) of the teachers in this sample taught in suburban school districts. The means, ranges, and proportions of the total number of regular education students and special education students in this sample of regular elementary teachers' classrooms are depicted in Table 6.

Table 6

Means and Ranges of Regular Education Teachers' Classroom Demographics

Classroom Demographics	Mean	Range
Total Students	21.56	7.0-26
Students with IEP	4.02	0.0-27
Students with 504	1.62	0.0-10
Tier 2 students	4.98	0.0-12
Tier 3 students	2.13	0.0-6.0
Students with IEP, 504, Tier 2 or Tier 3 status	11.62	0.0-37
Proportion of IEP students to total students	.19	
Proportion of IEP+504+Tier 2+Tier 3 students to total students	.55	

Note. n = 52.

The mean class size reported by these regular elementary teachers (*n* = 52) was almost 22. The mean proportion of students with IEPs compared to the total students was 19% in this sample. The mean proportion of all special needs students (IEP, 504, Tier 2, and Tier 3) to total students was 55% in this sample. In other words, more than half of the students taught by these regular elementary teachers were, on average, formally identified as having some type(s) of special needs. These results were subsequently used to conduct the correlation analyses related to research question and hypothesis one.

Descriptive Results

The researcher computed the means, standard deviations, and frequencies of the survey responses in the stressor domains and the overall composite stressor score for the entire sample ($M = 2.52$). The results are depicted in Table 7.

Table 7

Frequencies, Means, and Standard Deviations of Survey Stressor Domains

Stressor Domains	*n*	Mean	*SD*
Administrative	52	2.39	0.80
Support Issues	51	2.28	1.04
Student Behavior	52	2.73	0.89
Classroom Issues	51	2.55	0.95
Parental Issues	50	2.40	0.78

Note. Scale = 1 (*Not Stressful*); 2 (*Somewhat Stressful*);
3 (*Quite Stressful*); 4 (*Extremely Stressful*)

The teachers in this sample rated student behavior as the most stressful domain among those measured; the results approached the rating of quite stressful. Ratings for the domain of classroom issues also approached three on the Likert scale, indicating that these concerns were quite stressful among this group of teachers. However, the standard deviations were sizeable for a 4-point scale, indicating relatively high levels of variability.

The researcher added four Likert-scale items related to teacher burnout to the survey that were not included in the Forlin (2001) or Brackenweed (2008) surveys. The results of participants' responses to the burnout questions are depicted in Table 8.

Table 8

Frequencies, Means, and Standard Deviations of Regular Elementary Teachers' Responses to

Burnout Items

Burnout Item	Never	A few times a year	Once a month	Few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Every day	*M*	*SD*
I am emotionally drained.	0	4	3	9	4	18	14	5.37	1.54
I am tired when I get up in the morning.	1	2	2	6	4	10	27	5.85	1.57
I am burned out from my work.	4	4	6	10	3	10	15	4.81	1.97
I feel like leaving the teaching profession.	8	14	5	5	2	5	13	3.88	2.28

Note. n = 52.

The majority of these respondents (62%) indicated that they felt emotionally drained either a few times a week or every day. Seventy-one percent of the respondents indicated that they were tired when getting up in the morning, and 48% of this sample of teachers reported feeling burned out either a few times a week or every day. Of the 52 respondents, only eight reported never feeling like leaving the teaching profession. More than 80% of the respondents reported their feeling as though they wanted to leave the teaching profession at least a few times a year. Numerically, the responses of the teachers were skewed to the high end of the survey's burnout items.

The second research question in this study dealt with the regular elementary educators' perceived needs for professional development in order to meet the needs of the special need students in their classrooms. The researcher computed the means and standard deviations of the survey items related to needs for professional development. Table 9 displays the descriptive statistics related to the professional development choices of the teachers to indicate the perceived utility of professional development that they would like to complete. These results indicate that this sample of regular elementary teachers felt that many of the professional development topics would be somewhat useful to quite useful in helping them to meet the needs of special learners in their classrooms. These responses also revealed sizeable standard deviations on the 4-point scale, indicating considerable variability on these items within the sample's responses. The teachers' highest ratings of the topics' usefulness focused on differentiated instruction, best practices of inclusive education, proactive behavior management, cooperative learning, and conflict management skills; all of these topics relate to management of student behavior, which was reported as stressful by these teachers.

Table 9

Perceived Usefulness of Professional Development Teachers Would Like to Complete

Professional Development	*n*	Mean	*SD*
Differentiated Instruction	49	2.78	.91
Inclusion Best Practices	49	2.63	.98
Proactive Behavior Management	46	2.63	.96
Cooperative Learning	48	2.58	1.04
Conflict Resolution Skills	47	2.53	.92
Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports (PBIS)	47	2.47	.96
Feedback/activities to increase growth mindset, resilience, and/or grit	47	2.47	.94
Teaching with the Brain in Mind/Neuroscience	49	2.37	.96
Responsive Teaching	46	2.33	.93
English Language Learners	46	2.28	.90
Standards	46	2.24	.86
Learning Profiles	46	2.06	.90
Rigor	47	2.04	.85
Universal Design for Learning	47	2.02	.93
Performance Assessments	45	2.02	.83
Portfolios	46	1.78	.75

Note. Scale = 1 (*Not useful*); 2 (*Somewhat useful*); 3 (*Quite useful*); 4 (*Extremely useful*)

Survey respondents were also asked to select the survey response that best reflected their

opinion of the following statement: "I need more professional development to help me be more

effective in serving special needs learners in my classroom." The results are displayed in Table
10.

Table 10

Regular Elementary Teachers' Need for Professional Development

Answer Choices	*n*	Percentage
Strongly Agree	11	21%
Agree	29	55%
Disagree	8	15%
Strongly Disagree	4	8%

Note. n = 52. M = 2.10. SD = .81. Scale = 1 (Strongly Disagree);
2 (*Disagree*); 3 (*Agree*); 4 (*Strongly Agree*).

Seventy-six percent of these regular elementary teachers reported that they needed more

professional development to better serve the special learners in their classrooms. However, in a

follow-up survey item, approximately 60% of the respondents in the current study disagreed with

the statement, "In the last year, I had the opportunity to choose the types of professional

development to suit the needs for my classroom."

Inferential Results

Research Question 1 and Hypothesis 1

Q1: What is the relationship between numbers of special needs students in elementary

classrooms and regular elementary teachers' perceptions of stress?

H1: There is a significant correlation between the mean proportion of elementary special needs

students to the total number of students and the mean composite score of this sample of

elementary teachers' perceptions of stress.

In order to determine whether there was a significant correlation between the proportion

of special needs students in regular elementary classrooms and elementary teachers' perceptions

of stress, the researcher used the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) to correlate the sample's mean ratio (.55) of special needs students to the mean composite score of the elementary teachers' perceived stress ($M = 2.52$). The results of the correlation analysis yielded a coefficient of $r = .13$ and $r^2 = .017$ ($p = .34$). Cohen's d was also conducted to determine effect size; the result was $d = .27$, pointing to a weak effect. The resulting correlation coefficient was not significant; therefore, the directional hypothesis was rejected.

Research Question 2 and Hypothesis 2

Q2: What is the relationship between the numbers of special needs students in regular elementary classrooms and the professional development regular elementary teachers need to successfully teach special needs students?

H2: There is a significant correlation between the mean proportion of elementary special needs students to total number of students and the mean composite score of this sample of elementary teachers' perceptions of needs for professional development.

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was used to determine the relationship between the mean ratio of special needs students to the total number of regular education students ($M = .55$) and the composite mean of this sample of elementary teachers' perceived needs for professional development ($M = 2.10$); the correlation was not statistically significant ($r = .25$; $p = .07$). However, the result approached significance. The explained variability of the relationship was minimal ($r^2 = .063$; 6.3%). The effect size (ES) was computed using Cohen's d; the resulting ES, $d = .52$, was considered medium. The directional hypothesis was rejected.

Ancillary Results

The researcher examined the survey data and decided to conduct additional analyses apart from the study's hypotheses. The researcher was interested in finding out whether mean scores from the individual stressor domains of the survey were predictive of the mean composite score of overall teacher stress ($M = 2.52$) among this sample of elementary teachers. The researcher conducted multiple linear regression analyses of five independent predictor variables from the survey and the dependent variable of the mean composite stressor score for this sample of teachers. The results of the analyses are displayed in Table 11.

Table 11

Regression of Survey Stressor Domains and Mean Composite Score of Teachers' Stress

Model	B	SE	Standardized β	d
Intercept	0.24	0.10		
Administrative	0.21	0.04	.25***	.52
Support Issues	0.14	0.03	.21***	.44
Student Behavior	0.16	0.04	.21***	.43
Classroom Issues	0.19	0.05	.27***	.55
Parent Issues	0.23	0.04	.27***	.56

*Note. n = 52. *p ≤ .001*

The results of the regression analyses revealed that all the stressor domains were significantly related to the composite stressor score, indicating a high degree of internal consistency of the instrument. The stressor scores related to working with parents, students, and administration revealed greater effect sizes than the other two domains from the survey. The

predictive model was significant ($F_{(5, 42)} = 130.60$; $p < .001$). The five independent predictor variables in the model revealed a very strong ($R = .97$) prediction, contributing 94% ($R^2 = .94$) of the explained variability of the dependent variable of teachers' perceived overall stress. The predictive effect size (ES) in this model was strong ($d = 7.98$).

Multiple linear regression was also used to determine whether teachers' mean scores on the survey's Personal Competency ($M = 2.69$) and Professional Competency ($M = 2.56$) categories of teacher stressors were predictive of the mean overall composite score of teacher stressors ($M = 2.52$). The results of the analyses are depicted in Table 12.

Table 12

Prediction of Composite Teacher Stress by Survey Category of Competence

Model	B	SE	Standardized β	ES
Intercept	0.65	0.19		
Professional Competency	0.32	0.08	.40***	.87[b]
Personal Competency	0.39	0.08	.52***	1.22[b]

Note. $n = 49$. ***$p < .001$ [b] Large predictive effect ($d \geq .80$)

The results of the analyses revealed that both personal competency and professional competency were significant predictors of the mean composite score of teachers' stress ($F_{(2, 49)} = 51.34$; $p < .001$; $d = 1.22$). In other words, teachers' perceptions of their personal and professional competencies were significantly related to teachers' perceived levels of stress in this sample. The mean score of the professional competency category revealed a smaller effect size than the mean score of the personal competency ($d = .87$). When both personal competency and

professional competency were analyzed in the regression model, the two independent variables showed a strong relationship to the dependent variable of the mean composite stress score (R = .82; R^2 = .667; d = 2.83). The two predictors explained 67.7% of the variability of composite scores of participants' overall stress.

Table 13 displays the most stressful personal competency concerns among this sample of elementary teachers.

Table 13

Regular Elementary Teachers' Stressful Personal Competency Concerns

Personal Competency	Mean Stressor Score
Managing daily workload and required school duties	2.98
Managing personal and/or family demands with work demands	2.94
Allocating time beyond contract hours to complete classroom-related tasks	3.00

Note: n = 49. Scale = 1 (*Not Stressful*); 2 (*Somewhat Stressful*); 3 (*Quite Stressful*); 4 (*Extremely Stressful*)

The three most stressful personal competency concerns among this sample of regular elementary teachers were related to time. The highest mean stressor score was the survey item regarding allocation of time beyond contract hours to complete classroom-related tasks.

Descriptive statistics derived from the professional competency survey items are displayed in Table 14 to describe the most prevalent stressors reported by this sample of regular elementary teachers.

Table 14

Regular Elementary Teachers' Stressors Related to Professional Development Needs

Professional Competency	Mean Stress Level
Inadequate Preservice Training	2.19
In-service Training Inadequate Regarding Children's Specific Disabilities	2.37
Inadequate In-service Training Focused on Meeting the Needs of Inclusion Children	2.33

Note. $n = 52$. Mean range $= 1$ (*Not Stressful*); 2 (*Somewhat Stressful*); 3 (*Quite Stressful*); 4 (*Extremely Stressful*)

Study participants indicated that both pre-service training and in-service training were somewhat to quite stressful because they were inadequate for meeting their needs for serving their special needs students.

To determine whether any differences existed between personal competency scores and the overall stressor score, the mean composite personal competency score was compared to the mean overall composite stressor score using the one-sample *t*-test. In the same fashion, the professional competency mean score was compared to the mean overall composite stressor score for this sample. The results revealed that the *t*-test comparison of the mean personal competency score and the composite stressor score was statistically significant ($t_{(51)} = 16.08$; $p < .001$). Cohen's *d* test was also used to assess the effect size for both variables and overall participant stress. The effect size was considered very large ($d = 2.24$). Personal competency (Mean $= 2.69$; $SD = 0.90$) exerted a slightly greater effect ($d = 1.88$) on stressors among the teachers in this sample than professional competency (Mean $= 2.56$; $SD = 0.85$; $d = 1.84$). However, the magnitude of effect was considered very large for both categories ($d \geq 1.30$).

The researcher also used the one-sample *t*-test to compare the individual stressor domain scores to the mean overall composite stressor score (Mean = 2.52). Table 15 displays the results of the analyses.

Table 15

Regular Elementary Teachers' Composite Stress Score Comparison by Stressor Domains

Domains	*n*	Mean	*SD*	*t*	ES
Administrative	52	2.39	0.80	12.55***	1.74[a]
Support Issues	51	2.28	1.04	8.75***	1.23[b]
Student Behavior	52	2.73	0.89	14.05***	1.94[a]
Classroom Issues	51	2.55	0.95	11.71***	1.63[a]
Parental Issues	50	2.40	0.78	12.65***	1.80[a]

Note. n = 52. ***$p < .001$ [a] Very Large effect ($d \geq 1.30$)   [b] Large effect ($d \geq .80$)

All five of the domains of teachers' stressors in this sample were significantly related to the overall composite stressor score. The domain of student behavior revealed a larger effect size ($d = 1.94$) than the other domains. Four of the five individual domains of stress reflected a very large magnitude of effect ($d \geq 1.30$) on teachers' perceptions of stress, with the domain of support issues exerting a large magnitude of effect ($d \geq .80$).

Table 16 contains a summary of findings for the *t*-test comparisons of participants' perceived stressors by competency domain to the mean composite stressor score (Mean = 2.52).

Table 16

Regular Elementary Teachers' Composite Stressor Score Comparison to Competency Categories

Stress Category	n	Mean	SD	T	ES
Professional Competency	52	2.56	0.85	13.22***	1.84[a]
Personal Competency	52	2.69	0.90	13.60***	1.88[a]

*Note. ***p < .001*   [a] Very large effect ($d \geq 1.30$)   Overall composite stressor ($M = 2.52$)

Finally, the researcher conducted multiple linear regression analyses to evaluate the predictive abilities of three independent predictor variables: years of teaching experience, teachers' age, and school district type. The dependent variable in the model was the mean overall composite score of participants' stress ($M = 2.52$). Table 17 displays the results of the analyses and the effect sizes.

Table 17

Prediction of Regular Elementary Teachers' Composite Stressor Score by Demographic Identifier

Model	B	SE	Standardized β	d
Intercept	2.94	0.33		
Age of Teacher	0.12	0.12	.18	.37
Years of Experience	-0.20	0.09	-.40*	.87[a]
District Type	-0.12	0.11	-.15	.30

*Note. n = 52 *p = .03* [b] Large predictive effect ($d \geq .80$) Overall composite stressor ($M = 2.52$)

The results of the regression analysis revealed that years of teaching experience was a significant predictor of overall teacher stress; the result also demonstrated a large predictive effect ($d = .87$). The results indicated that teachers with more experience report less stress than

teachers with less experience. Participants' age and district type were not significant predictors of composite stress scores, and the effect size was considered medium. When all three independent variables were calculated, the predictive model was not significant ($F_{(3, 48)} = 2.20$; $p < .10$). The relationship of the three independent predictor variables to the model's dependent variable (composite stress score) was medium ($R = .35$), contributing 12.2% ($R^2 = .122$) of the explained variability of participants' overall stress. The predictive effect size of the model was strong at $d = .75$.

Summary

Completed surveys from 52 elementary teachers were analyzed to address the research questions and hypotheses. Similar to the results of the study by Forlin (2001), the sample for the current study was disproportionately female. A majority (69%) of teachers in this study reported to be in the age range of 30-49. Approximately 60% of study participants reported service in the field of education as a teacher for 10 years or less, and six study participants (11.5%) reported having served in the field of education as a teacher for more than 20 years.

With respect to the highest degree held by the participants, 56% held a Bachelor's degree, 39% held a Master's degree, and 6% reported holding either a Ph.D. or Ed.D. degree. Since completing initial teacher certification, 15% reported having completed no formal training or professional development focused on the inclusive classroom.

The mean class size reported by the participants ($n = 52$) was 22. The mean proportion of students with IEPs to the total students was 19%, and the mean proportion of special needs students (IEP, 504, Tier 2, and Tier 3) to total students was 55%.

This research study uncovered no significant relationships between the proportion of special needs students in a classroom and the perceived stressors of elementary teachers as

predicted in research hypothesis one, which was rejected.

The proportions of elementary special needs students and elementary teachers' perceptions of needs for professional development support was not significant ($p < .07$) but approached significance. Approximately 60% of the respondents disagreed when asked about the opportunity to choose the type of professional development to meet the individual needs in their classrooms. Almost 80% of the teachers indicated a need for more professional development to serve the special needs of learners in their classrooms.

Ancillary analyses using multiple linear regression were used to determine whether mean scores on the personal competency and professional categories of teacher stressors predicted the overall composite score of teacher stressors reported in the survey. The results of the analyses revealed that personal competency was a significant predictor of the mean composite score of teachers' stress ($F_{(2, 49)} = 51.34$; $p < .001$; $d = 1.22$).   The three most stressful personal competency issues were related to time. The highest mean stressor score (3.00) was the survey item asking about allocation of time beyond contract hours to complete classroom related tasks, indicating that allocation of time was quite stressful.

Five domains of stress were surveyed within this study: administrative issues, support issues, student behavior, classroom issues, and parent issues. All five of the domains of teachers' stressors in this sample were significantly related to the overall composite stressor score. The domain of student behavior revealed a larger effect size ($d = 1.94$) than the other domains. A discussion of the results of the study is included in chapter five.

V. DISCUSSION

The United States has a disturbing level of churn among educators (Rondfelt et al., 2012). For example, teacher attrition in the United States is double that of other countries and continues to rise (Sutcher et al., 2016). Given the level of teacher attrition, research evidence is critical to assist decision-makers in determining reasons for teacher attrition and possible remedies in order to support classroom teachers and strengthen educational environments. The current researcher was troubled by the high levels of stress, burnout, and attrition among her colleagues in education and wanted to research possible reasons for the heightened levels. Discussions with colleagues and exposure to recent literature on stress, burnout, and attrition led to the idea that teacher stress might be related to changes in the critical mass of numbers of special needs learners in regular (core) elementary classrooms as well as the types of professional development teachers need to assist special learners. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between the mean proportions of elementary students with special needs and elementary teachers' stressors and needs for professional development.

This study is a replication and expansion of Forlin's (2001) and Brackenweed's (2008) research on regular elementary teachers' stressors related to meeting the needs of inclusion students. The current researcher used tipping point theory (Gladwell, 2002) and critical mass theory (Oliver et al., 1985) to hypothesize the relationships between the numbers of special needs students compared to the numbers of "regular" students in regular (core) elementary classrooms and the teachers' perceived stressors and needs for professional development. A broad definition of inclusion was utilized in the study to encompass those students who received intervention

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support as part of a Response to Intervention (RtI) Tier 2 or Tier 3 plan in addition to those with

Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or 504 plans. Utilizing this definition for special needs

students was purposeful in the design of this study since inclusion is generally understood to

encompass only the education of students with IEPs within the general education classroom.

According to Gladwell (2002), tipping points occur at different times for each individual

and are dependent on context. The current researcher wanted to know whether tipping points

existed at which regular education teachers experienced atypical or unusual levels of stress

and/or burnout based on the ratio of special needs students to regular education students in their

classrooms. A number of contexts, including internal and external circumstances, may lead to

tipping points among educators' perceived levels of stress. These circumstances may include

school leadership, faculty or staff, student enrollment numbers and class size, additional

accountability measures, extra-curricular duties, new curricular expectations, and many other

circumstances.

Critical mass theory (Oliver et al., 1985) and tipping point theory (Gladwell, 2002)

promote the idea that social scientists can describe and sometimes predict the nature of group

behavior as well as the influence select individuals or circumstances can have in any

environment. Although critical mass theory has been used in sociology to explain collective

action for a collective good, this research study proposed that critical mass and tipping points can

be achieved, measured, and have negative outcomes such as stress and burnout.

Though generally accepting of inclusion, teachers experience high levels of burnout at a

faster rate than historically reported; these rates are due in part from increased demands of

accountability systems, teacher performance evaluations, and change initiatives in schools and

districts (Bermejo-Toro et al., 2016; Brackenreed, 2011; Dewhurst-Savellis et al., 2000;

Friedman, 1992; Leiter & Maslach, 2005; Lopez, 2017; Mojsa-Kaja et al., 2015; Steinhardt et al., 2011; Wood & McCarthy, 2002). An example of a nationwide change initiative was the wide-spread implementation of the Response to Intervention (RtI) model. RtI in education has been instrumental in its advocacy for adequate, differentiated supports for all students to be successful and to demonstrate satisfactory progress. "RtI provides a unified system of studying student difficulties and providing early intervention prior to referral for formal evaluation for special education or allowing such evaluation only as a last resort" (Buffum et al., 2009, p. 19). Change initiatives such as RtI often place pressure on teachers who must learn and manage new systems, protocols, procedures, and teaching strategies that impinge on the limited time educators have for planning, preparation, and execution of changes.

The design of this dissertation study was a non-experimental replication of previous research by Forlin (2001) and Brackenweed (2008) who surveyed both elementary and secondary level inclusion teachers to determine their perceptions of workplace stressors. The current researcher surveyed a purposive sample of 52 regular elementary classroom teachers who taught students with special needs to determine the teachers' perceived levels of stress and needs for professional development in order to meet the needs of special learners in their classrooms. The survey (see Appendix A) was modeled after Brackenweed's survey (2008) but used a 4-point Likert scale: 1 (*not stressful*); 2 (*somewhat stressful*); 3 (*quite stressful*); 4 (*extremely stressful*). The survey items were generated to assess elementary teachers' perceptions of stressors related to a broad number of domains: allocation (or lack of) resources; instructional materials; professional development; support personnel; student behavior concerns; parent concerns; administrative concerns; classroom concerns; professional competency; and personal competency. In addition, the researcher added four Likert-scale items related to teacher burnout

as well as open-ended items related to types of professional development elementary teachers

needed in order to effectively meet the needs of special needs students.

Research Results

Analysis of the descriptive data revealed that the mean class size of this sample of regular

elementary teachers ($n = 52$) was almost 22. The mean proportion of students with IEPs

compared to the total students was 19%. The mean proportion of all special needs students (IEP,

504, Tier 2, and Tier 3) to total students was 55%. In other words, on average, more than half of

the students taught by the elementary teachers in this sample were formally identified as

requiring specialized instruction to meet the needs of one or more of the four types of special

needs under study.

Two research questions and two hypotheses were addressed in this study to determine the

relationships of proportions of special needs students to teachers' perceived stress and needs for

professional development based on the theoretical foundations of critical mass theory (Oliver et

al., 1985) and tipping point theory (Gladwell, 2002).

Perceptions of Stress and Burnout

Q1: What is the relationship between numbers of special needs students in an elementary

classroom and regular elementary teachers' perceptions of stress?

H1: There is a significant correlation between the mean proportion of elementary special needs

students to total number of students and the mean composite score of this sample of elementary

teachers' perceptions of stress.

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) between the mean proportion of

special needs students in a classroom (.55 or 55%) and mean composite stressor score (Mean =

2.52) was not significant ($p < .34$) in this sample of teachers. The directional hypothesis was

rejected. The limitation of this study's sample size ($n = 52$) likely influenced the results. The sample was also a sample of convenience; therefore, the sample was not necessarily representative or generalizable to regular elementary teachers in general.

In addition to surveying the research-based domains of stressors, this researcher asked teachers to rate the frequency of their feelings of generalized burnout based on Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter's (1996) research. The majority of regular elementary teachers in this sample (62%) rated feeling emotionally drained either a few times a week or every day. The majority (71%) of the respondents indicated feeling tired when getting up in the morning. When asked the frequency of feeling burned out from workplace concerns, 48% of the teachers reported feeling burned out either a few times a week or every day. Of the 52 respondents, only 8 teachers reported never feeling the need to leave the teaching profession. More than 80% of the respondents reported feeling the need to leave the teaching profession at least a few times a year.

The three most stressful personal competency issues reported by teachers in this study were related to time. The highest mean stressor score ($M = 3.00$) was the survey item asking about allocation of time beyond contract hours to complete classroom-related tasks. In open-ended survey responses, the teachers further articulated the perceived lack of understanding by administrators, district personnel, and school personnel regarding the time involved to complete the required tasks associated with accountability measures, planning, preparation, and general day-to-day expectations of the classroom.

Additional analyses conducted by the researcher further examined the teachers' survey responses. All six of the survey's domains of teachers' stressors (support, classroom, student behavior, parent, professional competency, and personal competency) in this sample were significantly related to the sample's mean composite stressor score (Mean stressor score = 2.52;

$p \leq .001$), indicating high reliability. The domain of student behavior revealed a larger effect size ($d = 1.94$) than the other domains. The domain of support concerns exerted a large magnitude of effect ($d \geq .80$). Four domains of stress (administrative concerns, student behavior, classroom issues, and parental issues) reflected a very large magnitude of effect ($d \geq 1.30$) on teachers' perceptions of stress.

Need for Professional Development

The second research question in this study examined the elementary teachers' perceived needs for professional development to meet the demands of inclusive classrooms.

Q2: What is the relationship between the numbers of special needs students in regular elementary classrooms and the professional development regular elementary teachers need to successfully teach special needs students?

H2: There is a significant correlation between the mean proportion of elementary special needs students to total number of students and the mean composite score of this sample of elementary teachers' perceptions of needs for professional development.

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) between the mean ratio of special needs students and the regular elementary teachers' perceived needs for professional development was not statistically significant ($r = .25$; $p = .07$). The directional hypothesis was rejected. Although this p value is greater than the generally accepted significance threshold of $p < .05$, the results approached significance, suggesting that further inquiry could be valuable.

The researcher further explored the survey results to dig deeper into the participants' needs for professional development to better serve students with special needs in inclusive classrooms. More than 75% of the respondents indicated that they had not been given the opportunity to choose their professional development at their individual school sites to meet the

perceived needs of their inclusive classrooms. In addition, while 85% of participants indicated

completion of formal training (college classes, in-service training, additional certifications)

beyond their initial certification to serve student needs in inclusive classrooms, 70% of the

respondents indicated that their pre-service training designed to meet the needs of inclusion

students was inadequate and somewhat stressful, quite stressful, or extremely stressful. Fifteen

percent of this sample of elementary teachers indicated having had no formal training in meeting

the needs of special learners since initial teaching certification.

One of the survey items asked teachers to indicate the topics of professional development

they would like to complete in order to better serve their inclusion students. The teachers rated

the following topics of professional development as most useful on a four-point scale:

differentiated instruction ($M = 2.78$), inclusion best practices ($M = 2.63$), proactive behavior

management ($M = 2.63$), and cooperative learning ($M = 2.58$). Almost 80% of the elementary

regular education teachers in this study reported that they needed more professional development

to effectively teach in inclusive classrooms. The teachers also suggested that conflict resolution

skill development and proactive behavior management were areas they would like to learn more

about as part of their professional development.

Qualitative analysis of the optional open-ended responses to survey items revealed a

common theme among the teachers' responses: teachers often were at a loss as to what more

they could do to best serve student needs. A second theme was apparent among those who chose

to respond to the open-ended survey items: teachers felt overwhelmed by the demands of

managing student behaviors. Since the survey category of student behavior was significantly

related to overall elementary teachers' perceived stress ($t_{(52)} = 14.05$; $p < .001$; $ES = 1.94$), their

voices should be heard, valued, and result in actions to meet their needs. Professional

development in this critical area of teaching and learning is vital not only to teachers, but also to students and their overall success.

Limitations

While this study added insight into elementary general education teachers' perceived stressors as they served students with special needs, limitations to the study existed. The sample for this study was a sample of convenience of regular elementary teachers derived mainly from professional and social media networks. The final sample size was limited ($n = 52$) and not necessarily representative of or generalizable to the population of regular elementary teachers who served inclusion students. Finally, correlational research does not imply causality and its results should not be construed as causal.

Implications of the Study

With the historical shift of the United States' special education policies to emphasize inclusion and equity, the results of this study raise important questions for consideration. The current law known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 contains amendments and reauthorization of components from prior legislation, including the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The purpose statement for the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 states that education is to "provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high quality education and to close educational achievement gaps" (20 U.S.C. 6301, p. 8). Is professional development chosen by a district or school the optimal approach to meeting the very real needs of the nation's teaching force? Are preservice training programs adequately preparing aspiring teachers? The results from this study suggest that the perceived needs of the nation's teaching force are not adequately addressed through in-service training, nor are teachers receiving adequate pre-service preparation.

Leiter and Maslach (2005) wrote that an understanding of burnout is essential. When teachers reach high levels of burnout, their students may experience increased discipline referrals and consequences; in addition, school climate often suffers when teachers are highly frustrated and over-worked (Dewhurt-Savellis et al., 2000; Dwyer, 2014; Shaw & Newton, 2014). Teachers who reach a state of frustration and exhaustion tend to lose effectiveness and their sense of personal and professional efficacy (Leiter & Maslach, 2005; Lopez, 2017; Steinhardt et al., 2011). Highly frustrated teachers feel they no longer have control over what happens to them (Leiter & Maslach, 2005; Lopez, 2017; Steinhardt et al., 2011).

Results from this replication study were similar to those of Forlin (2001) in Australia and Brackenreed (2008) in Canada. The concerns that teachers rated as stressors in this study had common themes as those of Brackenreed (2008) and Forlin (2001), including but not limited to lack of resources, lack of time, and lack of personal and professional competency to meet the diverse needs of today's inclusive classrooms. Considering the teacher attrition rate in the U.S., our nation's sense of urgency should be at an all-time high. Educators and policy makers must find solutions to address the root causes of burnout and teacher attrition in order to retain highly qualified teachers and administrators in United States' schools.

Teacher Advocacy

Teacher unions advocate in the interests of teacher and administrative members; however, the results of advocacy by unions to alleviate teachers' perceived stress suggests that critical mass has not yet been achieved for the common good of teachers, administrators, students, parents, and schools. Marwell and Oliver (1988) discussed the importance of identifying a critical mass of a collective action group whose contributions would have the greatest impact. Typically, teacher unions have varying levels of engagement from members.

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Most members of teachers' unions pay monthly dues but remain inactive in the sense of attending school board meetings or advocacy to raise concerns and to support initiatives. Critical mass theory also suggests that most individuals do little but expect to benefit from the collective good. Do teacher unions need more members to engage in union activities, or do teacher unions need to consider seeking a different tipping or leverage point with target members? Teachers unions that are intent on conducting the same activities, expressing the same arguments in the same forum, and achieving little or no results may need to consider evaluating their methods and seek consultation from educators on ways to more effectively influence positive change.

Servant Leadership and Professional Development

Shaw and Newton (2014) conducted research that found a significant positive correlation ($p < .02$) between teachers' perceptions of their principals' level of servant leadership and teachers' job satisfaction and retention. Servant leaders have common characteristics including love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment (i.e., distributed leadership), and service (Shaw & Newton, 2014). The characteristics of servant leaders can be demonstrated through actions, including knowing the strengths and weaknesses of individuals and their diverse learning styles, then presenting information and communicating in a variety of ways to fully support and advocate for the individuals they lead. Servant leaders can play important roles in building the personal and professional competencies of their teachers, especially in the area of professional development.

The table below depicts a comparison of select professional competency survey items from this study and the previous two studies that the current study replicated. Results from the three studies on teacher stress related to meeting the needs of special learners are displayed in Table 18.

Table 18

Study Comparison: Professional Competency Stressors Among Inclusion Teachers

Professional Competency	Mean Stress Level (Forlin, 2001) $n = 571$ [Australia]	Mean Stress Level (Brackenweed, 2008) $n = 269$ [Canada]	Mean Stress Level (Gainey, 2019) $n = 52$ [United States]
Inadequate Preservice Training	2.32	2.59	2.19
In-service Training Inadequate Regarding Children's Specific Disabilities	2.36	2.81	2.37
Proposed In-service Training Focused on Meeting the Needs of Inclusion Children was Inadequate	2.43	2.84	2.33

Note. Scale = 1 (*Not Stressful*); 2 (*Somewhat Stressful*); 3 (*Quite Stressful*); 4 (*Extremely Stressful*).

This study's results were similar to those in the Forlin (2001), indicating higher stress levels related to in-service training and proposed in-service training designed to meet the needs of inclusion children. The Brackenreed (2008) study found higher mean stress scores for all three survey items related to professional development.

Approximately 60% of the respondents in the current replication study disagreed with the survey statement, "In the last year, I had the opportunity to choose the types of professional development to suit the needs for my classroom." Further, most respondents (76.8%) indicated a need for more professional development to help serve the special needs in their respective classrooms. If principals and other educational leaders make time to ascertain the most pressing concerns of classroom teachers, the usefulness of professional development might be more aligned to the realities of classroom teaching. Additionally, district leaders could promote and

support high-quality online courses and mentorships that would allow teachers to identify and complete their specific professional development choices. Perhaps these rather simple initiatives could reduce teacher churn and enhance the common good that critical mass theorists describe.

The primary purpose of a servant leader is to serve others as demonstrated by building the capacity of others and by shared leadership opportunities. The results of the current study suggest that servant leadership may be a preferred leadership style in the interests of reducing teacher burnout and increasing teacher retention by respecting, acknowledging, and meeting teachers' professional development needs.

Teacher Development and Retention

"Given [that] the attrition rates among teachers are higher in their earliest years within the profession, education leaders need to identify factors that contribute to the satisfaction and retention of novice teachers" (Dwyer, 2014, p. 1). Approximately 23% of this study's sample included teachers with five or fewer years' teaching experience. Although almost a quarter of this sample would be considered novice teachers, the mean ratio of special needs students to total students in the sample's classrooms ($n = 52$) was .55 or 55%. Are these novice teachers getting the support they need to successfully meet the needs of all their students and to keep them in the profession?

The overall correlation between the ratio of elementary special needs students and teachers' perceived needs for professional development approached significance and was considered medium ($d = .52$; $p < .07$). In addition, multiple linear regression analyses were conducted to determine whether teachers' personal competency and professional competency scores were predictors of the overall composite score of teacher stressors reported in this sample. The results of the analyses revealed that the survey category of personal competency was a

highly significant predictor of the mean composite score of teachers' stress ($F_{(2, 49)} = 51.34$; $p < .001$; $d = 1.22$) in this sample. Furthermore, the teachers' responses to the personal competency items suggested that managing daily work loads and school-related duties impinged on the allocation of time to meet family demands. Time allocation beyond contract hours was the greatest mean stressor score ($M = 3.00$) among the personal competency survey items. An understanding of the personal competency stressors teachers face is an important insight for school-based leadership teams to consider when determining priorities for school reform initiatives.

The professional competency category of the survey also exerted a large degree of predictive effect ($d = .87$) in a regression analysis. Both personal and professional competency concerns were stressful to some degree for 93% of this survey's sample. Further, in response to the survey item "I feel burned out from my work," almost 40% of the teachers reported this emotion at least once a month. Decision-makers must determine effective strategies to promote the overall wellness of staff in the effort to retain good teachers. Ultimately, healthy and fulfilled teachers can promote the well-being and success of the students they serve (Greenberg, Brown, & Abenavoli, 2016).

In summary, decision-makers and policy analysts need to pay attention to the individual needs and overall wellness of teachers. Professional development and support systems should consider the teachers' individual learning styles and directly relate to teachers' perceived and expressed needs for assistance, including needs for rejuvenation. Instructional coaching should be differentiated to serve the diverse needs identified by teachers themselves. Small group learning and/or support groups combined with online professional development and forums might be a good solution to differentiating teacher development.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research on the important topics of inclusive education and teacher stress could be conducted in a number of school settings (private, charter, magnet) as well as for middle and high schools. This study focused on regular elementary teachers; do teachers in middle school and high school experience comparable levels of stress? Middle school and high school scheduling is such that teachers do not spend the entire day with students as do most core elementary teachers. Might this factor influence higher or lower levels of perceived stress?

To further capture the complex construct of teacher stress, further research should include qualitative methods such as case studies and phenomenological studies. Qualitative studies would offer additional insights into the realities of balancing work, family, and personal growth. The complexities teachers face in striving for life balance would provide a wealth of information to consider. Case studies of veteran teachers might offer teachers advice related to coping strategies that less experienced teachers may need in order to stay in the profession. The current study contained a survey section on coping strategies. Interestingly, maintaining a sense of humor was indicated as the most useful coping strategy by this sample of regular elementary teachers.

In many cases, especially in turnaround schools and schools that are understaffed, teachers are frequently asked or required to work well beyond contract hours (with or without pay). Many school policies require teachers to respond to all phone calls and emails within 24 hours or face reprimands. Some schools implement that policy even on weekends, summers, and holidays. Given the rigors of a full day of teaching, the requirement to respond to emails and phone calls at the end of the day or during teacher planning periods may create higher levels of stress among teachers. Often, teachers are asked to attend meetings with support staff,

administration, parents, and other stakeholders that extend beyond the school day. Teachers are often expected to volunteer their time for after-school functions including faculty meetings, parent conference nights, and other parent and student involvement activities. Informational sessions and parent outreach activities are often a part of school agendas, and these sessions usually require time beyond contract hours to prepare for and/or attend. Required attendance at collaborative planning and professional learning community meetings, trainings, and other in-services often consume teachers' planning periods. Consequently, teachers are faced with the dilemma of taking work home in order to be prepared for delivering instruction, grading, and other contractual obligations. Maintaining a balance between work and home can be highly stressful. In respect to the different contexts existing with our nation's school districts, case studies or phenomenological studies could offer rich perspectives for decision-makers to consider when evaluating programs and designing systemic support plans.

Replication of the current study would provide educational leaders at school or district levels with valuable information for program evaluation and other decisions regarding the future vision and direction of curriculum and instruction as well as professional development of teachers. Individual survey item results could also serve as valuable talking points in professional learning communities.

Professional Development

With regard to the development of servant leaders, needs assessments should be conducted to assist in planning professional development to build the leadership capacity of all stakeholders in the educational process. School-based leaders each have a profile with strengths and areas to develop to be efficient and responsive instructional leaders. A study of educational

leaders' perceptions of teachers' needs for professional and personal development and the leaders' responses to the perceived needs would be instructive.

Professional development focused on building the capacity of servant leadership for school and district leadership teams could dramatically change the trajectories of individual schools, the overall well-being of the staff and teachers, reduce the level of attrition in the school, and ultimately create an environment in which parents, students, and teachers can thrive, not just survive. Research designed to study the complex, interactive systems of schools in this manner could be quite fruitful; in addition, wide-spread dissemination of the results of such research to educators and policy makers would be valuable.

Nationally, college and university teacher education preparation programs are charged with preparing prospective teachers to understand and positively respond to the nature and needs of all learners, including those in an inclusive classroom. In a study by Pavri and Hegwer-DiVita (2006), the authors stated, "Teachers reported [that] their university preparation only somewhat prepared them to identify and meet social and emotional needs of the target students" (p. 148). Further discussion of these authors' results revealed that a large proportion ($n = 31$; 45%) of participating teachers' professional development needs were not adequately supported through district staff development programs (Pavri & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006). These results are similar to the current study in which teachers expressed discontent with their pre-service education. Seventy percent of the elementary teachers in this study reported stress regarding inadequate preservice training to meet the needs of inclusive classrooms. The implications for both pre-service teacher education programs and in-service professional development are clear. Therefore, a rigorous review of research-based best practices in inclusive education would be highly beneficial to the design of teacher education programs in order to effectively prepare

university students to teach, especially when accompanied by field experiences in a variety of classroom settings and among diverse populations of students.

The pre-service education programs for special educators would also benefit from examination and continuous program evaluation efforts. In the state of Florida, universities certify special educators to teach kindergarten through grades 12 in varied exceptionalities. Perhaps this emphasis on broad ages and stages of cognitive and affective development is too global to be truly effective in meeting the needs of special learners. An examination of different models of teacher preparation of special educators, as well as inclusion teachers, could prove beneficial and point to cost-effective ways to fund special instruction and teacher development.

Special educators should be well-prepared, willing, and able to serve as coaches and mentors to core teachers who seek answers to meet the needs of their special learners. Both quantitative and qualitative studies of effective practices of special education teachers and core teachers should yield a wealth of information about ways to promote success for all learners.

Professional development opportunities for teachers in the areas of specific learning exceptionalities often exist online within district platforms, but the resources are not always kept updated with the latest research and federal policies. These resources should maximize the teachers' time and efforts to help teachers to meet specific needs in their own classrooms. Perhaps the district's instructional technology specialists could simply gather and categorize existing resources currently available online and make them available to teachers, who would then get badges or other types of in-service credits upon successful completion. Professional learning communities (PLCs) might also be involved in these types of efforts. In addition, local colleges and universities with teacher education programs can be invaluable resources as partners in the efforts to effectively meet the needs of all students, especially those of special learners.

Optional open-ended comments added to this study's survey revealed a common theme among the regular elementary teachers: they are not given opportunities to choose the types of professional development that specifically meet their individual classroom needs. In other words, teachers want differentiated professional development. Instead, several teachers were brutally honest when they commented on the typical professional development scenario: they are told when and where they are going to go, what they will learn, and how they will be assessed. While almost any teacher can get at least something out of mandated professional development, the content of the workshops or courses may not relate to teachers' immediate and authentic needs in order to be useful. Consequently, many teachers view mandated professional development as a drain on their time, energy, and skill development. Since perception is often reality, this study suggests that teachers' perceived needs are sometimes ignored. Studies such as this one could examine "teacher talk" to provide information related to teachers' specific developmental needs and ways to meet them.

The phenomenon of teacher attrition in the U.S. demands a rigorous, mixed-methods research approach by educators and policy makers to study the reasons for the rise in teacher attrition rates. Perhaps state or federal departments of education could fund a comprehensive study of the reasons for teacher churn, stress, and burnout and possible remedies. Listening to the concerns of the teachers within each school would go a long way in changing the landscape of teacher longevity, transfer, and attrition rates. By the same token, teachers need to proactively ensure that their voices are heard without fear of condemnation or retribution. When considering the emphasis of critical mass theory on the common good of the whole, social scientists might consider whether a small group of skilled servant leaders could turn around the levels of stress and burnout that many teachers experience.

Although this researcher did not formally analyze the coping strategies reported by the sample's elementary inclusion teachers, some strategies were prominent. Interestingly, the highest rated coping strategy by participants in this study was maintaining a sense of humor; 72% of the subjects rated this coping strategy as quite useful or extremely useful. Sense of humor is a personal quality that greatly varies from person to person. Each teacher is an individual human being with an individual story. Each teacher has a tipping point unique to his or her life's context and in response to his or her environment. The ability to identify the specific problems, concerns, and complications related to inclusive teachers' stressors can serve to promote the provision of effective and appropriate levels of training and support.

Conclusion

The results of this replication study will help educators and policy makers to plan for further study to determine the primary stressors in inclusive educators' lives and possible ways to alleviate the stressors, thus helping to reduce teacher turnover and attrition. While correlational research does not imply causality, this study provides additional evidence of the relationships between critical mass and tipping points related to teachers' perceived needs for professional development to teach effectively in inclusive classroom environments.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Inclusive Classrooms: A Survey of Stressors and Support Needs
Voluntary Consent for Online Survey

This survey is designed to gather information for a research study conducted by Nichole Gainey as part of her Ed.D. dissertation. The focus of this study is on stressors teaching in inclusive education and needs for support. The principal investigator at SEU is Dr. Patty LeBlanc, Professor in the College of Education.

As a teacher, you face many challenges with accountability demands and meeting the needs of all learners including those with special needs defined on RtI tier 2 and tier 3 plans, 504 plans, and IEPs. This study is being conducted with a perspective that inclusive education includes not just students with IEPs in the general classroom, but all students with special needs defined on RtI plans, 504 plans, and IEPs.

This survey includes five parts and should take about 25-30 minutes of your time. All parts of the survey serve a specific purpose to further understand the stressors and professional development needs of teachers in the inclusive classroom as defined above.   Responses are anonymous, and   the results of individual responses will remain totally confidential. The results will be used only for reporting grouped results in the dissertation.

By taking this survey, you certify that you are 18 years of age or older and that you consent to participate.

If you have any questions related to this survey or the research study, please feel free to contact Mrs. Nichole Gainey at ngainey@seu.edu and/or Dr. Patty LeBlanc at pbleblanc@seu.edu.

If you would like a copy of the results at the completion of the study, please email Nichole Gainey at ngainey@seu.edu.

Thank you so much for your assistance in this important research study! Your prompt response to the survey is very much appreciated.

Inclusive Classrooms: A Survey of Stressors and Support Needs

Part A General Information

1. What is your age?

[   ]

2. Your gender

◯ Male

◯ Female

3. Total number of years teaching?

[   ]

4. Which type of school best describes your current or most recent regular classroom teaching experience?

◯ urban

◯ suburban

◯ rural

◯ Other (please specify)

◯ reservation/aboriginal

◯ military base

[   ]

5. Type of school you currently teach in (or most recently taught in) as a regular classroom teacher in an inclusive setting.

☐ urban

☐ rural

☐ suburban

☐ Other (please specify)

☐ reservation/aboriginal

☐ military base

[   ]

6. Which of the following best describes your school where you completed your current or most recent classroom teaching experience?

[   ]

7. Your class structure

- ( ) single grade
- ( ) multi-age/grade
- ( ) block (by discipline)
- ( ) Other (please specify)

[ ]

8. What grade level(s) do you teach this year (or that you taught in your most recent position)? Check all that apply.

- [ ] Kindergarten
- [ ] 1st grade
- [ ] 2nd grade
- [ ] 3rd grade
- [ ] 4th grade
- [ ] 5th grade
- [ ] middle school
- [ ] high school

9. What is your current (or your most recent) teaching position?

- ( ) regular classroom teacher
- ( ) inclusion teacher
- ( ) Special education teacher
- ( ) Other (please specify)
- ( ) Music Teacher
- ( ) Physical Education Teacher
- ( ) Art Teacher

[ ]

10. What is the highest degree you hold?

- ( ) Bachelor's
- ( ) Masters
- ( ) Other (please specify)
- ( ) Ph.D.
- ( ) Ed.D.

[ ]

11. Number of children in your current (or most recent) classroom:

[ ]

12. Number of children in your current or recent school

[ ]

13. Number of years you have taught in an inclusive classroom (as defined in the introduction)

14. What formal education (college level or courses within a district/state approved certification program) have you completed for teaching children in an inclusive classroom since completing your initial teacher certification requirements?

☐ college classes

☐ certification in progress for exceptional education

☐ state or district in-service training

☐ degree in progress for exceptional education

☐ degree earned in exceptional education

☐ none

☐ certification completed in exceptional education

☐ Other (please specify)

[   ]

15. How many hours of college coursework in teaching students with special needs did you complete prior to receiving your initial teaching certificate?

[   ]

Part B Information about Children in Your Class

16. Total number of students in your current (or most recent) classroom

[   ]

17. Total number of students in your current (or most recent) classroom with

an IEP   [   ]

a 504 Plan   [   ]

Tier 2 RtI support   [   ]

Tier 3 RtI support   [   ]

18. How many students in your current or most recent classroom have been identified through special education evaluation and have an IEP for accommodating the following?

Autism   [   ]

Behavior disorder   [   ]

Blind/Low Vision   [   ]

Deaf/Hard of Hearing   [   ]

Developmental Disabilities   [   ]

Giftedness   [   ]

Learning Disabilities   [   ]

Mild Intellectual Disability   [   ]

Multiple Disabilities   [   ]

Physical Handicap or
Physically Challenged   [   ]

Other Health Impaired   [   ]

Speech/Language   [   ]

ADHD   [   ]

Other   [   ]

19. How many students are waiting for special education evaluation in your classroom (or were waiting in your most recent classroom)?

20. How many students in your class (or most recent class) could be considered "at risk" because of the following circumstances?

ELL

Homeless

Foster Care

Retained in current or previous grade

Chronic absences (less than 80% attendance rate)

Part C: Potential Stressors Associated With Inclusive Education

* 21. Administrative Issues: Focusing on students with special needs in your current (or most recent) classroom, indicate the extent to which the following administrative issues are stressful for you.

	Not stressful	Somewhat stressful	Quite stressful	Extremely stressful
obtaining relevant information about a child	○	○	○	○
record keeping	○	○	○	○
planning a child's IEP, 504, RtI Tier 2, or Tier 3 Plan	○	○	○	○
adjusting unit plans	○	○	○	○
obtaining funding	○	○	○	○
obtaining physical adaptations e.g. paths, handrails or gate locks	○	○	○	○
taking responsibility for a child's welfare	○	○	○	○
being held accountable for a child's educational outcomes	○	○	○	○
coordination of support personnel	○	○	○	○
change of routine at short notice e.g. absence of teacher aide	○	○	○	○
obtaining clear job description and expectations	○	○	○	○
establishing and maintaining lines of communication between you and administration	○	○	○	○
receiving feedback from leadership	○	○	○	○
administrative turnover	○	○	○	○
teacher turnover	○	○	○	○

Other (please specify)

[   ]

22. Overall, indicate the extent to which administrative issues are stressful for you.

	Not stressful	Somewhat stressful	Quite stressful	Extremely stressful
	○	○	○	○

* 23. Support: Focusing on students with special needs in your current (or most recent) classroom, indicate the extent to which the following support issues are stressful for you.

	Not Stressful	Somewhat Stressful	Quite Stressful	Extremely Stressful
locating age-appropriate educational resources for a child's ability level	○	○	○	○
securing suitable resources for the classroom	○	○	○	○
accessing occupational therapy	○	○	○	○
accessing physiotherapy	○	○	○	○
accessing speech therapy	○	○	○	○
allocation of resource teacher	○	○	○	○
allocation of speech and language	○	○	○	○
allocation of teacher aide/para-professional time	○	○	○	○
employing a teacher aide/para-professional	○	○	○	○
obtaining a replacement aide during sick leave	○	○	○	○
allocation of school-based coach	○	○	○	○
allocation of interventionist	○	○	○	○
allocation of Special Education Teacher	○	○	○	○
allocation of School Psychologist	○	○	○	○

24. Overall, indicate the extent to which support issues are stressful for you.

	Not stressful	Somewhat stressful	Quite stressful	Extremely stressful
	○	○	○	○

* 25. Student Behavior: Focusing on students with special needs in your current (or most recent) class, indicate the extent to which the following student behaviors are stressful for you.

	Not stressful	Somewhat stressful	Quite stressful	Extremely stressful
short attention span	○	○	○	○
inappropriate social skills	○	○	○	○
limited speech	○	○	○	○
poor communication skills	○	○	○	○
attention seeking	○	○	○	○
hyperactivity	○	○	○	○
withdrawn	○	○	○	○
intimidating	○	○	○	○
manipulative	○	○	○	○
over-loving	○	○	○	○
unaware of danger	○	○	○	○
poor mobility	○	○	○	○
talking out of turn	○	○	○	○
making noises (verbally or with objects)	○	○	○	○
tantrums	○	○	○	○
attacks others e.g. hits, bites	○	○	○	○
verbally rude to others	○	○	○	○
unpredictable reactions	○	○	○	○
Runs away	○	○	○	○
behavior problems outside of the classroom (hallway, cafeteria, and/or playground)	○	○	○	○

Other (please specify)

[   ]

26. Overall, indicate the extent to which student behaviors are stressful for you.

Not stressful	Somewhat stressful	Quite stressful	Extremely stressful
○	○	○	○

* 27. The Classroom: Focusing on students with special needs in your current (or most recent) classroom, indicate the extent to which the following classroom issues are stressful for you.

	Not stressful	Somewhat Stressful	Quite Stressful	Extremely Stressful
management of peers' responses to distressing health or hygiene issues	○	○	○	○
management of special needs student's interpersonal relationships with other students	○	○	○	○
time available for other students	○	○	○	○
difficulty in monitoring other students when attending to a student with special needs	○	○	○	○
whole class teaching is disrupted by a special needs student	○	○	○	○
small group teaching is disrupted by a special needs student	○	○	○	○

Other (please specify)

[   ]

28. Overall, indicate the extent to which classroom issues are stressful for you.

Not stressful	Somewhat stressful	Quite stressful	Extremely stressful
○	○	○	○

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* 29. Parents: Focusing on students with special needs in your current (or most recent) classroom, indicate the extent to which the following parental issues are stressful for you.

	Not stressful	Somewhat stressful	Quite stressful	Extremely stressful
limited contact with parents	○	○	○	○
excessive meetings with parents	○	○	○	○
parent(s) in the classroom	○	○	○	○
lack of understanding of the child's capabilities by the parent(s)	○	○	○	○
lack of follow-through with recommendations (including but not limited to medication)	○	○	○	○
lack of understanding of the long term prognosis for the child by the parent(s)	○	○	○	○
unwillingness of the parent(s) to come to terms with the child's disability	○	○	○	○
parent/teacher tension	○	○	○	○
socio-economic disadvantage of the family	○	○	○	○

Other (please specify)

[   ]

30. Overall, indicate the extent to which parental issues are stressful for you.

Not stressful	Somewhat stressful	Quite stressful	Extremely stressful
○	○	○	○

* 31. Professional Competency: Focusing on students with special needs in your current (or most recent) classroom, indicate the extent to which the following professional competency issues are stressful for you.

	Not stressful	Somewhat stressful	Quite stressful	Extremely stressful
insufficient pre-service education	○	○	○	○

	Not stressful	Somewhat stressful	Quite stressful	Extremely stressful
inadequate in-service education regarding a students' specific special needs	○	○	○	○
inadequate in-service education in meeting the educational needs of the special needs students	○	○	○	○
sustaining an active learning environment for the special needs students	○	○	○	○
determining the students with special needs capabilities	○	○	○	○
determining how much to challenge the students with special needs	○	○	○	○
confusing laziness with a student with special needs inability	○	○	○	○
reduced ability to teach other students as effectively as you would like	○	○	○	○
modifying curriculum	○	○	○	○
grading	○	○	○	○
implementing appropriate accommodations	○	○	○	○
implementing accommodations on an IEP, 504 Plan, RtI Tier 2, or Tier 3 plan	○	○	○	○
finding the time to plan and gather materials for differentiated curriculum	○	○	○	○
collecting data/documentation for progress monitoring and formative assessment to inform planning	○	○	○	○

	Not stressful	Somewhat stressful	Quite stressful	Extremely stressful
not having choice in professional development opportunities	○	○	○	○
not receiving support in a timely manner	○	○	○	○
lack of respect for professional autonomy and creativity	○	○	○	○
limited or no opportunity to collaborate with a mentor	○	○	○	○
collective responsibility lacking	○	○	○	○
allocating time to collaborate with other staff members on plans and progress related to students with special needs in my classroom	○	○	○	○

Other (please specify)

[   ]

32. Overall, indicate the extent to which professional competency issues are stressful for you.

Not stressful	Somewhat stressful	Quite stressful	Extremely stressful
○	○	○	○

* 33. Personal Competency: Focusing on students with special needs in your current (or most recent)

classroom, indicate the extent to which the following personal competency issues are stressful for you.

	Not stressful	Somewhat stressful	Quite stressful	Extremely stressful
meeting the child's needs	○	○	○	○
undertaking tasks associated with the child's condition e.g. toileting	○	○	○	○
empathizing with parents	○	○	○	○
responding to a child's personality	○	○	○	○
maintaining a child's safety	○	○	○	○

	Not stressful	Somewhat stressful	Quite stressful	Extremely stressful
maintaining the safety of the other children	◯	◯	◯	◯
meeting the parents' expectations	◯	◯	◯	◯
maintaining supportive interactions at work	◯	◯	◯	◯
responding to the extent to which the school has consistent and equitable rules for everyone	◯	◯	◯	◯
maintaining fulfillment with teaching	◯	◯	◯	◯
managing daily workload and required school duties	◯	◯	◯	◯
managing personal and/or family demands with work demands	◯	◯	◯	◯
allocating time needed beyond contract hours to complete classroom-related tasks	◯	◯	◯	◯
responding to co-workers, team members, or other staff members' personalities	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other (please specify)

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34. Overall, indicate the extent to which personal competency issues are stressful for you.

Not stressful	Somewhat stressful	Quite stressful	Extremely stressful
◯	◯	◯	◯

35. How many sick days are you allowed each year?

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36. How many total sick days do you project to use during your current (or did you use in the last year completed) during an inclusive teaching placement?

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37. Please read each statement carefully and decide how often you feel this way about your current or most recent teaching position.

	Never	A few times a year	Once a month	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Every day
I am emotionally drained.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I am tired when I get up in the morning.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I am burned out from my work.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I feel like leaving the teaching profession.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

38. Overall, my level of stress when teaching students with special needs could be described as:

not stressful	somewhat stressful	quite stressful	extremely stressful
◯	◯	◯	◯

Part D: The Usefulness of Coping Strategies Employed During Inclusive Education

* 39. Please continue to refer to the special needs children in your current or most recent class.   Indicate how useful the following strategies are for you in coping with inclusion in your regular classroom. Respond by choosing the option which best represents your opinion of the listed strategies.

	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Quite useful	Extremely useful
Discuss the situation with your administration.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Discuss the situation with your school's counselor.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Discuss the situation with your school's interventionist.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Discuss the situation with parents.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Seek help and resources from other teachers.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Take some form of physical exercise (e.g. aerobics or sports).	◯	◯	◯	◯
Write down your feelings.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Seek professional help for specific students.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Seek professional help for yourself.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Ask a relative or friend for advice.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Develop other interests outside school.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Seek a transfer from the school but remain as a classroom teacher.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Seek a different position within your school removing yourself from the classroom setting.	◯	◯	◯	◯

	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Quite useful	Extremely useful
Seek a transfer from the school and choose a different position that is not a classroom teaching position.	○	○	○	○
Think about how a person you know would handle the situation.	○	○	○	○
Concentrate on what has to be done next.	○	○	○	○
Reduce the number of support personnel visiting your class.	○	○	○	○
Increase the number of support personnel visiting your class.	○	○	○	○
Leaving specifc students to work independently for extended periods.	○	○	○	○
Assure yourself that things will get better.	○	○	○	○
Have specific students removed from your classroom upon request.	○	○	○	○
Keep others from knowing how bad things really are.	○	○	○	○
Come up with different solutions for difficult issues.	○	○	○	○
Don't think too much about it.	○	○	○	○
Discuss the situation with specialist personnel (i.e. school psychologist).	○	○	○	○
Maintain a sense of humor.	○	○	○	○
Make a plan of action and follow it.	○	○	○	○
Try to get specific students moved to a special classroom or school.	○	○	○	○

	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Quite useful	Extremely useful
Share your feelings with the students in your class.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Enlist support of the other students.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Use alcohol or medication.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Discuss the situation with colleagues.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Try to keep your feelings to yourself.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Practice meditation.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Seek spiritual/religious support.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Draw on past experiences.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Hope that the situation will go away.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Apply for sick or mental health leave.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Resign from teaching.	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other (please specify)

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Part E: Professional Development Needs

40. In the last year, how many workshops has your school/district provided that you have participated in?

[   ]

41. Please select the option that best reflects your opinion with the following statement: In the last year, I had the opportunity to choose the types of professional development to suit the needs for my classroom.

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
◯	◯	◯	◯

* 42. Consider the usefulness of each type of professional development you've completed in the last three years in meeting the needs of the special needs students in your current (or most recent) classroom. Choose the option which best reflects your opinion of usefulness.

	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Quite useful	Extremely useful
Universal Design for Learning	◯	◯	◯	◯
Differentiated Instruction	◯	◯	◯	◯
Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports (PBIS)	◯	◯	◯	◯
Inclusion Classroom Best Practices	◯	◯	◯	◯
Teaching With the Brain in Mind/Applying Neuroscience Findings in Education	◯	◯	◯	◯
Feedback/Activities to increase Growth Mindset, Resilience, and/or Grit	◯	◯	◯	◯
Responsive Teaching	◯	◯	◯	◯
Cooperative Learning	◯	◯	◯	◯
Learning Profiles	◯	◯	◯	◯
Performance Assessments	◯	◯	◯	◯
Proactive Behavior Management	◯	◯	◯	◯
Conflict Resolution Skills	◯	◯	◯	◯

	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Quite useful	Extremely useful
Portfolios	○	○	○	○
Rigor	○	○	○	○
Marzano	○	○	○	○
English Language Learners	○	○	○	○
Standards	○	○	○	○

Other (please specify)

[text box]

43. Approximately how many total hours have you participated in the professional development selected?

[text box]

* 44. Select your opinion of usefulness for all professional development you would like to complete to better meet the needs in your classroom. Select all that apply.

	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Quite useful	Extremely useful
Universal Design for Learning	○	○	○	○
Differentiated Instruction	○	○	○	○
Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports (PBIS)	○	○	○	○
Inclusion Classroom Best Practices	○	○	○	○
Teaching With the Brain in Mind/Applying Neuroscience Findings in Education	○	○	○	○
Feedback/Activities to increase Growth Mindset, Resilience, and/or Grit	○	○	○	○
Responsive Teaching	○	○	○	○
Cooperative Learning	○	○	○	○

Learning Profiles	○	○	○	○
Performance Assessments	○	○	○	○
Proactive Behavior Management	○	○	○	○
Conflict Resolution Skills	○	○	○	○
Portfolios Rigor Marzano	○	○	○	○
English Language Learners	○	○	○	○
Standards	○	○	○	○

Other (please specify)

45. Please select the option that best reflects your opinion with the following statement: I need more professional development to help me be more effective in serving special needs learners in my classroom.

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○

46. Do you have any other comments, questions, or concerns?

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey. We truly value the information you have provided. Your responses will contribute to the understanding of perceived stressors and types of supports needed for regular classroom teachers to effectively serve special needs learners.

Appendix B

Protocol #: 2018 ED 17

Exempt: Yes ☑ **No** ☐

Principal Investigator's Name: Parry LeBlanc

Today's Date: 9/13

Co-Investigators: Nichole Gainey

Project Title: Inclusive Classrooms: A Study of Elementary Regular Classroom Teachers

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1. Does the research place subjects at more than minimal risk? **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

Minimal risk is defined as the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort is no greater than that ordinarily encountered in daily life or during routine physical or psychological examination or tests)

Notes: _____

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2. If more than minimal risk, does the merit of the project outweigh the risks and are the benefits maximized and risks minimized? **N/A** ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

Notes: _____

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3. Are there any ethical issues regarding the study's design and conduct? **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

Ethical issues may include but are not limited to the Belmont Report principles: respect for persons (voluntary, fully informed consent); beneficence (obligation to protect subjects from harm and secure their well-being); and, justice (benefits and burdens of research are fairly distributed)

Notes: _____

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4. Is subject selection equitable? **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

If special populations are included the IRB should ensure that subjects can understand the research, give full consent, and voluntarily agree to participate, and they should consider any other possible special problems. Are vulnerable or special populations included in the research?

- ☐ Pregnant women
- ☐ Fetus/fetal tissue
- ☐ Prisoners
- ☐ Minors Under Age 18
- ☐ Elderly subjects
- ☐ Minority groups and non-English speakers
- ☐ Patients
- ☐ Mentally/Emotionally/Developmentally Disabled persons
- ☐ Behavioral Abnormalities, psychological or disease condition
- ☐ None of the above, Normal Healthy Volunteers

Notes: _____

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5. Is the recruitment and consent process (including telephone scripts, ads, brochures, letters, compensation) fully described, appropriate, and non-coercive? **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

Notes: _____

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1. Are risks (physical, emotional, financial, legal) to subjects minimized? Yes ☐ No ☐
Notes:_____
_____

2. Confidentiality of Data:
Are there procedures for protecting privacy and confidentiality? Yes ☐ No ☐
Notes:_____
_____

8. Is Informed Consent Included in the Application? Yes ☐ No ☐

Stipulate Missing Elements:

Is affiliation with SEU clearly noted?		Yes ☐	No ☐
Is the Faculty PI identified?	N/A ☐	Yes ☐	No ☐
Is the study faculty sponsor identified (if appropriate)?		Yes ☐	No ☐
Does the consent state the study purpose accurately?		Yes ☐	No ☐
Is it clear what the subject(s) will be asked to do?		Yes ☐	No ☐
Are risks or discomforts clearly and fully stated?		Yes ☐	No ☐
Are benefits clearly and fully stated?		Yes ☐	No ☐
Are alternatives listed (if appropriate)?	N/A ☐	Yes ☐	No ☐
Are confidentiality or anonymity issues addressed?		Yes ☐	No ☐
Is the PI's contact information included?		Yes ☐	No ☐
Is the IRB's contact information included?		Yes ☐	No ☐
Is it stated that the subject can withdraw at anytime?		Yes ☐	No ☐
Is the consent understandable at an 8th grade reading level?		Yes ☐	No ☐

Assent Form Not Required ☐

Is one needed (can the child really refuse to participate)?	Yes ☐	No ☐
Is it one page or less?	Yes ☐	No ☐
Is the language simple and sentences short?	Yes ☐	No ☐

Notes: _____
_____

Additional Comments/Requirements by IRB:

Exempt

RECOMMENDATION:

☑ **Approved as submitted**   ☐ **Approval Deferred; add'l information required**
(additional IRB review required)

☐ **Approved with stipulations as noted**   ☐ **Not Approved**

Signature: IRB Office-AF   **Date:** 9/13/18