

A National Study of State Credentialing Requirements for Administrators of Special Education

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- Unlike data that show that all states require credentials for special education teachers, national data indicate that only 27 states require licensure/certification/endorsement as an administrator of special education.
- The titles used by states to identify the local director of special education include administrator of special education, director of special education, director of pupil personnel services or pupil special education, and director of exceptional needs.
- There was variation with regard to those state programs that incorporate the six Council of Exceptional Children (CEC) 2009 Administrator of Special Education Standards into their requirements.
- The great majority of the states requiring credentialing as administrators of special education also require a master's degree as the minimum degree requirement for special education administrators, and half of those states require specific course work in special education administration.
- Less than one-third of the states require a practicum/internship in special education administration, and only one state required that candidates pass a special education administration licensing exam.
- Most of the states requiring credentialing of administrators of special education reported having continuing education/professional development requirements for administrators to keep their credentials active.

Lashley and Boscardin (2003) found there is a severe shortage of appropriately trained administrators of special education. While some states have been quite rigorous, clearly defining competencies and expectations for special education administrators, many states remain vague, with no such definitions or guidelines. Instead, these states have elected to allow the administrator of special education role to be filled by administrators who are not trained in special education or special education administration. In addition, compounding this issue is a growing trend in

which universities are discontinuing their special education administration programs by not replacing retiring faculty with this area of expertise, or by allowing faculty to be absorbed by other programs.

Following the passage of *No Child Left Behind* and with the advent of *Race to the Top*, all teachers are required to be highly qualified. However, little has been written about the qualifications of educational administrators, and administrators of special education in particular. This research study investigates credentialing requirements for

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administrators of special education in a climate of accountability and elevated expectations. Hypotheses are explored based on the data gathered.

Efforts to License Administrators of Special Education

At the 1962 annual meeting of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) (a meeting that pre-dated Public Law (P.L.) 94-142, Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975) a committee was appointed to investigate (a) the training and experience expected of state directors and supervisors, and (b) the extent to which these expectations were being met in college and university programs accepting students under P. L. 85-926 (Education of Mentally Retarded Children Act of 1958), which provided fellowships for advanced preparation of directors and supervisors. Milazzo and Blessing (1964) used P.L. 87-276 (Teachers of the Deaf Act of 1961) (a law that emphasized the need for adequate preparation for administrators and coordinators of programs of special education in state and local school systems) as the basis for their investigation of the availability and content of training programs in institutions of higher education (IHEs), including both colleges and universities. In a survey of 12 states, Brabandt (1969) found that only Illinois had certification or credential requirements that promoted standards for special education administrators. In their national certification survey, Kern and Mayer (1970) found that only 12 of 38 responding states reported any specific certification requirements for the position of director of special education.

Marro and Kohl (1972) found that certification of special education administrators varied from state to state, based on national data gathered from 1066 usable questionnaires out of 1146 received questionnaires from local administrators of special education. The data indicated that very few administrators (32%) held special education administrator's certificates, and only four out of every ten had experienced an internship. The position titles varied, with the most frequent being director of special education, coordinator of special education, supervisor of special education, and director of pupil personnel services. At the time of this study, the latter title appeared to be gaining in popularity. Over one-third of the group belonged to the Council of Administrators in Special Education (CASE).

Twenty-three states required neither certification nor endorsement as a director of special education or education administrator.

(Forgnone and Collings, 1975)

Forgnone and Collings (1975) investigated the availability of training programs for administrators of special education in institutions of higher education and the availability of director of special education certification within each of the 50 states. Data indicated that 23 programs in the country were producing leadership personnel to fill the increasing number of administrative positions in the field of special education. However, only six states required certification that demanded some level of competency and only three states had approved training programs. Twenty-three states required neither certification nor endorsement as a director of special education or education administrator.

In a 1979 study by Whitworth and Hatley, data were collected from 50 states regarding certification of special education administrators and supervisors. It was found that 20 states had no licensure, certification, or endorsement requirements for administrators of special education, two states awarded certificates in general administration, two states awarded special education administrative approvals, eight states gave a special education administrative endorsement, 15 states provided a special education supervisory endorsement, and three states certified individuals as special education administrators and supervisors. This study also found variations in degree prerequisites for state certification/approval/endorsement: nine states required a master's degree, three states required additional credit hours in special education beyond the initial certificate, five states required credit hours in educational administration, seven states required completion of an approved program, 11 states required previous teaching experience, three states required additional certification besides special education, one state required practicum experience, and two states required additional hours in another area of special education.

Prillaman and Richardson (1985) found 26 states had a separate certification/endorsement for special education administrators, compared with six states in 1975.

In a 1980 study completed by Stile and Pettibone, 12 of the 50 states plus Washington, D.C. required special education coursework for general administration certification. A separate special education administration credential was offered by 26 states, while 20 of those states included special education authorization as part of the general education administrator's certificate. Four of those states offered candidates a choice between a separate certificate or authorization as a director of special education as part of the general education administration certificate. Stile and Pettibone (1980) found training programs in special education administration available in 26 states and Washington, D.C., but in seven of those states, separate special education administration credentials were unavailable. Six of the states offering separate special education administrative certification had no training programs. One state reported that a training program was under development.

Prillaman and Richardson (1985) found 26 states had a separate certification/endorsement for special education administrators, compared with six states in 1975. In addition, only four states and the District of Columbia did not require special education or general education administration certification/endorsement for special education administrators. This finding contrasted markedly with the 23 states requiring no state certification in 1975. Prillaman and Richardson (1985) reported that, in 1985, 20 states had a general education administration certification requirement for special education administrators, which was a slight increase from 18 states with a similar requirement in 1975. Perhaps a more significant finding was that nine of the 26 states that required certification/endorsement in special education in 1985 had no certification requirements in 1975. They also found that nine of the 18 states that required only a general education administration certificate in 1975 now require a special education administration certification/endorsement. They also found that 11 of the 20 states that required a general education administration certificate in 1975 had no special education or general education administration requirements for special education administrators. Total results indicated that 38 of the 51 respondents had increased their requirements for administrators of special education programs since 1975 (Prillaman & Richardson, 1985).

Stile, Abernathy, and Pettibone (1986) reported on the results of a 5-year follow-up study of training and certification of special education administrators. The data from the 50 states plus the District of Columbia indicated that since 1979, the greatest change occurred in the number of states requiring special education course work or demonstration of competency in special education as part of the general administration credential. In 1984, 16 states reported requirements as opposed to 12 in 1979. Eighteen states included authorization in special education as part of the general administration credential and two states were developing authorization requirements. Twenty-three states offered a separate special education administration credential while six offered a similar certificate at the supervisory level. Nineteen states had at least one formal training program leading to a degree in special education administration: three states had programs leading to a degree in special education supervision, and respondents at an additional two state offices knew of programs leading to a special education supervision certificate. Although seven states with special education administration credentials reported no formal training program leading to a degree, all reported that special education administration coursework was available within the state. Two certification offices did not know of any formal programs leading to a degree in their state, but they did report the availability of special education administration coursework. Forty-six states reported that special education administration course work was offered.

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Stile, Abernathy, and Pettibone (1986)

Valesky and Hirth (1992) found that 32 of the 50 states offered an endorsement as an administrator of special education but did not report a distinction among states that required separate certification. They also reported that 28 states required administrators of special education to be

knowledgeable of special education law. Interestingly, at the time of this study, Valesky and Hirth (1992) found that the number of due process hearings in states had no relationship to state endorsement requirements.

There has been a decline in the number of endorsements since Whitworth and Hatley's 1979 study that found that 25 states had separate approval or endorsement requirements for special education administrators, and Stile and Pettibone's 1980 study, which found that 20 states included special education authorization as part of general education administrator's certificate. In the Stile, Abernathy, and Pettibone's 1985 study, 18 states included authorization in special education administration as part of the general administration credential. With the decline in endorsements, there was a rise in dedicated special education administration certificates and licenses. For example, Forgnone and Collins (1975) reported that six states required separate certification as an administrator of special education. Three years later, Whitworth and Hatley (1979) detected a decline in certification of administrators of special education from six to three states, but Stile and Pettibone (1980) found a return to 1975 levels, with six states offering a separate administrator of special education certificate. On the other hand, Prillaman and Richardson (1985) noted that 26 states offered a separate certificate or endorsement for administrators of special education, but did not offer a distinction between these two designations. Stile, Abernathy, and Pettibone (1986) found that 23 states offered a separate special education administration credential.

The purpose of this investigation is to provide an update to the number of states offering licenses/certificates/endorsements as administrators of special education. In addition, this study is also designed to gather information related to the credentialing process, including titles associated with that position, competency requirements, experience requirements, practica/internships, degree and course work requirements, credentialing examinations, and continuing education requirements. This information will offer insight into how states ensure the development of highly qualified administrators of special education who are expected to support students with disabilities, their families, and the instructional staff who are responsible for their educational outcomes.

Collecting State Data

Procedure

An initial introductory e-mail was sent to the State Directors of Special Education (SEAs) of the 50 states and Washington, D.C. asking them to participate in a survey about the credentialing requirements for administrators of special education for their state. The participants were provided with Web site link to SurveyMonkey™ (e.g., an on-line data collection and analysis tool) in the introductory e-mail that directed them to the survey. Those SEAs not responding to the initial inquiry received follow-up e-mails similar to second contacts in earlier studies (Forgnone & Collings, 1975; Prillaman & Richardson, 1985; Stile, Abernathy, & Pettibone, 1986; Whitworth & Hatley, 1979), and follow-up telephone calls (Prillaman & Richardson, 1985; Valesky & Hirth, 1992; Whitworth & Hatley, 1979). In the follow-up communications, participants were given a choice of responding to the online survey, answering the questions by telephone, or receiving the survey via fax to be returned via fax or postal mail upon completion. When these attempts failed, other sources, such as members of the CASE board of directors and faculty representing the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Educators (NCATE) accredited higher education administrators of special education programs were contacted to provide information. A 98% response rate was achieved.

The Survey

Like the previous studies (Forgnone & Collings, 1975; Marro & Kohl, 1972; Prillaman & Richardson, 1985; Stile, Abernathy, & Pettibone, 1986; Valesky & Hirth, 1992; Whitworth & Hatley, 1979), a survey was used to gather national administrator of special education credentialing data from state education agencies. To gather these data, a 17-item questionnaire was developed to ascertain the licensure requirements needed to hold the position of special education administrator. A group of 10 special educators, general education administrators, and special education administrators selected the 17 items using two sources: a survey used in a pilot study to ascertain the status of licensure, and survey items used in similar studies (Forgnone & Collings, 1975; Marro & Kohl, 1975; Prillaman & Richardson, 1985; Stile, Abernathy, & Pettibone,

1986; Valesky & Hirth, 1992; Whitworth & Hatley, 1979). From the pilot study, researchers found that states tended not to respond to lengthy, detailed questionnaires, so every effort was made to provide a focused set of questions that could be completed by a knowledgeable respondent within a 15 minute time period.

Items selected focused specifically on endorsement/certification/licensing of administrators of special education required by states. The questions examined various aspects of credentialing including the amount of previous teaching experience, the highest level of education attained, and the amount of continuing education a special education administrator would need to practice in a particular state.

The Participants

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the Council for Administrators of Special Education (CASE) provided potential contacts for each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia. State directors of special education or their representatives ($n = 51$) served as the initial point of contact. Other sources included CASE board of director members ($n = 2$) and higher education faculty ($n = 2$) that represented an NCATE-accredited administrator of special education programs when state directors had not responded to initial and follow-up contacts.

Analysis

Responses were received and recorded using SurveyMonkey technology. Results of the research were analyzed for patterns and trends using Excel and Predictive Analytics SoftWare (PASW, 2010). Only data from states that reported requiring separate credentialing requirements and designations for special education administration were collected, analyzed, and reported.

The Credentialing of Administrators of Special Education

In this section, the results of the survey will be explored. Several follow-up questions were asked of those who indicated that their states offered a license/certificate/endorsement in the area of special education administration. The analysis of results

includes whether states require the designation of administrator of special education (or some variation), and the titles associated with that position (see *Table 1*). In addition, competency requirements, experience requirements, practicum/internship requirements, degree and coursework requirements, credentialing examinations, and continuing education requirements (see *Table 2*).

State Requirements and Position Titles

Of the 27 states that have separate special education administrative credentialing, five of the states offer endorsements, 12 require certificates, seven require licenses, and three states require a hybrid license that combines general education administrator licenses with administrator of special education endorsements (see *Figure 1*). The titles used by states to identify the local director of special education include: administrator of special education, director of special education, director of pupil personnel services, director of pupil special education, and director of exceptional needs. Some non-descriptive titles, such as district educational specialist, PK-12 principal, supervisor of special education, and general education administrator with special education administrator endorsement, are used by a few states.

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The Integration of CEC Administrator of Special Education Standards by States

Among those states that require licensure/certification/endorsement as an administrator of special education, there is variation with regard to those that incorporate the six CEC 2009 Administrator of Special Education standards. Program development and organization ($n = 15$), evaluation ($n = 14$), and professional development

Table 1: States requiring licensing/certification/endorsement requirements for administrators of special education

State	State Licensing Requirements	Title
Alabama	None of the Above	
Alaska	Certification	Special Education Director
Arizona	None of the Above	
Arkansas	License	Curriculum/Program Administrator
California	Certification	Pupil Personnel Services Credential
Colorado	Endorsement	Special Education Director
Connecticut	None of the Above	
Delaware	Certification	Director of Special Education
Dist. of Columbia	Not Reporting	
Florida	None of the Above	
Georgia	None of the Above	
Hawaii	Certification	District Education Specialist
Idaho	Endorsement	Special Education Director
Illinois	Endorsement	Director of Special Education – not mandated/local control
Indiana	License	Director of Exceptional Needs
Iowa	License/Endorsement	PK–12 Principal/PK–12 Supervisor of Special Education
Kansas	License	Special Education Director
Kentucky	Certification	Director of Special Education
Louisiana	None of the Above	
Maine	Certification	Special Education Administrators/Director
Maryland	None of the Above	
Massachusetts	License	Administrator of Special Education
Michigan	None of the Above	Director/Supervisor of Special Education
Minnesota	License	Special Education Director
Mississippi	None of the Above	
Missouri	License/Certification/Endorsement	Director of Special Education
Montana	License/Endorsement	—
Nebraska	Certification	Special Education Director
Nevada	None of the Above	
New Hampshire	Certification	Special Education Administrator
New Jersey	None of the Above	
New Mexico	None of the Above	
New York	None of the Above	
North Carolina	Certification	Exceptional Children Director
North Dakota	Certification	Special Education Director
Ohio	License	Director Pupil Personnel Services or Special Education
Oklahoma	None of the Above	
Oregon	None of the Above	
Pennsylvania	Certification	Special Education Supervisor
Rhode Island	Certification	Administrator of Special Education
South Carolina	None of the Above	
South Dakota	None of the Above	
Tennessee	None of the Above	

Table 1: Continued.

State	State Licensing Requirements	Title
Texas	None of the Above	
Utah	None of the Above	
Vermont	Endorsement	Director of Special Education
Virginia	Endorsement	Administration and Supervision
Washington	None of the Above	
West Virginia	None of the Above	
Wisconsin	License	Director of Special Education and Pupil Services
Wyoming	None of the Above	

and ethical practice ($n = 13$) are the standards most frequently incorporated into state standards for administrators of special education (see *Figure 2*). Collaboration and research and inquiry are included in the standards of eleven states.

Degree and Coursework Requirements

The great majority of states require the master’s degree as the minimum degree for special education administrator credentialing (see *Figure 3*). Twenty-two states require a master’s degree and one state requires a master’s degree plus an additional 30 credits. For one state, credit hours are waived based on service, which was not defined. Another state requires that the graduate program leading to the master’s degree be approved by the state board of education for a director or supervisor program for special education administration. One state awards an initial license upon completion of the master’s degree, but requires an educational specialist or doctoral degree for full licensure. Completion of a postbaccalaureate program in lieu of a master’s degree is permissible for one state with the majority of candidates meeting the master’s degree requirement.

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In terms of course work, 20 states require specific course work in special education administration, with 15 of these states also requiring courses in educational administration. Fourteen of these states

require course work in special education, special education administration, and educational administration. One state requires course work in only special education administration. Although some states did not require course work in special education administration, five did require course work in both special education and educational administration.

Internship and Practicum Experiences

Fourteen of the states have internship and/or practicum requirements of varying lengths of time for prospective administrators (see *Figure 4*). Four of the states require a paid internship experience, while 10 states require practicum experiences. One state requires a practicum experience but does not specify whether participants are paid. For one state, neither practica nor internships are a requirement but the respondent indicated that most of the universities require a practicum/internship experience. The practicum/internship experiences range from 30 to 320 hours in length. Five states require a practicum/internship to be at least 300 hours in length. Two states require completion of a one course equivalent for the practicum/internship and another state only requires a practicum/internship if the applicant does not complete the requirement at a university or college.

Licensure/Certification/Endorsement Examinations

Six of the states reporting require special education administrators to pass a general education examination for credentialing, while four states require applicants to pass an examination specific to special education. Three states reported having an

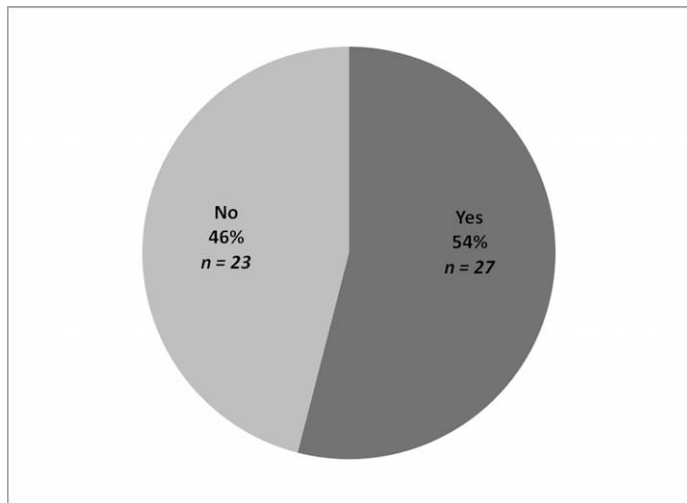
Table 2: Licensing/certification/endorsement requirements for states requiring credentialing for administrators of special education

State	CEC Standards	Minimal Degree Requirements	Prior Teaching Experience	Prior Special Education Teaching Experience	Practicum or Internship Experience	Coursework Requirements	General Education Administration Examination	Special Education Administration Examination	Continuing Education Unit Requirements
1. Alaska	—	Master's	Yes	Yes	—	SP/SPA	No	No	Yes
2. Arkansas	LP/PDO/RI/E/PDEP/C	Master's	Yes	Yes	—	SP/EA	Yes	Yes	Yes
3. California	—	Master's	Yes	Yes	No	SP/SPA/EA	Yes	No	No
4. Colorado	LP/PDO/PDEP/C	Master's	No	No	No	SP/SPA/EA	No	No	Yes
5. Delaware	—	—	—	—	No	—	—	—	—
6. Hawaii	LP/PDO/RI/E/PDEP/C	Master's	No	No	Yes	SP/SPA/EA	No	No	No
7. Idaho	LP/PDO/E	—	Yes	Yes	Yes	SP/SPA/EA	—	No	Yes
8. Illinois	LP/PDO/RI/E/PDEP/C	Master's	Yes	Yes	No	SP/SPA	No	Yes	Yes
9. Indiana	O	Master's	No	No	No	SP/SPA/EA	Yes	Yes	Yes
10. Iowa	—	Master's	Yes	No	Yes	SP/SPA/EA	No	No	Yes
11. Kansas	O	Master's	Yes	Yes	—	SP/SPA/EA	—	—	—
12. Kentucky	LP/PDO/RI/E/PDEP	Master's + 30	—	—	Yes	SPA	No	No	Yes
13. Maine	LP/PDO/E/PDEP/O	Master's	Yes	Yes	Yes	SP/SPA/EA	—	—	Yes
14. Massachusetts	LP/PDO/RI/E/PDEP/C	Master's	Yes	Yes	Yes	SP/SPA/EA	—	No	Yes
15. Minnesota	LP/PDO/E	—	No	No	Yes	SP/SPA/EA	—	—	Yes
16. Missouri	LP/PDO/RI/E/PDEP/C	Master's	Yes	Yes	Yes	SPA/EA	Yes	No	Yes
17. Montana	—	Master's	Yes	Yes	Yes	SP/SPA/EA	No	No	Yes
18. Nebraska	LP/PDO/RI/E/PDEP/C/O	Master's	Yes	No	Yes	SP/EA	No	No	No
19. New Hampshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
20. North Carolina	—	Master's	No	No	No	SP/EA	Yes	No	Yes
21. North Dakota	LP/PDO	Master's	Yes	Yes	Yes	SP/EA	No	No	Yes
22. Ohio	—	Master's	Yes	Yes	Yes	SPA/EA	—	—	Yes
23. Pennsylvania	LP/PDO/RI/E/PDEP/C	Master's	Yes	No	No	SP/SPA/EA	No	Yes	No
24. Rhode Island	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
25. Vermont	LP/E/PDEP	Master's	Yes	Yes	No	SP/EA	No	No	Yes
26. Virginia	LP/PDO/RI/E/PDEP/C	Master's	Yes	Yes	Yes	EA	Yes	No	Yes
27. Wisconsin	LP/PDO/RI/E/PDEP/C	Master's	Yes	No	Yes	SP/SPA/EA	No	No	Yes

KEY: — = Don't Know/Cannot Determine.

LP = Leadership & Policy; PDO = Program Development & Organization; RI = Research & Inquiry; E = Evaluation; PDEP = Professional Development & Ethical Practice; C = Collaboration; O = Other; SP = Special Education; SPA = Special Education Administration; EA = Educational Administration.

Figure 1. States requiring special education administrator licensing, certification, or endorsement.



exam for director of special education. Seven states reported no data for this question, while reporters for three of the states said they were unsure if any exam was required.

Prior Teaching Experience

Prior teaching experience required for licensure/certification/endorsement was explored two ways: one question inquired about general education teaching experience requirements, and a second question asked about special education teaching experience requirements. Of the 23 states for which

Figure 2. CEC Administrator of Special Education Standards explicitly addressed by states requiring special education administrator credentialing.

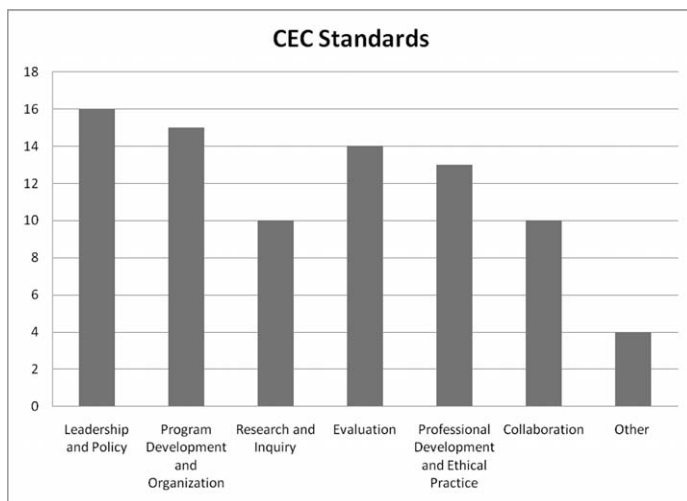
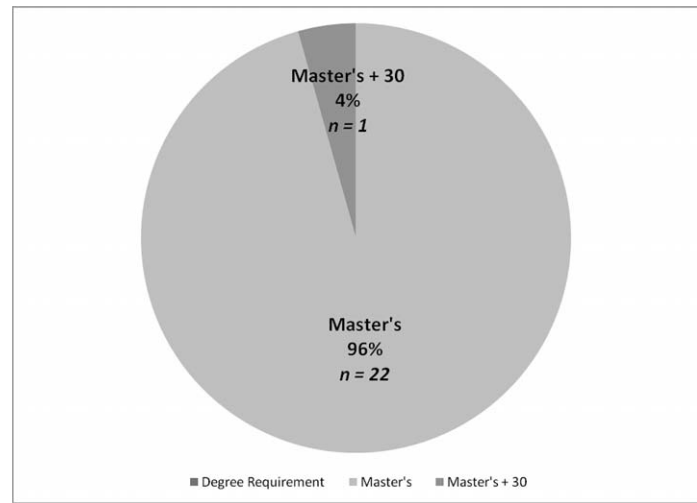


Figure 3. Degree requirements for states requiring special education administrator credentialing.



there were responses, 18 require prior teaching experience for credentialing as an administrator of special education. Thirteen states of the 23 require that the teaching experience involves students with special needs (see Figures 5 and 6). Three of the fourteen states provided a qualified response noting that teaching was loosely defined to include any of the related service personnel who work with students with special needs. Of the states that do not require teaching experience, one requires a license in the area of special education and another offers two tracks for credentialing as an administrator of special education—one with teaching experience and one without.

Figure 4. States requiring practica or internships for credentialing as administrators of special education.

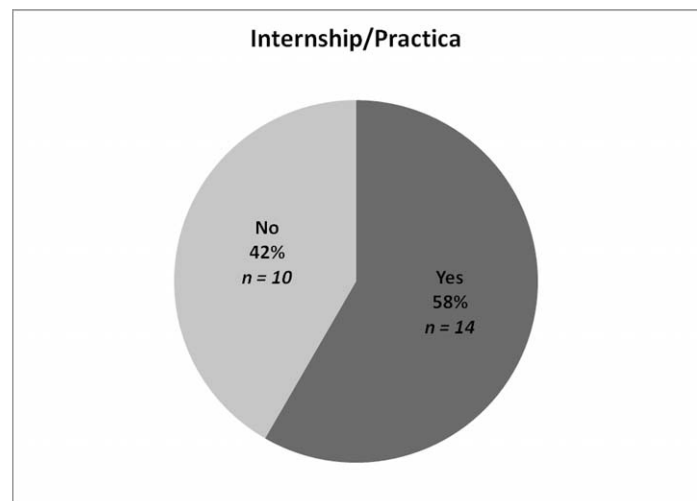
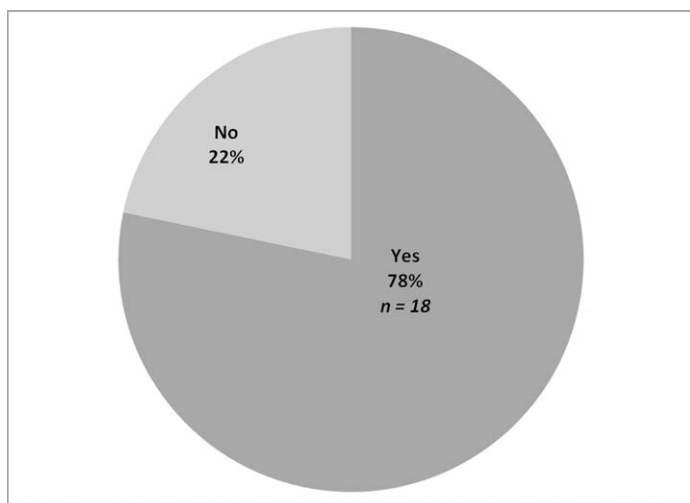


Figure 5. States requiring prior teaching experience for credentialing as an administrator of special education.



Of the 23 states for which there were responses, 18 require prior teaching experience for credentialing as an administrator of special education. Thirteen states of the 23 require that the teaching experience involves students with special needs ...

Continuing Education/Professional Development Requirements

Nineteen states reported having continuing education/professional development requirements for

Figure 6. States requiring prior special education teaching experience for credentialing as an administrator of special education.

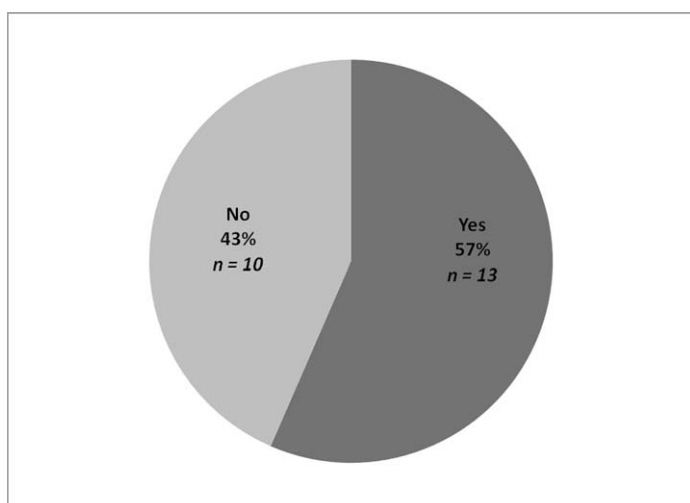
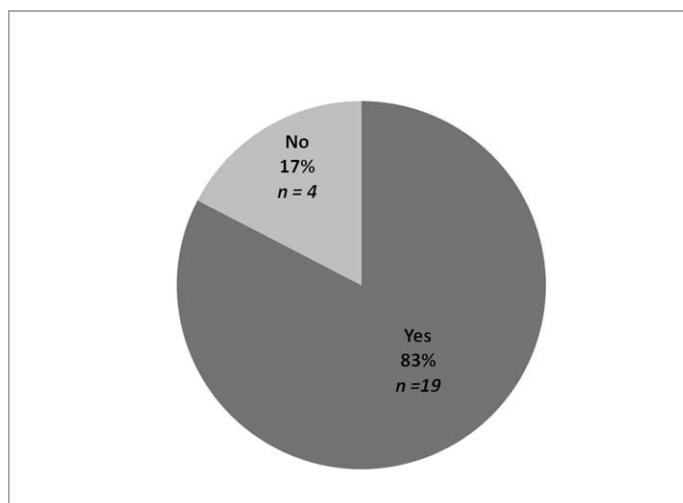


Figure 7. States requiring administrators of special education to complete continuing education units (CEUs) to maintain credentials.



administrators to keep their credentials active (see Figure 7). Some states offered additional comments. One state requires professional development credits to be specific to special education. These state professional development hourly requirements range from 42 to 180 hours completed within a range of 2 to 5 years, with 5 years being the norm for a completion cycle. One state requires 42 hours of leadership credit every 2 years, which is equivalent to 105 hours over a 5-year period. Two states require 60 hours or four graduate credits over 5 years. One state requires anyone holding professional certification to complete 175 hours of professional development during the 5-year validity period of their professional certification in order to maintain that certification. Another state requires 125 clock hours of professional development to be completed during a 5-year period. Another state requires 180 renewal points, rather than CEUs, over a 5-year period. Two states required college, university, or regional education agency credits for renewal, one requiring four credits and the other six credits. The state requiring six credits enacted a *grandfather clause* requiring no additional credits to maintain certification for those who were awarded licenses prior to 2004. Those who received licenses after 2004 are required to complete a 3 to 5 year professional development plan.

Discussion

Since the enactment of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142) 35 years ago, the state of special education

administration licensing/certification/endorsement requirements has changed dramatically. There has been a gradual rise in the number of states requiring separate special education administration certificates or licenses. In this study, 27 states require a special education director license or certificate, as compared to six states requiring that license or certificate between 1975 and 1980 (Forgnone & Collins, 1975; Stile & Pettibone, 1980). Inversely, the number of states requiring special education administration endorsements in this study is in stark contrast to the earlier studies (Stile, Abernathy, & Pettibone 1985; Stile & Pettibone, 1980; Whitworth & Hatley, 1979), down from a high of 25 states (Whitworth & Hatley, 1979) with only five states making this a requirement in 2010. The findings of this study were most closely aligned with those of Prillaman and Richarson (1985) and Stile, Abernathy, and Pettibone (1986), although it is difficult to make a distinction between certificates and endorsements in the data examined in those studies. Unlike this study, where only one state requires special education as part of the general education administration license, 18 states included authorization in special education as part of the general administration credential in the Stile, Abernathy, and Pettibone (1986) study. This shift in licensing practices is in concert with current national policy trends that demand greater accountability and a highly qualified workforce.

... title or licensing erosion not only creates confusion and threatens the stability of a profession, but it also has the potential to affect the educational outcomes of students with disabilities.

While most states use the title of director of special education or administrator of special education, there is some variation among the states requiring licensure/certification/endorsement. There is much confusion concerning the tasks associated with the role of administrators of special education, and that a broad knowledge base is required in understanding the needs of exceptional children. Based on the findings of Finkbinder (1981), titles are an integral component to those assuming professional identities. Titles are symbolic, representing the ethos and culture that define the essence of the embodiment of a discipline or

profession. Given the importance of their roles of ensuring that students with disabilities are provided a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, it is interesting that none of the states awarded licenses to administrators of special education at the level of the superintendency. In many districts, being relegated to the level of director places administrators of special education at the same level as the principals, constraining their ability to fully advocate for the needs of students with disabilities. It would then stand to reason that title or licensing erosion not only creates confusion and threatens the stability of a profession, but it also has the potential to affect the educational outcomes of students with disabilities.

Whitworth and Hatley (1985) noted that one of the basic problems with certification of any type (and particularly that of the special education leadership position) is the need for agreement across states. Credentialing often resembles a maze of various titles, labels, guidelines, and stipulations through which one must wander in search of understanding. Examining the Council for Exceptional Children (2009) publication, *What Every Special Educator Must Know: Ethics, Standards, and Guidelines for Special Educators*, it is evident that special education does not suffer from a lack of standards and categories, but instead needs to reconcile the national titular and professional standard ambiguities that dictate licensing requirements.

Administrators of special education with strong professional identities are considered to be essential to ensuring the delivery of high quality evidence-based special education programs in increasingly inclusive schools (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004; Schulman, 2005). These leaders are the standard bearers—the ones who set expectations of what it means to be a professional. Without this model of professionalism, there is a risk of ambiguity and erosion that challenges role identities.

The national standards (CEC, 2009) provide administrators of special education with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that form the foundation for professional identities, as well as a framework for developing professional identities. Not all states that require endorsement/certification/licensing fully incorporate the CEC administrator of special education standards into their state credentialing requirements. The standards least frequently included are collaboration and research

and inquiry. This is understandable in a field that demands proficiency in the laws and regulations (Valesky & Hirth, 1992), particularly laws that require ongoing program evaluation and annual accountability for student progress. Similar findings in recent studies have been noted that the knowledge items within the collaboration and research and inquiry standards were ranked low (Boscardin, McCarthy, & Delgado, 2009).

Mechanisms that are thought to aid in the development of professional identities include pre-service training anchored by professional standards and a predictable course of study. Schulman (2005) has referred to a predictable course of study for a profession, such as medicine or law, as signature pedagogies. It is Schulman's (2005) belief that signature pedagogies are another component that contributes to strong professional identities. Finkbinder (1981) suggested that, rather than following the practice of borrowing faculty from general education, pre-service training programs for special education administrators could provide core administrative courses and field experiences delivered by special education faculty. Prillaman and Richardson (1985) suggested the following in their study: (1) a post-master's degree in administration that would include appropriate coursework in educational administration; (2) 3 to 5 years of teaching in at least two areas of exceptionality; (3) an internship in special education administration; and (4) cognate or support coursework in such related areas as personnel management, sociology, psychology, and organizational theory.

Mechanisms that are thought to aid in the development of professional identities include pre-service training anchored by professional standards and a predictable course of study.

According to Billingsley (2005), professional teachers and administrators who complete accredited pre-service programs that prepare them well in their disciplinary area, and who then work in educational environments that continue to support evidence-based practices, are more likely to remain in their chosen profession and be more effective. In the best of all worlds professional standards would be

integrated into pre-service signature pedagogies, work-related experiences, and ongoing professional development and engagement.

Continuing education is a noticeable addition to credentialing requirements for administrators of special education since the passage of *No Child Left Behind*.

Many of the studies did not investigate prior teaching experience (Prillaman & Richardson, 1985; Stile, Abernathy, & Pettibone 1985; Stile & Pettibone, 1980; Valesky & Hirth, 1992), practicum/internship requirements (Prillaman & Richardson, 1985; Stile, Abernathy, & Pettibone 1985; Stile & Pettibone, 1980; Valesky & Hirth, 1992), or continuing education requirements (Forgnone & Collins, 1975; Prillaman & Richardson, 1985; Stile, Abernathy, & Pettibone 1985; Stile & Pettibone, 1980; Valesky & Hirth, 1992).

Only Forgnone and Collings (1975) and Whitworth and Hatley (1979) investigated prior teaching and practicum experience requirements. Forgnone and Collins (1975) found that, of the five states requiring certification/endorsement, four required special education teaching experience and practica. In the Whitworth and Hatley (1979) study, eleven states required prior teaching and one state required practicum experience. The importance of previous teaching experience (Milazzo & Blessing, 1964) and internships (Finkbinder, 1981; Marro & Kohl, 1972; Milazzo & Blessing, 1964) to the training of administrators of special education was noted in earlier studies. Teaching and internships are growing trends, but surprisingly, have not grown to the extent that might be expected at this writing.

Continuing education is a noticeable addition to credentialing requirements for administrators of special education since the passage of *No Child Left Behind*. All of these experiences, paired with the knowledge base, contribute to skill acquisition and induction into the field of special education leadership and administration in a way that course work alone cannot achieve. This ensures the development of evidenced-based leadership practices that, in turn, are linked to improved instructional practices by teachers, and translate to increased educational outcomes for students (Boscardin, 2007, 2004; Leithwood, et al., 2004).

Concerns and Needs for Future Research

The above discussion begs the question about the relationship between administrator of special education shortages and the quality of credentialing. While it is difficult to ascertain from the data offered by Arick and Krug (1993) and the 26th Annual Report to Congress (U.S. Department of Education, 2006) how state credentialing requirements might be related to shortages of administrators of special education, it is possible to identify areas in need of further investigation. Arick and Krug (1993) found in a national survey that 789 of the 1468 special education directors were currently experiencing a 10% special education administration personnel shortage. A need for 858 new or replacement administrators/directors (15%) was reported in the next three years, in addition to the 10% shortage reported by Arick and Krug (1993). Of the special education directors surveyed by Arick and Krug (1993), one-third did not possess certification in special education or appreciable experience in teaching special education.

As suggested by Leithwood, et al. (2004), the relationship between special education administrative practices and improved instructional practices of teachers and the educational outcomes of students with disabilities warrants further investigation.

The 26th Annual Report to Congress (U.S. Department of Education, 2006) is the most recent Office of Special Education (OSEP) report containing administrator data. This is a concern because the four-year absence of unreported data could be seen as a growing trend of benign neglect in the category of special education administration. At the same time, the Office of Special Education Programs has made the administration of special education a priority in the Personnel Leadership Grant competitions over the past 11 years.

According to the 26th Annual Report to Congress (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), the number of special education administrators and supervisors in local education agencies (LEAs) and school systems nationwide increased by 25%, from 14,604 in 1999 to

18,241 in 2006. In addition, a steady five percent of in-service special education administrators are not fully certified. This suggests uncertainty about the comprehensiveness of licensure requirements for special education administration and showcases the need to more fully prepare more leaders in special education. At the state level, the number of special education administrative personnel in state education agencies (SEAs) increased by 9%, from 1080 in 1999 to 1178 in 2006. The increasing number of SEA employees, most of whom are fully licensed (all but 0.018%), suggests the imperative of special education administration at the state level in setting the direction and vision, and providing oversight for compliance.

The need for well-trained and fully licensed special education administrative personnel at the LEA and SEA levels has increased as the population of American children of diverse status has expanded, and as districts and states are becoming increasingly accountable for meeting achievement targets of students with disabilities. There is a need to investigate whether gaps exist in the licensing requirements of special education administrators. It is equally important to understand how state requirements ensure that administrators of special education are "highly qualified" to coordinate the equitable delivery of services to students with exceptional needs. As suggested by Leithwood, et al. (2004), the relationship between special education administrative practices and improved instructional practices of teachers and the educational outcomes of students with disabilities warrants further investigation. Future research would do well to investigate the comprehensiveness of the credentialing requirements with regard to addressing the national standards for administrators of special education.

At a time when the cry is there is a national crisis in school leadership, it seems to make sense that states would require separate credentialing for administrators of special education, rather than combining the credentialing with the general educational administration. Future research that more closely investigates the general education administration credentialing requirements of those states not requiring specific licensure in special education administration would help clarify the relationship between credentialing practices and special education leadership effectiveness. Additionally, research is needed that investigates the career paths of special education directors in states

without separate credentialing for special education administrators. It is important to understand the relationship between the numbers of special education directors who gravitated toward other areas of administration that are unrelated to special education. These data may provide a better understanding about how commitment to and longevity in the field of special education administration is influenced by state credentialing structures.

The trend to combine administrator of special education licensing with general education administrator credentialing may have an effect on the decline in the number of special education administration graduate programs, particularly where university programs have a linear relationship with available state licenses. Of related interest are the alternate paths to credentialing outside of traditional higher education routes that states have made available to those seeking licensure/certification/endorsement as administrators of special education. It is important to understand the qualitative differences between accreditation requirements for universities and colleges offering licensing credentials and the requirements by states for those seeking licensing as administrators of special education through alternate paths. By investigating the presence of differences, it may be possible to better understand the affects of credentialing practices on the quality of service delivery and educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

It is difficult to train and supply personnel that contribute to the leadership of special education at the national, state, and local levels without the availability of state-of-the-art training programs. In a March, 1996 letter to Dr. Leonard Burrello, Professor of Educational Administration at Indiana University–Bloomington, Dr. Thomas Hehir, then the Director of the Office of Special Education Programs, emphasized the need for pre-service training programs that addressed both the dearth of training programs for special education administrators and the quality given the continual high demand by those in the field for qualified personnel. Understanding how faculty shortages (Castle & Arends, 2003; Smith, Pion, & Tyler, 2004) have affected university special education administration program viability, coupled with the limited resources attached to tenure track positions and special education program priorities, is another area that warrants investigation.

Summary

In the current educational climate of high accountability that includes all educators being highly qualified, it would seem reasonable to expect rigorous state credentialing requirements for administrators of special education. Unlike data that show that all states require licenses for special education teachers, national data from this study indicate that only a little over half of the states require licensure/certification/endorsement for administrators of special education. The titles used by states to identify the local administrator of special education are not commensurate with the responsibilities reflected in the national CEC Administrator of Special Education Standards (2009). State credentialing of administrators of special education, whether through universities or alternate paths, should reflect the same high standards of excellence. Continuing education/professional development is one avenue for maintaining high standards and excellence in the administrator of special education profession.

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