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Perceptions of Supportive Leadership Behaviors of School Site Administrators for Secondary Special Education Teachers

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School administrators fall short of supporting special education teachers due to a lack of knowledge of and experience in special education. The purpose of this study was to identify and compare leadership behaviors perceived as supportive by special education teachers and school site administrators. Data collection involved a survey instrument with 52 leadership behaviors from four domains: emotional, instructional, instrumental, and technical. The survey was sent via email to 200 participants who were previously identified as either special education teachers or school site administrators from secondary schools, grades 6-12, and 95 surveys were completed and used for data analysis.

The results indicated that the leadership behaviors perceived to be most supportive were found to be from the emotional domain. Teachers placed the highest value on having their decisions supported in front of other teachers and parents. Administrators perceived having interest in what teachers do in their classrooms as most valuable to their special education teachers. The mean scores from both groups were compared, and significant differences were found in three domains: emotional, instructional, and technical. There was a significant difference between the groups for 22 of the leadership behaviors.

The findings revealed that there is a difference in the perceptions of special education teachers and school administrators. Accordingly, school districts should develop and practice the leadership behaviors identified as most valuable in this study. Administrators can use these results to guide how they provide support to their teachers and should focus on providing the type of support that is perceived as most valuable based on what was reported by special education teachers.

Keywords: Perceptions, Leadership Behavior, & Special Education

“Instructional leader” is the new term for secondary school site administrators who are entrusted with ensuring that all of their students achieve academically. Administrators must have the knowledge and ability to work with both general and special educators to ensure that high-quality instruction is accessible to all students at their school (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003). According to NCLB, students with disabilities must be proficient in grade-level state standards, as measured by standardized testing, by the year 2014. It is the responsibility of educational leaders to ensure that every teacher, including special education teachers, is highly qualified in all core subjects taught (Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007).

The requirement for highly qualified teachers, as defined by NCLB, has created a national shortage of special education teachers. Moreover, special education teachers leave the special education environment at a much higher rate than do general education teachers (Katsiyannis, Zhang, & Conroy, 2003). Many studies have shown a disproportionate number of special education teachers who leave the profession early in their career (Connelly & Graham, 2009; Fore, Martin, & Bender, 2002; Garnes, Menlove, & Salzberg, 2004; Gehrke & McCoy, 2007; Kaff, 2004).

Historically, site-based instructional leaders were not responsible for special education programs. The special education director had been in charge of educational programs for students with disabilities. Now the role of the special education director has shifted to one that promotes collaboration between site administrators and special education teachers and ensures access by students with disabilities to all instructional programs (Boscardin, 2004, 2005; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003).

A large body of research has determined that the primary reason for the

high rate of teacher attrition in special education is the lack of support by school site administrators (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Fore et al., 2002; Garnes et al., 2004; Gehrke & McCoy, 2007; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Kaff, 2004; Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999). The type of support given to special education teachers plays an important role in their job satisfaction and effectiveness. Teachers who perceive that their administrators support them tend to find their work more rewarding, are more productive and motivated, and are more likely to stay in their teaching position (Littrell & Billingsley, 1994).

The reality is that school administrators fall short of supporting special education programs for many reasons. Studies show that the primary reason administrators are not providing sufficient support for special education programs is a lack of knowledge and experience in special education (Lasky & Karge, 2006; Monteith, 2000; Otto & Arnold, 2005; Praisner, 2003; Valesky & Hirth, 1992; Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006).

School site administrators have a responsibility to support all programs on their campuses, including general and special education. Over the years, multiple accountability policies have been implemented, holding public school educators accountable for high levels of achievement for all student subgroups. With adequate support and resources, special education teachers implement programs for students with disabilities. Moreover, special education programs contribute to the overall academic achievement for the entire school, as measured by annual state standardized testing.

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in three concepts: the role of instructional leaders,

accountability in special education, and leadership behaviors. Leadership behaviors have an impact on the level of support perceived by special education teachers. While there are many leadership behaviors that are perceived as supportive by special education teachers, there is a discrepancy between what leaders and special education teachers perceive as supportive. When special education teachers perceive that they are supported, they are more likely to remain in their teaching position and to be effective teachers.

Role of Instructional Leaders in Special Education

Up until the last decade, instructional leaders dealt primarily with general education programs. Their role, however, has evolved and they now need to redefine their role as inclusive of all subgroups of students (Boscardin, 2005). A large body of research has evaluated the impact that principals have on student achievement, finding that expectations, school climate, and other leadership behaviors have a direct effect (Cole-Henderson, 2000; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Witzers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). Witzers et al. conducted a meta-analysis of 37 studies to determine the specific leadership behaviors that contribute to student achievement. Three meta-analyses were conducted on the studies: the first was simultaneous, the second was on a subsample of all the studies, and the third involved a series of small analyses on each subdimension of educational leadership. The results indicated that school leadership has a significant effect on student achievement. Four leadership behaviors were found to be significant: supervision and evaluation, monitoring, visibility, and defining and communicating the mission. In particular, defining and communicating the mission was found to be the most relevant of all measured leadership behaviors in terms

of the impact on student achievement (Witzers et al., 2003).

In a survey of principals' knowledge of such programs, Farkas, Johnson, and Duffett (2003), found that 80% of principals believed that federal and state regulations for special education had increased in complexity and that school leaders are responsible for these programs, and thus it is necessary for principals to gain the knowledge needed to lead these programs at their school sites.

Several studies have identified a need for professional development for principals who have special education programs in their schools (Collins & White, 2001; Monteith, 2000; Smith & Colon, 1998; Valesky & Hirth, 1992). To determine the knowledge base of secondary principals in the area of special education, Wakeman et al. (2006) asked principals to describe their training in special education, finding that principals reported being informed in fundamental issues but lacked knowledge of specific current issues in special education.

Accountability in Special Education

Schools are required to report data from their performance on annual standardized assessments to the public; and those schools that do not make AYP, based on the guidelines of NCLB, receive sanctions from the federal government. NCLB has specific guidelines for which groups of students comprise significant subgroups, and, in many schools, students with disabilities are considered a significant subgroup; their scores and participation rates on the annual standardized tests contribute to a school's overall achievement.

The accountability provisions in NCLB have changed the focus of schools to the performance of every student and to school-wide improvement. "Principals have seen their roles shift toward emphasizing instructional leadership, monitoring the

achievement of all students, and using data to make decisions” (Lashley, 2007, p. 177). At one time, principals could afford to focus instruction on certain groups of students, but now, due to NCLB and public accountability, they must focus their leadership on all groups of students (Lashley, 2007).

As the primary educational leader, the principal’s attitudes and beliefs contribute to student achievement. The overall school culture is created by the principal and contributes to accountability. Training, supporting, and maintaining qualified special educators contribute to accountability in special education.

Principal Leadership Behaviors

Principals are the primary instructional leaders at their schools, and their specific leadership behaviors have an impact on student achievement. Boscardin (2005) noted:

Secondary school administrators are in a position to influence outcomes for high and low achieving students, particularly students with disabilities. Tied to these student-focused instructional leadership dimensions are dimensions of leadership that have the potential to improve the performance of teachers and increase student outcomes. (p. 27)

Through specific leadership behaviors, the school principal supports teachers who provide instruction to students; therefore, these leaders have a direct effect on achievement. Boscardin summarized the finding from multiple researchers by listing four ways that administrators affect learning:

(a) attending to basic team tasks and setting clear priorities, (b) making knowledge-based decisions through the use of problem-solving, (c) encouraging instructional flexibility and appropriate instructional

groupings, and (d) developing strong professional bonds among teachers through teams. (p. 27)

The attitude of the school principal plays a role in the success of inclusion programs for students with disabilities. In studying elementary and secondary school principals, Idol (2006) found that they were in favor of inclusion as long as there was extra support for the general education classroom teacher. She also found that each of the schools at which these principals served made noticeable improvements on statewide test scores over a period of four years due to the classroom inclusiveness.

Guzman (1997) determined the common leadership behaviors of principals that contributed to successful implementation of inclusive programs for students with disabilities as including: (a) open systems of communication among staff members, (b) active involvement in IEP meetings, (c) personal communication with parents of students with disabilities, (d) established policies for consistent discipline, and (e) continuous personal professional development.

In a review of research, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) found that the literature pointed to three conclusions regarding how successful leadership influences student achievement: the impact that an administrator has on people and the organization, the way leaders use clues regarding to whom to pay close attention, and the nature of the influences and practices on details within the organization. The educational leader is responsible for setting direction for the organization by creating a purpose or vision, and the principal needs to practice leadership behaviors such as developing people, building capacity, capturing and maintaining the attention of school personnel, and monitoring policies and regulations (Leithwood et al., 2004).

In studying how collective or shared leadership affects student learning, Leithwood and Mascall (2008) found that high-achieving schools had leaders who had broad influence across the school, whereas leadership in low-achieving schools was not as evident. The three variables that had a direct influence on student achievement were capacity, motivation, and work setting; overall, however, collective leadership had a modest indirect effect on student achievement. The greatest effect on student achievement was found through the influence that leaders had on teacher motivation and work setting (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). For this study, the work setting was described in terms of class size, availability of instructional assistants, total number of students, time for professional development, curriculum, and adequacy of the budget.

Leadership Behaviors Perceived as Supportive

There are many leadership behaviors that are perceived as supportive by special education teachers. Additionally, the perception of which behaviors are supportive differs between special educators and site administrators.

Types of Support

The type of support given to special education teachers plays an important role in their job satisfaction and effectiveness (Balfour, 2002; Ewy, 2007; House, 1981; Littrell & Billingsley, 1994; McFarland, 2009). Teachers who perceive that their administrators support them tend to find their work more rewarding, are more productive and motivated, and are more likely to stay in their teaching position (Littrell & Billingsley, 1994).

House (1981) identified four dimensions of administrator support: emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal. Littrell and Billingsley (1994) adapted these dimensions to principals in

elementary and secondary schools. Emotional support is the way that a principal openly communicates, shows appreciation, and takes an interest in the teacher's work and ideas. Instrumental support involves a principal's showing support by ensuring that the teachers have all supplies needed, including resources, space, and time. Informational support occurs when principals provide strategies for the improvement of instructional practices and classroom management. Appraisal support is defined as giving feedback and constructive criticism on a regular basis.

Perceptions of Special Education Teachers

Whether special education teachers choose to continue to teach involves a number of variables, including the level of job stress, job satisfaction, and administrative support (Gersten et al., 2001). Importantly, school leaders have control over many of the factors that can alleviate the stress of special education teachers. Gersten et al. used a survey methodology with three large school districts to determine which factors affect special education teachers' intent to stay in their position. Factor analysis was used to cluster survey items to determine the variables for path analysis, which yielded eight variables: support from principals, central office support, professional development opportunities, role dissonance, job stress, job satisfaction, commitment to the profession, and years of special education teaching experience.

When special education teachers perceive support from their administrator, they are more likely to remain in their position. Using a survey methodology, Otto and Arnold (2005) found that 69% of special educators reported satisfaction with the level of support that they received from their administrator. Nevertheless, the researcher felt that further studies were needed to determine the differences between the

support felt by experienced teachers and those who were new to the profession (less than five years' experience).

Miller et al. (1999) found 13 variables that predicted special education teachers' decision to remain in special education, four of which were predictor variables, which were found to have the most direct effect on attrition, with nine additional variables. The predictor variables included teacher certification status, perceived stress levels, overall school climate, and age (Miller et al., 1999). The other nine variables included perception of adequacy of job preparation, years of teaching experience, perceived support from building administrator, perceived autonomy, perceived role conflict, professional satisfaction with professional opportunities, interaction with colleagues, salary, and commitment to special education teaching. Although their research elicited valuable information about factors that predict a teacher's decision to remain in the field of special education, they concluded that further research is needed to better understand the variables that influence special education teachers' choice to remain in or leave the profession.

Littrell and Billingsley (1994) sought to identify which support dimensions were perceived as the most important for special and general educators. Of the four support dimensions noted earlier, emotional support was rated the highest by special educators, with a statistically significant difference in mean scores as compared to general educators. They concluded that principals who provided the most support in the emotional and informational dimensions had teachers who were the most satisfied in their jobs.

In a similar study of types of support, but with different types (emotional, environmental, instructional, and technical), Ewy (2007) surveyed 172 special education

teachers to determine the types of support that they valued from administrators. The results indicated that special education teachers found emotional support to be the most valuable emotional support and was found to be the most important among special education teachers (Ewy, 2007).

Although administrators do provide support to special educators, these educators do not often perceive as supported by administrators (Littrell & Billingsley, 1994). To study these relative perceptions, Balfour (2002) developed the Administrative Support Survey. Both the quantitative survey data and the qualitative data from the open-ended questions were analyzed, resulting in the finding that emotional support was the most valuable type of support.

Perceptions of Site Administrators

It is a school administrator's job to support their special education teachers in ways that they perceive are the most valuable. Guzman (1997) conducted a study to determine which leadership behaviors were valued by principals in inclusive schools and found several factors in common. One factor was the belief that the establishment of a system of communication about policies and practices as well allowing teachers to make recommendations for changes would provide needed support (Guzman, 1997). Another factor was the importance of having active involvement in development of IEPs and attending meetings. Additional perceptions of what behaviors were supportive of special education teachers included working collaboratively with their teachers and helping support student discipline (Guzman, 1997).

Administrators, who perceive special education as an opportunity, will likely have a higher rate of success supporting the program and thus encounter fewer problems (Smith & Colon, 1998). Cruzeiro and

Morgan (2006) surveyed school principals about which behaviors they perceive as supportive in how they administer special education programs, and they identified five items that principals felt were most supportive. All five focused on teacher support and the identification of professional development needs: communication of confidence and respect to all staff members, encouragement of teacher involvement in professional development, positive student behavior support, acknowledgement of staff efforts regularly, and active involvement in the IEP process (Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006).

Cruzeiro and Morgan (2006) found that principals unified the school system by equally including special education programs into the overall educational program. Principals felt that the communication of the school's mission, managing curriculum and instruction, and monitoring all students' progress were important to a successful special education program but that instructional support and the facilitation of collaboration between general and special educators were the most valuable.

Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) asked principals to rate leadership practices that they felt were effective, of which three were reported as the most effective: providing heterogeneous groups in classes with students who have disabilities, cooperative learning, and collaboration. Nevertheless, these practices were not implemented consistently. The researchers concluded that further investigation was needed in regard to what they perceive as valuable practices. The results of this study suggested that principals have a variety of ideas and attitudes, and, thus, future research should investigate definitions, organizational structures, and the skills and practices that principals need to help create effective learning environments that are valued in special education programs.

Principals do not feel prepared with the knowledge needed to successfully administer special education programs, and numerous studies have concluded that there is a need for professional development (Lowe & Brigham, 2000; Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000; Smith & Colon, 1998; Valesky & Hirth, 1992; Wakeman et al., 2006). Principals believe that, with more knowledge and training, they will have a better idea of how to provide the support that special education teachers perceive as supportive. Wakeman et al. stated:

Principals who more readily understood the laws and needs of students with disabilities also supported special education teachers with resources. One reason for this may be that principals who understand what teachers need to teach and why they need it are more apt to provide resources to meet the instructional needs of the students. (p. 167)

The more knowledge that principals have of special education, the more they will support the programs on their campus, and the more likely they will be to demonstrate leadership behaviors that are perceived as supportive to special education teachers.

The purpose of this research is to identify and compare specific leadership behaviors perceived as supportive by special education teachers and school site administrators. In particular, this study focuses on the role that the administrator plays in providing the support needed to ensure the success of special education programs (Smith & Colon, 1998). This study identifies the specific leadership behaviors that special educators perceive as valuable and supportive. A comparison is made to the behaviors that administrators perceive are supportive for their teachers. The research question this study addressed is, what is the relationship between what

teachers perceive as supportive and what administrators perceive as supportive?

This research is important and will make a significant contribution to educational leadership because site administrators, to retain special education teachers, need to know which leadership behaviors are perceived as supportive to special education teachers and how much support to provide. Few studies have been conducted to determine which specific leadership behaviors are perceived as valuable and supportive by special education teachers. This study fills gaps in the research, which relates to the identification of leadership behaviors that are perceived as supportive from the perspective of both special education teachers and school site administrators.

This study provides information that will guide site administrators in the most valuable ways to support their special education teachers, thus contributing to the retention of these teachers.

Methods

Participants

This study was conducted within one Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) in a suburban area in Southern California, which is comprised of two unified school districts with a total of 15 secondary schools. The demographics of the student populations in these two districts are similar and were obtained for the 2008-09 school year from the California Department of Education. Table 1 provides a summary of the demographic data for the two districts.

Table 1
Demographic Data

Data	District A	District B
Total Population	22,000	16,500
Secondary School Population	10,000	9,000
High Schools	4	2
Middle Schools	6	3
Secondary Administrators	28	16
Secondary Special Education Teachers	42	34

Table 2 presents the percentages for each subgroup in the two districts.

Percentages were rounded off to the nearest whole number.

Table 2
Subgroup Percentages

Subgroup	District A	District B
Hispanic	78	62
Asian	13	22
White	5	4
Free and Reduced Lunch	69	59
English Language Learners	22	34
Special Education	10	10

Research Design

A survey methodology was chosen because surveys enable the researcher to determine participant characteristics as well as their perceptions, ideas, and experiences (Fowler, 1993; Frankel & Wallen, 1996). According to Nardi (2006), survey methodology is an effective technique for measuring experiences and beliefs, and data can be collected from a large number of participants with anonymity. Surveys have been used to collect data and answer research questions, similar to those presented in this study, by multiple researchers (Balfour, 2002; Cook, Semmel, & Gerber, 1999; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Dyal, Flynt, & Bennett-Walker, 1996; Ewy, 2007; Lasky & Karge, 2006; McFarland, 2009; Wakeman et al., 2006). The initial step was to conduct interviews to develop the questionnaire. Once the questionnaire was finalized, it was distributed to site administrators and secondary special education teachers.

The research question this study answered was, what is the relationship between what teachers perceive as supportive and what administrators perceive

as supportive? It was hypothesized that leadership behaviors that are perceived as supportive by special education teachers will be different than those that are perceived as supportive by administrators.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

A modified version of the Administrative Support Survey was used to collect data for this study. Balfour (2002) developed the original version of this survey designed to identify valuable and supportive leadership behaviors for special education teachers in four domains: emotional support, environmental support, instructional support, and technical support. Since the development of this survey, Ewy (2007) and McFarland (2009) have modified it for use in similar studies, and it has elicited valuable results. Thus, it was selected for use in this study.

Results

There was a significant difference between what special education teachers and site administrators perceive as the most valuable leadership behaviors. The data were analyzed with SPSS, Version 16.0 for Windows, using descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVAs, with $p < .05$ for

determining statistical significance. The survey was sent via email to 200 participants who were previously identified as either special education teachers or school site administrators in secondary schools, grades 6-12. A total of 95 surveys were completed and submitted. Of these, 35 respondents identified themselves as secondary site administrators, 59 as special education teachers, and one person did not specify either group. The total response rate for this study was 47.5%, which was considered an acceptable response rate for data analysis.

Demographic Information

Participants were identified by the type of school where they worked, the number of principals and assistant principals at their school, and the position that they held. Participants worked at four different types of school sites: 15.8% Elementary, K-6 school, 14.7% Elementary/Middle, K-8 school, 23.2% Middle, 6/7-8 school, and 46.3% High, 9-12 school.

Participants also were identified based on how many principals served in their school full time: 95.8% one principal, 2.1% two principals, and 2.1% three principals. Participants also were asked how many assistant principals served in their school full time: 13.7% no assistant principals, 37.9% one assistant principal, 6.3% two assistant principals, 26.3% three assistant principals, 14.7% four assistant principals, and 1.1% five assistant principals.

Participants who represented the five different categories (resource specialist, self-contained, consultant/related services, co-teaching/inclusion, and school administrator) described the delivery model for their primary assignment. For purposes of data analysis, the four different special education positions were combined, and, thus, two different groups were utilized for analysis: special educator and school administrator. There were a total of 95

participants, of whom 62.1% identified themselves as special educators, 36.8% as school administrators, and 1.1% as not indicated.

Participants were asked about their plans for remaining in their current assignment for the next school year: 87.4% yes, 3.2% no, and 9.5% not sure yet. Of the participants, 60% were female, 36.8% were male, and 3% did not respond. Participants also indicated how many years of experience they had as either a special educator or site administrator: 29.5% had 0-5 years' experience, 31.6% had 6-10 years' experience, 17.9% had 11-15 years' experience, 5.3% had 16-20 years' experience, and 13.7% had 21 or more years of experience.

The results for each age group are as follows: 4.2% under 30, 10.5%, 31-35; 21.1%, 36-40; 14.7%, 41-45; 8.4%, 46-50; 8.4%, 51-55; 23.2%, 56-60; and 6.3%, 61 or older. Finally, they were identified in various ethnic groups: 4.7% Asian, 3.2% African American, 24.2% Hispanic, 45.3% White, 9.5% other/multiple, and 3.2% declined to state.

The administrative support section of the survey presented 52 leadership behaviors, and participants were instructed to rate each of the items according to their perceived value of the support. The responses in this portion of the survey were based on a 4-point Likert scale, with 1 = not valuable at all, 2 = somewhat valuable, 3 = very valuable, and 4 = extremely valuable.

The 52 leadership behaviors were categorized into four domains, emotional, instrumental, instructional, and technical, which were predetermined based on the original version of this survey (Balfour, 2002). One-way ANOVA was used to determine whether there was any statistical significance between the behaviors that were perceived valuable by special educators and school administrators. Each of the specific

leadership behaviors were examined separately, and then analyses were conducted utilizing data from the four domains together.

The mean scores for each of the four domains were compared to determine the relationship between the perceptions of special educators and administrators. Figure 1 presents the mean differences for the four domains. There was a difference between the two groups for three of the four domains: emotional, instructional, and technical. There was no difference between the two

groups in the instrumental domain. The mean score for special educators in the emotional domain was $M = 3.10$ and for administrators, $M = 3.45$; for the instructional domain for special educators, $M = 2.43$ and for administrators, $M = 2.85$; and for the technical domain for special educators, $M = 2.61$ and for administrators, $M = 3.04$. There was no difference in mean scores for the instrumental domain. The mean score for special educators was $M = 3.08$ and for administrators, $M = 3.05$.

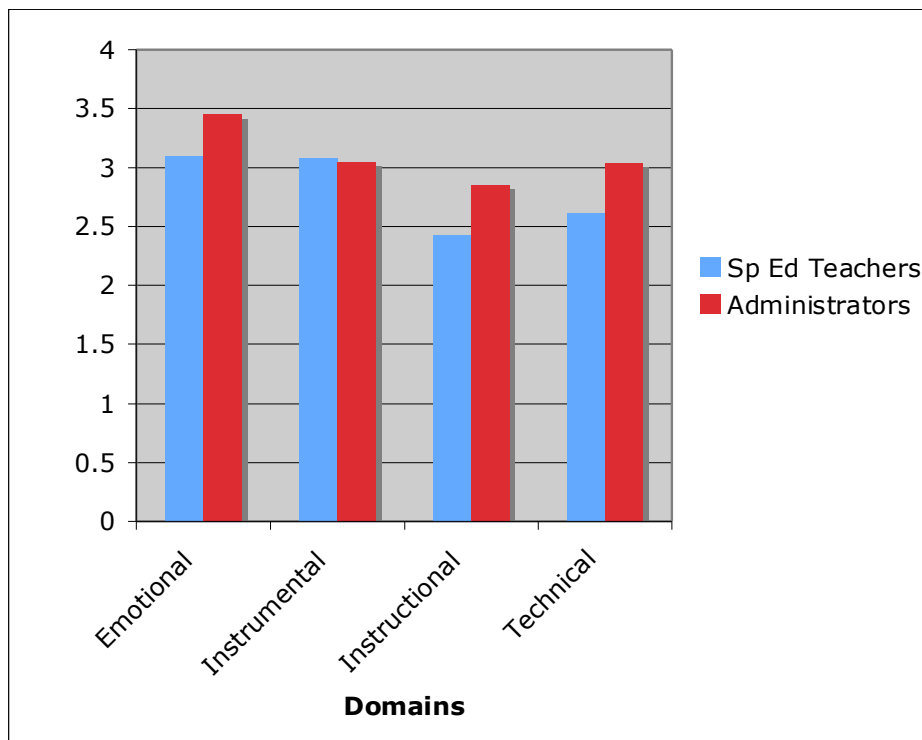


Figure 1. Mean differences for the four domains.

A one-way ANOVA was used to determine whether there were any significant differences between the mean scores of special educators and site administrators for each of the 52 behaviors. The behaviors were grouped into the domains for analysis.

Emotional Domain

There were a total of eight behaviors for which a significant difference was found between the perceptions of special educators and administrators in the emotional domain. The results revealed that significantly more administrators reported making teachers feel that they are making a difference [$F(1, 91) =$

4.41, $p < .05$). They also had a greater interest in what teachers do in the classroom [$F(1, 92) = 19.65, p < .05$] and believe in giving teachers genuine and specific feedback about their work [$F(1, 92) = 11.45, p < .05$]. Further, the results revealed that significantly more administrators, as compared to special educators, felt that telling teachers when they are on the right track with their work is valuable [$F(1, 92) = 6.16, p < .05$].

Administrators felt that observing frequently in teachers' classrooms is more valuable than what special educators perceived [$F(1, 91) = 25.32, p < .05$]. In addition, they perceived that listening and giving teachers undivided attention when they talk is more supportive [$F(1, 92) = 4.73, p < .05$]. Giving teachers recognition

for a job well done [$F(1, 90) = 4.02, p < .05$] and recognizing special projects or programs in teachers' classrooms [$F(1, 92) = 6.99, p < .05$] were both perceived as having a higher value by administrators than by special educators.

Of the 16 behaviors in the emotional domain, eight were found not to significantly differ in terms of value between administrators and special educators. The data revealed that both groups perceived these eight behaviors as having the same level of value. Table 3 provides a summary of the behaviors, F values, and p values.

Table 3
F Values and Significance Levels for the Emotional Domain

No.	Leadership Behavior	F	p
1	Supports teachers' decisions in front of parents.	.39	.53
2	Makes teachers feel that they are making a difference.	4.41	.04*
3	Is interested in what teachers do in the classroom.	19.65	.00*
8	Takes an interest in teachers' professional development and give opportunities to grow.	3.09	.08
9	Gives teachers genuine and specific feedback about their work.	11.45	.00*
10	Tells teachers when they are on the right track with their work.	6.16	.02*
12	Shows confidence in teachers' actions and decisions.	.79	.38
13	Observes frequently in teachers' classrooms.	25.32	.00*
15	Is available to discuss teachers' personal problems or concerns.	2.66	.11
22	Listens and gives teachers undivided attention when they talk.	4.73	.03*
24	Seeks teachers' input on important issues in the school.	2.65	.11
30	Gives teachers' recognition for a job well done.	4.02	.05*
31	Recognizes special projects or programs in teachers' classrooms.	6.99	.01*
41	Is available to discuss teachers' professional problems or concerns.	2.32	.13
51	Permits teachers to use their own judgment to solve problems.	1.41	.24

52	Supports teachers' decisions in front of other teachers.	.39	.53
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Note. * $p < .05$.

Instrumental Domain

There were a total of 12 behaviors in the instrumental domain, and none was significant. The data revealed that special education teachers and administrators

perceive each of the behaviors in this domain at the same level of value. Table 4 provides a summary of the behaviors, F values, and p values.

Table 4
F Values and Significance Levels for the Instrumental Domain

No.	Leadership Behavior	F	p
7	Ensures that teachers have enough planning time.	.13	.72
21	Keeps teachers informed of school and district events.	1.50	.22
25	Makes sure that teachers do not have to switch between too many grade levels and subjects.	1.03	.31
32	Arranges teachers' schedules in a way to reduce the time spent of paperwork and in meetings.	.48	.50
34	Provides teachers with the funds they need to get supplies.	3.52	.06
35	Assigns teachers to work with students for whom they are trained and certified to teach.	.04	.85
36	Makes sure teachers have the space they need to teach and plan.	.20	.65
37	Makes sure teachers have the equipment they need for their classroom (e.g., computers, TVs, projectors).	1.08	.30
38	Does not assign teachers the most challenging students in school all at one time.	1.18	.28
42	Provides teachers with clerical assistance to schedule meeting and complete paperwork.	1.77	.19
44	Keeps the student diversity in teachers' classrooms to a minimum (grade levels and exceptionalities).	1.82	.18
49	Communicates to the school staff that special education students and teachers are an important part of the school.	1.68	.20

Instructional Domain

There were a total of 13 behaviors in the instructional domain, of which seven were significant. The results revealed that administrators perceived each of the behaviors to be more valuable than did special education teachers. Administrators reported value in giving teachers information about modifying instruction [$F(1, 91) = 16.84, p < .05$]. Additionally, administrators felt that giving teachers information about instructional techniques would help improve teaching [$F(1, 90) = 7.49, p < .05$]. Administrators wanted to help teachers decide when and how to teach certain subjects [$F(1, 91) = 13.65, p < .05$]; suggest alternative instructional methods for

students who are struggling [$F(1, 90) = 7.64, p < .05$]; and help teachers write lesson plans [$F(1, 92) = 9.72, p < .05$]. Further, significantly more administrators perceived that giving teachers information on ways to make instruction meaningful [$F(1, 91) = 20.73, p < .05$] and helping teachers pick the right instructional programs for their students [$F(1, 92) = 5.18, p < .05$] were valuable leadership behaviors than did special educators. Six behaviors from the instructional domain were found to not differ in their perceptions of value by special educators versus administrators. Table 5 provides a summary of the behaviors, *F* values, and *p* values.

Table 5

F Values and Significance Levels for the Instructional Domain

No.	Leadership Behavior	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
4	Gives teachers information about modifying instruction.	16.84	.00*
5	Gives teachers information about instructional techniques that will help improve teaching.	7.49	.01*
11	Helps teachers interpret state curriculum standards and apply them to teaching special education students.	2.52	.12
14	Helps teachers select or create curriculum for students with disabilities.	.85	.36
16	Helps teachers decide when and how to teach certain subjects.	13.65	.00*
17	Helps teachers use planning time effectively.	3.53	.06
18	Suggests alternative instructional methods for students who are struggling.	7.64	.01*
19	Helps teachers select or create appropriate instructional materials.	2.27	.14
40	Helps teachers implement co-teaching strategies.	2.52	.12
43	Helps teachers write lesson plans.	9.72	.00*
45	Gives teachers information on ways to make instruction meaningful.	20.73	.00*
47	Provides teachers with strategies for working with paraprofessionals.	.91	.34
48	Helps teachers pick the right instructional programs for their students (e.g., reading, math)	5.18	.03*

Note. * $p < .05$.

Technical Domain

There were a total of 11 behaviors in the technical domain, of which seven were significant. Administrators perceive a higher level of value when providing teachers with reliable feedback about IEPs [$F(1, 92) = 8.04, p < .05$]. They also reported a higher level of value for providing teachers with reliable input about the progress reports they write for students [$F(1, 92) = 13.95, p < .05$]. Helping teachers follow the federal and state special education regulations [$F(1, 92) = 7.28, p < .05$] was perceived as more valuable by administrators. In addition, helping teachers ensure that they meet confidentiality requirements [$F(1, 90) = 23.90, p < .05$] was more valuable to administrators. Further, a difference was found between how administrator and special educators perceive the following leadership behaviors: helping teachers get information from the central

office special education department in the school district [$F(1, 91) = 4.645, p < .05$], giving teachers reliable information about due dates for special education paperwork [$F(1, 91) = 10.63, p < .05$], and helping teachers coordinate related services for their students [$F(1, 92) = 12.15, p < .05$].

There were only four behaviors for which there were no significant differences between administrators and special educators. The data indicate that teachers and administrators felt the same way about providing feedback about assessments conducted with students, helping teachers to find information in special education files, developing schedules to ensure students received the required hours per their IEPs, and helping teachers get assistive technology for their students. Table 6 provides a summary of the behaviors, F values, and p values.

Table 6
F Values and Significance Levels for the Technical Domain

No.	Leadership Behavior	F	p
6	Provides teachers with reliable feedback about IEPs.	8.04	.01*
20	Provides teachers with reliable input about the progress reports they write for students.	13.95	.00*
23	Helps teachers follow the federal and state special education regulations.	7.28	.01*
26	Provides teachers with reliable feedback about the assessments they conduct with students.	3.56	.06
27	Helps teachers ensure that they meet confidentiality requirements.	23.90	.00*
28	Helps teachers get information from the central office special education department in the school district.	4.65	.03*
29	Gives teachers reliable information about due dates for special education paperwork (e.g., IEPs, triennial evaluations, annual reviews).	10.63	.00*
33	Helps teachers find information in special education files.	3.01	.09

39	Helps teachers coordinate related services for their students (e.g., speech/language, physical therapy).	12.15	.00*
46	Helps teachers develop schedules to ensure students are receiving the required hours of service per their IEPs.	.91	.34
50	Helps teachers get assistive technology devices for their students.	.04	.85

Note. * $p < .05$.

Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The mean scores for special educators and administrators were compared for each of the four domains, with a resulting difference in perceptions for three domains: emotional, instructional, and technical. There was no difference in the way that special educators and administrators perceived the value of behaviors from the instrumental domain. For each of the three domains where a difference was noted, the administrators had the higher mean scores. Teachers, in general, focus primarily on their instructional strategies in the classroom, whereas administrators must focus on all aspects of education due to the high levels of accountability for student achievement. NCLB holds schools accountable for the achievement of all students, including those with disabilities. Administrators' roles have shifted to emphasizing instructional leadership and monitoring the achievement of students (Lashley, 2007). Administrators may have ranked each of the leadership behaviors on the survey with a higher score because they feel pressure to support all programs equally and thus have the concept of support on their mind at all times. One can conclude that administrators had higher mean scores overall because they felt that all of the leadership behaviors were valuable, as it is their job to support their teachers and each of the behaviors.

There was a significant difference between special educators and administrators on 22 of the leadership

behaviors in this study. For each of these behaviors, administrators ranked them of higher value than did special educators. It was hypothesized that leadership behaviors perceived as supportive by special education teachers would be different than those that are perceived as supportive by administrators. The data supported this hypothesis, with a significant difference in these 22 leadership behaviors.

Special education teachers and administrators have different perceptions about what is considered valuable support. There are different demands placed on each group, and, therefore, there are differences in what they perceive to be of value with regard to leadership behaviors. Special education teachers' jobs are to work directly with students, and they are responsible for the proper paperwork and legal requirements for the services for students with disabilities who are on their caseload. Administrators have the responsibility to lead and support all programs at their schools, and they are held accountable for student achievement.

The difference in the way that administrators and special education teachers perceive the value of leadership behaviors could be due to administrators' lack of knowledge of and experience with special education (Lasky & Karge, 2006; Monteith, 2000; Otto & Arnold, 2005; Praisner, 2003; Valesky & Hirth, 1992; Wakeman et al., 2006). The more knowledge that principals have about special education, the better that they will be able to understand how best to support their teachers and programs. Praisner (2003) found that principals who had a positive

attitude toward special education were more likely to provide support for the programs.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations of the present study. First, it included only secondary special education teachers of grades 6 through 12 and secondary site administrators. The survey data were collected from individuals who were employed in the selected districts as limited by the researcher. Special educators and site administrators from elementary schools were not included, as the focus was on secondary grades only. Previous studies compared the perceptions of support for special education teachers; elementary and secondary teachers were found to have perceptions that were different from those of administrators (Balfour, 2002; Ewy, 2007; McFarland, 2009).

Second, there was a sample of only 59 special education teachers and 35 administrators. Thus, the results of this study are generalizable only to populations with similar demographics. Despite the small sample size, the findings are valuable for understanding the differences in how administrators and special educators perceive the value of leadership behaviors.

Third, the survey utilized for data collection limits the results. The survey was modified from the original instrument that was designed by Balfour (2002) for use in a similar study. The way that the survey was designed, including the presentation, the wording of the questions, and the chosen leadership behaviors, could affect how participants responded.

Implications for Future Practice

Overall, teachers who perceive that their administrators support them tend to find their work more rewarding, are more productive and motivated, and are more likely to stay in their teaching position (Littrell & Billingsley, 1994). This study has provided an insight into understanding

how special education teachers feel most supported. These results show that there is a significant difference in the perceptions between what administrators and special educators feel are valuable supports; therefore, administrators should focus on providing the type of support that is perceived as most valuable by special educators.

To reduce the gap in perceptions of site administrators and special education teachers, administrators should develop and practice the leadership behaviors identified as most valuable in this study by special education teachers. Site administrators need to have an understanding of the specific behaviors that are perceived as the most supportive for their special education teachers, and they should provide an environment that is emotional supportive. They should also consider creating an open line of communication with their special education teachers so that their confidence in the decisions made by the teachers is evident. It is also important to make sure administrators listen carefully and give teachers their undivided attention when they talk.

The results of this study have meaning for special education teachers and administrators from the SELPA where this study took place as well as for other secondary special education teachers and administrators from similar districts. To effectively support secondary special education teachers, administrators need to know what leadership behaviors are perceived as supportive. Garnes et al. (2004) concluded that future research was needed to evaluate the working conditions of special education teachers and to find ways to improve these conditions. Special educators will be more likely to remain in their positions when provided with emotional support, as was found in the current study. It is beneficial for districts to

consider providing training to their administrators to help them gain knowledge

and an understanding of how special educators feel supported.

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