

IMPROVING EDUCATION OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS WITH AN EMOTIONAL
DISABILITY THROUGH HIGHLY STRUCTURED TEACHER LEARNING
OPPORTUNITIES

by
Kathryn Snow

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Abstract

Due to their unique needs, students with an emotional disability require teachers and programming grounded in evidence-based practices implemented with fidelity to be successful. In this needs assessment, I employed a convergent-parallel, mixed methods approach to explore teacher perspectives around the constructs of time, resources, and support needed to adequately support students with an ED. I utilized Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory as a framework for exploring the literature to help ensure an understanding of the full scope of constructs that impact outcomes for students with an ED. Using a mixed method design, I collected both quantitative and qualitative data, including a survey and interview, to provide a comprehensive view of the perspectives of teachers working with students who have an ED. Participants included teachers from an identified comprehensive high school in the district. Teachers identified issues around the need for further (a) preparation and (b) resources beyond professional learning as significantly impacting their ability to adequately support students with an ED. I constructed a tool that, implemented over time, may be the first step in building an ecosystem of learning that can be networked across a district and is sustainable and measurable for both teachers and school-based leaders.

Keywords: professional development, evidence-based practices, emotional disability, onboarding, teacher preparation

Executive Summary

Students with emotional disabilities (ED) experience lower outcomes than their peers (MSDE, 2022). While safeguards from Federal law provides direction for local school inclusion of general education, it leaves the details of implantation to the schools (IDEA, 2019). Wood et al. (2017) highlighted that students with an ED need programming grounded in evidence-based practices implemented throughout their school day; however, this programming varies widely from school to school. A literature review revealed factors such as inconsistencies in staff training, time, and programming for students with ED all contribute to these outcomes and impact a teacher's ability to support students with an ED (McKenna et al., 2019; Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Further, teachers working with students who have an ED are more likely to be less experienced and less credentialed than their teaching peers, which often leads to teacher burnout within the first few years of teaching (Brunsting et al., 2014).

An empirical study was developed to explore the three most prevalent factors that emerged out of the literature review, which were time, resources and professional learning (Brunsting et al., 2014; Wilkins & Bost, 2016). The mixed-method approach included both interview and survey to explore teacher perceptions of time, resources, and professional learning accessible to them in a comprehensive public high school setting. Findings from the study confirmed the constructs of time, resources, and professional learning to be impactful on a teacher's ability to support students with ED. Given these constructs, I next explored literature on common professional learning in public schools, what is working well in professional learning, as well as characteristics of highly effective professional learning. The literature review on professional learning highlighted constructs such as structured onboarding, consistent learning over time, and feedback to teachers as most salient in professional learning.

In sum the literature, needs assessment, and study of professional learning led me to develop an ecosystem of learning to include the three critical areas of onboarding, teacher professional learning, and feedback to the teacher. For this dissertation, I focused on the structured onboarding component of the ecosystem. Utilizing a website to host the portfolio of work, I created guides to onboarding, orientation, developing teacher learning plans, and rubrics. Additionally, within the website is a guide to utilizing the tool which includes video guides embedded throughout. The website is an opportunity for districts to access the ecosystem of learning and tools that will enable them to successfully prepare and retain teachers working with students who have an ED.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my dad, John S. Seal Jr., without whom I wouldn't have dared to dream the "big" dreams.

I also dedicate this work in memory of my mom, Audrey Shahan, never was there a better cheerleader, and to my grandmother, Gertrude Eva Seal, whose love always lit the way.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Approximately 335,000 students in the United States are diagnosed with an emotional disability (ED; Samuels, 2021). Due to their unique needs, students with an ED require teachers and programming grounded in evidence-based practices implemented with fidelity to be successful (Wood et al., 2017). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines an ED as the following:

A condition that exhibits one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

- (a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors;
- (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;
- (c) inappropriate types of behavior under normal circumstances;
- (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; and/or
- (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. (IDEA, n.d.; Swank & Huber, 2013, p. 73)

According to the IDEA (n.d.), students with an ED are entitled to safeguards and provisions that ensure an equitable education, including access to maximum participation in general education and protections from suspensions related to disability. These safeguards mean that both general and special education teachers, across disciplinary and content areas, are charged with supporting achievement for students with an ED in the least restrictive environment possible; however, researchers have found that teachers may not have what they need to adequately provide resources like social skill building, de-escalation techniques, and positive reinforcement within the general education setting (McKenna et al., 2019). Further, teachers of students with an ED

report that the lack of support from district resources like staff, funding, and preparation leads to emotional exhaustion and burnout among teachers within the first few years of their career (Aldrup et al., 2018; Brunsting et al., 2014).

The literature reveals factors that contribute to lower outcomes for students with ED. I begin by presenting a statement of the problem and then provide a review of the literature through an ecological theoretical framework to describes the interconnectedness of factors and stakeholders connected to the problem. First, I explore early structures in education and the impact on students with disabilities. Next, I outline the literature around historical perspectives of law impacting persons with disabilities. With the historical perspective in mind, I explore the literature surrounding how the problem of practice impacts teachers and their ability to support students with an ED. Finally, I explore the literature regarding the specialized needs for students with an ED, including how their disability impacts them in the school setting and what kind of resources they need to be adequately supported in the comprehensive classroom. I finish the literature review by summarizing the most impactful factors related to the problem of practice as well as those that may be most fruitful in improving the problem of practice.

Problem of Practice

Teaching students with an ED requires a great deal of skill as well as access to adequate resources (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). For example, in order for teachers to be both adaptive in the inclusive environment and able to teach academic and behavioral curriculum, they must have training in evidence-based practices (McKenna et al., 2019). At present, teachers report varying degrees of success in supporting students with an ED, attributing the inconsistency to a lack of training and resources such as staff, time, and programming (McKenna et al., 2019; Wilkins & Bost, 2016). As a result, many secondary teachers share concerns about whether students with

an ED can fully attend to general classroom expectations without significant structured supports built into the school day (Brownell et al., 2010).

This concern is realized in the graduation rates of students with an ED, who are noted as less likely than students with any other disability to graduate (Doren et al., 2014). According to the Maryland State Department of Education website, in 2017, 87.67% of all Maryland students in the 4-year cohort graduated on time. This graduation rate is 20% higher than the 67.48% of students with disabilities who also graduated as part of the 4-year cohort (Salmon, 2018). Further, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2021), 33% of students with emotional disabilities dropped out of school nationally during the 2018-2019 school year; this rate was higher than any other disability category for that year.

Despite the need for intensive evidence-based programming for students with an ED, teacher access to these supports is inconsistent (Zaheer et al., 2019). Teachers, who are at the forefront of support and programming for students, are also part of a larger ecosystem in which students with an ED are served, and this system both supports and limits their abilities to serve children. To ensure greater success for students with an ED, it is imperative to understand what supports and hinders teachers' ability to support students with an ED.

Theoretical Framework

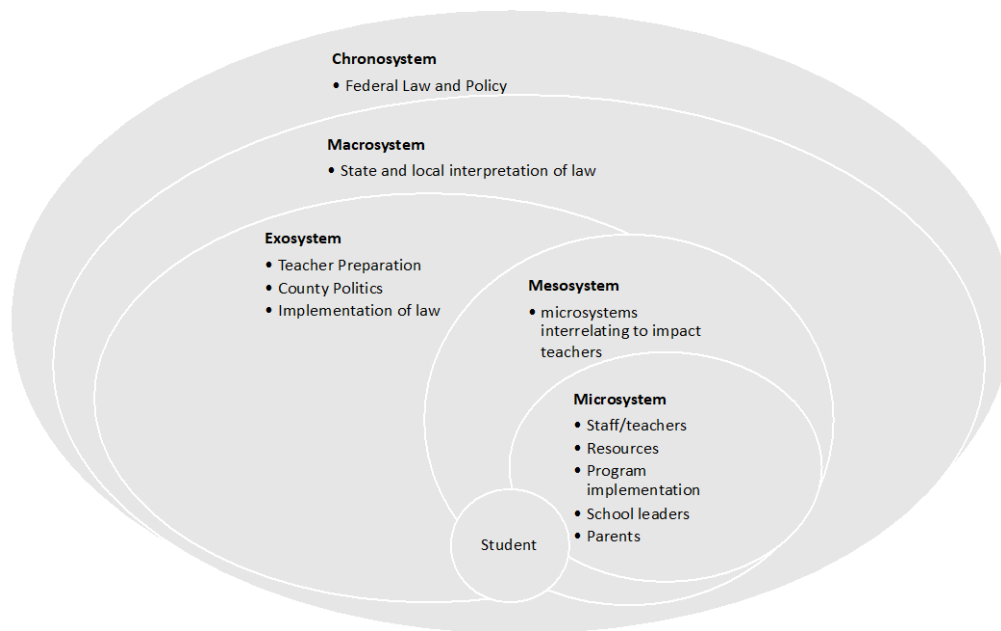
Bronfenbrenner's (1979) nested ecological systems theory is used to examine the causal relationships between individuals and the environments within the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. As Bronfenbrenner shared, and as is depicted in Figure 1, the systems are nested within one another and are, therefore, interrelated in impact. The chronosystem, the outermost circle (see Figure 1), is an example of changes that occur at a distant level from the individual, such as federal law. The macro level represents where federal

and state laws are interpreted. In this case, this level includes high level decisions about programming for students with an ED and resources allocation impacting teachers who work with students with an ED. The exosystem, representative of local decision making, includes county policies on graduation, county resources at the school level, and overall equity of programming as it applies to teachers of students with emotional disabilities and support for these children. The mesosystem and microsystem, the two systems closest and most relatable to the individual, includes the resources available to teachers of students with an ED. The microsystem includes the staff, training, and support teachers experience in their preparation and in their own school building, while the mesosystem includes the interactions that exist between teachers and students as a result of those connections. According to Bronfenbrenner, the nested systems are uniquely interconnected with each decision, creating consequences across the systems and outcomes for students with an ED.

While the microsystem and mesosystem are the most overtly connected to the individual, or, in this case, students with ED, they are also deeply connected to the greater cultures, policies, and changes that occur within the exosystem and macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) nested ecological systems theory outlines the connected and the nested relationships rooted in national policy and funneling down to the inner factors most closely related to supporting students with an ED. Using ecological theory as a framework for exploring the literature helps to ensure understanding of the full scope of constructs that impact outcomes for students with an ED.

Figure 1

Representation of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems



Note. Each level is affected by and interrelated with the other and, ultimately, all impact the individual at the center.

Situating the Problem of Practice Within the System

Examining and understanding the factors that support and limit student outcomes, including impact of stakeholders contributing within the system, is critical to improving outcomes for students with an ED. In this section, I examine how the problem of practice is situated within the larger ecosystem of education. First, I explore the contribution of factors such as the historical perspectives of education, including early structures and evolution of law, to better understand how the problem developed over time. Next, I explore the specialized needs of students with an ED to determine the types of resources needed to adequately support them in the general education classroom. Next, I outline teachers' perspectives of factors that impact their ability to support students with an ED in the general education classroom.

Impact of Early Structures in Education on Students with a Disability

Education in the United States looked very different in the 1800s than it does today. For the few who attended in a group setting, education was dependent on local implementation and heavily influenced by religion (Thattai, 2001). For most children, education meant learning a trade taught to them by their family, while those who could afford education hired individual tutors to teach subjects such as math or literacy (Mondale, 2002). In all cases, education was left to the responsibility of the families and, therefore, varied widely depending on financial means and status (Mondale, 2002).

School reform first took root in the early 1900s as communities looked to standardize learning as a means of ensuring ideals such as honesty, self-discipline, and structure were passed on to younger generations (Kaestle, 1978). The first laws governing education were state mandated, focusing on compulsory attendance for students (Yell et al., 1998). Specifically, these laws made school attendance mandatory for students considered “fit” to attend and, as a result, often excluded students with a disability (Yell et al., 1998). By 1918, attending elementary school was a requirement for students in the United States.

While the law established the requirement for formal education, it did not account for students with disabilities. The structure of public school in the early to mid-1900s was intended for students who were able to attend school satisfactorily without requiring additional support, such as those for building access or additional time or methods to understand content (Yell et al., 1998). As a result, people with physical disabilities or learning differences were often removed from mainstream society, dependent on family, or in the confines of an institution (Scotch, 2009). As shared by Scotch stated that there were few organizations established to support or

protect people with disabilities in the early 1900s, which limited resources to families and further segregated individuals from their society and peers.

Historical Perspective of Law Impacting Education for Persons with Disabilities

Ultimately, laws to protect people with disabilities did not exist for the first 75 years of the 20th century (Martin et al., 1996). Standardization of care for people with disabilities evolved significantly with the inception of civil rights laws in the 1970s (Martin et al., 1996). Since then, the United States has made attempts to move away from segregation, institutionalization, and under-education into evidence-based practices that provide access to education and independence (Lloyd & Lloyd, 2015). These changes, rooted in civil rights cases, were brought forth by families and groups of people who demanded the same access to education as their peers. PL 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 was the first federal law passed specifically outlining students' rights to access education (Lloyd & Lloyd, 2015). PL 94-142, later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990, has become an important law that married federal regulations, state decisions, and school funding to ensure access to education for all students, regardless of ability or need (Couvillon et al., 2018; Martin et al., 1996).

The IDEA continues to serve as the federal law governing the rights of students with disabilities. The IDEA ensures provisions such as a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), education in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) with access to nondisabled peers, and the right to an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) developed to make significant yearly progress (Couvillon et al., 2018). This law has improved education for students with disabilities to such a degree that in 1997, Congress mandated evolution of the language within the law to further support implementation of special education within schools. The expansion of language

addressed the needs of students for whom behavior impacted their education. The amendments to IDEA included students with disabilities accessing state testing, measurable IEP goals, options to mediate dispute (i.e., between parent and school district), as well as regulations supporting students with impacting behaviors and limitations on suspensions that could have resulted from those impacting behaviors (Couvillon et al., 1998; Martin et al., 1996).

The language outlined in the IDEA drove federal requirements of FAPE for students in public education, and specifically those with an ED (Couvillon et al., 1998). This federal law mandated that districts provide students with access to a general education setting. While the law led to clearer guidance and higher expectations, the law did not provide guidance on how to effectively program for students with an ED in general education. Factors such as district strategic goals, resource allocation, and staff development all impact outcomes for students with an ED. While the law has been defined, the problem of practice exists within the implementation of the law at the local level. In addition to fiscal resources, factors such as staff, training, and curriculum all impact how the law is implemented and how effective those resources are in adequately supporting students with an ED. As highlighted in the literature, students with an ED require more time and specialized programming than their nondisabled peers (McKenna et al., 2019). In the following section, I explore the common characteristics of students with an ED, needs that emerge within the educational setting, and programming currently used.

Students With an Emotional Disability

Students with an ED are likely to display intensive behavioral classroom disruptions, may struggle to develop and maintain relationships, are more likely than other students to disengage from peers, and are also less likely to participate in extracurricular activities (Strompolis et al., 2012). These characteristics contribute to further disengagement, poor grades, office referrals, or

grade level retention in school, all of which represent known risk factors for student dropout rates (Strompolis et al., 2012). Additionally, students with an ED report higher levels of stress and school burnout than their typically developing peers (Marlow et al., 2017). On a national level, students diagnosed with an ED report feelings of isolation from peers and staff, which leaves this academically vulnerable population with little school connection (Marlow et al., 2017). Farrington et al. (2012) shared that student academic achievement rests largely on the connection to others coupled with the ability to learn the social emotional skills needed to thrive. This is true for students with an ED as well, who report wanting to feel connected to their teachers, feel valuable in the classroom, and engage with other peers (Farrington et al., 2012). Marlow et al. (2017) extended this research with data from students with an ED who reported care and respect as the most important teacher quality when considering how they know they are welcome in a classroom. Understanding the characteristics and needs likely to emerge for students with an ED in the school setting may help to identify structures that are critical to their success. As shared previously, students with an ED require specific resources woven into their academic experience in order to feel connected and thrive academically.

Resources That Support Students with Emotional Disabilities

The term “resources” broadly describes a range of structures such as classroom setup, school wide expectations, curriculum, and teachers trained in de-escalation. There are many elementary programs and early childhood interventions available to positively impact students with an ED (Dodge et al., 2002). For the purpose of focusing on secondary education, however, this section outlines resources and tools needed within the comprehensive high school setting to improve outcomes for students with an ED. At the high school level, these tools include

additional staff, dedicated programs, mental health supports, and increased training for teachers (Mitchell et al., 2019).

Systematic, intentional design and integration of resources for students with an ED is critical for their success (McKenna et al., 2019). Green et al. (2016) stated that resources dedicated to students with an ED must be designed in concert with one another, starting with the supports available for students, intentional relationship building, engaging families, and a system to pull all of these components together into a unified program. Green et al. also shared that these systems do not always initiate within the school, but are instead often driven by policies at the district level. District decisions can impact not only school priorities, but also funding and other resources such as staffing, training, and programming options (Green et al., 2016).

In addition to programs available in secondary education, students with an ED require a greater number of staff interactions in their school day, particularly with staff trained in evidence-based practices specific to working with students who have an ED (Dawson, 2003). Additionally, Dawson shared that there is an ongoing need to meet with students to build relationships, implement supports, de-escalate crisis, and implement interventions. In their work on programming for students with an ED, Wilkins and Bost (2016) also highlighted the need for intensive staffing to impact disengaged students with an ED. Staffing for empathic listening/mentoring, connecting to outside programs, relationships with families, small class sizes, and varied options for school completion were all components to improving graduation; however, increased number of staff and time dedicated to individual student needs is also necessary (Wilkins & Bost, 2016).

While flexible programming and engagement are identified as structures to support students with an ED, their implementation varies widely among schools in both availability and

implementation. Students with an ED are complex, requiring structured and pervasive supports to reach graduation (Ginns & Begeny, 2019). As Margherio et al. (2019) pointed out, however, the lack of these resources and proper staff to implement them impacts fidelity and, ultimately, increases the risk of dropout. The following section outlines multi-tiered programming that schools currently implement with varying degrees of consistency and success. As discussed in the following section, tiered programming targets all students at the broadest level, and through the tiered approach, continually narrows the focus, eventually targeting a specific smaller group (Sailor et al., 2021). By these means, the goal is to provide individualized resources to students based on their specific needs (Sailor et al., 2021). Both school-wide and individualized programming is ideal; however, at present, schools vary widely in their implementation of programming to support students. In the following section, I explore current practices in programming to better understand what is most commonly implemented across schools. Additionally, I explore literature around targeted intervention known to support students with an ED. In examining this research, I sought to understand practices that are currently used, those considered to be ideal for supporting students with an ED, and how well those services are currently braided into the comprehensive high school setting.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) have gained popularity among districts aimed at improving graduation rates for students at risk of dropping out (Flannery et al., 2020). Schools utilize various types of MTSS to engage students through school-wide initiatives as well as individual targeted engagement approaches (Flannery et al., 2020). MTSS provides a guided framework for evaluating appropriate supports and building for sustainability based on individual school needs (Flannery et al., 2020). The multi-tiered approach in MTSS refers to the

leveled supports starting with whole school participation and increasing in intensity as supports are narrowed to target individual needs (Flannery et al., 2020).

In this section, I summarize programs currently implemented both school-wide as well as those targeted to improve engagement and respond to social/emotional needs of students. First, school-wide approaches targeted to all students are explored. Next, I explore the supports specific to the needs of students with an ED, such as mental health supports, systems of care, and self-advocacy. Finally, as part of MTSS, I explore the literature around the impact of family engagement through supports such as home visits, informal opportunities for parent participation, and use of workshops to improve student outcomes.

Schoolwide Programming

Within MTSS, there are many program options that schools utilize to improve engagement and outcomes for all students. For example, Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) is a program that aims to positively impact student behaviors through improved engagement and attendance, while reducing discipline referrals and suspensions (Noltemeyer et al., 2019). Sailor et al. (2021) found that participating in PBIS programs increased student engagement, reduced anger in students, and improved student attitude.

Test et al. (2009) focused on student-centered planning. Like PBIS, this approach puts student goals and areas of interest at the forefront of intervention. The student-centered planning elevates the work beyond positive behavior supports by also braiding interagency collaboration to improve family involvement, attendance, exposure to career areas of interest, and support in school to create a school-based approach that supports the whole student. Stroul and Friedman (1986) agreed that this multitiered and multidimensional approach is critical to the success of students with an ED. Test et al. (2009) also contended that this collaborative approach is

successful for students and families because it focuses on what each individual child needs, therefore strengthening buy-in and student engagement.

Support for freshmen entering high school is another notable MTSS structure shown to improve outcomes for students (Pinkus, 2008). Programs that mentor, orient, and provide personalized support for freshmen lead to improved outcomes, ultimately leading to better overall outcomes (Pinkus, 2008). Programs such as Freshman Success (FS) focus on supporting students during their freshman year to improve engagement during this critical period (McKee & Caldarella, 2016; Somers & Piliawksy, 2004) of transition to high school (Flannery et al., 2020). Like other MTSS programs, FS supports students through data-driven decision making and intentional goal setting to successfully improve outcomes (Flannery et al., 2020).

While MTSS is a widely utilized option in supporting students, it is not without its share of challenges. As shared by Weist et al. (2018), MTSS can be difficult to implement with fidelity, given the competing demands and limited resources within school buildings. Additionally, teachers report varying levels of preparation and professional learning for implementing complex systems of support, causing additional challenges to implement programming as intended (Weist et al., 2018). Brown-Chidsey (2016) shared that collaboration and teams are critical in implementing MTSS and, without these structures, the intervention will not be sustainable. Bakken and Obiakor (2016) furthered the notion of collaboration, noting that professional learning is critical in teaching teams how to work together to best implement MTSS. Bakken and Obiakor reiterated that for MTSS to make sustainable changes, teams will need to have the data, time, and professional learning to support their work.

Part of the collaborative efforts of MTSS includes family engagement. Family engagement in school is an important indicator of student success, and improving engagement

can improve connections for students with an ED (Wagner et al., 2015; Henry et al., 2010). Schools implement a variety of family engagement techniques, such as parent workshops, parents as volunteers, and even home visits to engage with families as partners in education (Jiménez-Castellanos et al., 2016).

Parent workshops are used to empower, teach, and partner with parents of students with an ED. Many families who have students with an ED experience frustration, feelings of being overwhelmed, or feelings of isolation. Therefore, parent workshops present an opportunity to intervene and mentor families needing additional tools and support (Nickerson et al., 2004). Workshops are opportunities for parents to build a social network and a place of community. Additionally, these workshops also become opportunities for siblings and other family members of students with an ED to connect to healthy groups and experience positive reinforcement in supporting their students with an ED (Nickerson et al., 2004). Students with an ED also reported that they felt the workshops helped their families and kept them connected to school (Somers & Piliawsky, 2014).

Jiménez-Castellanos et al. (2016) addressed the importance of parent engagement, highlighting that there is a difference between engagement and interaction. Jiménez-Castellanos et al. studied the impact of parent engagement in the education process and found that including parents in committees, offering opportunities to volunteer at school functions and to participate in decision making, and supporting community projects all led to improved student outcomes. The authors highlighted that parents should feel empowered to be part of the decision-making process and take ownership of school culture and practices (Jiménez-Castellanos et al., 2016).

Some communities even use home visits as an opportunity to build relationships, family capacity, and rapport (Cheney & Osher, 1997). Test et al. (2009) found that home visits built

trust and bridged support across home and school, leading to increased family engagement in schools. Additionally, through networked systems of support, families can receive respite care in home therapy and early intervention services to improve outcomes for students with an ED. Further, Ruffolo et al. (2005) identified home visits as a family-centered partnership and a culturally sensitive opportunity to both provide services in a natural setting and establish the parent as an equal decision maker. Collaborative efforts are consistently identified as an effective tool to engage parents and support students with an ED. Ultimately, consistent family first programming leads parents to feel empowered and better able advocate for the needs of their students (Test et al., 2009).

Parent involvement is critical to achievement, and a lack of involvement negatively impacts students (Jiménez-Castellanos et al., 2016). To improve student outcomes, schools need to facilitate informal events, informational opportunities, assistance for parents to understand classroom requirements, and connection to positive information about their student in order to ensure that families are collaborative members of the school team (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Somers and Piliawsky (2014) revealed that positive engagement emerges with families of students who received tutoring, after-school programming, and support for families in the form of workshops. Additionally, these students self-reported that the after-school programming was as important to them for safe social interactions as it was for the help with homework (Somers & Piliawsky, 2014).

Reaching parents through multiple authentic experiences and helping them to meet their own needs improves student outcomes (Somers & Piliawsky, 2014). Cheney and Osher (1997) further stated that when parents are connected to school, it improves not only student outcomes, but also parents' ability to advocate and support their students, both at home and in school.

Despite the literature supporting high level parent engagement, however, teachers report that not all schools have the means to provide multitiered supports needed (Henderson et al., 2005; Jiménez-Castellanos et al., 2016; Test et al., 2009). While the connection between parent and school positively impact outcomes, the lack of staff and resources can gravely impact the school's ability to engage parents in a meaningful way (Henry et al., 2010). Additionally, there is often a lack of training for how to partner with parents and a feeling of lack of time to create meaningful partnerships (Lloyd et al., 2019). In order to create the needed connections between families and school, the priority of making connections must be identified by districts, in professional development, and by multiple partners in networked support for families (Lloyd et al., 2019).

Targeted Supports for Students with Emotional Disabilities

While many students benefit from the school-wide supports of a MTSS, some students, such as those with an ED, require targeted supports, including those delivered in the third tier of MTSS. For example, Wisner and Norton (2013) found that students in an alternative education school participated in school-wide group counseling that included the use of mindfulness strategies. This school-wide approach normalized the counseling process and provided a platform for students to practice learned social skills alongside their peers (Wisner & Norton, 2013). While this was implemented on a small scale, Wisner and Norton found the approach improved attendance and work completion and lowered overall student referral rates.

Similarly, Brennan et al. (2015) built on the idea of counseling at school through students' participation in Systems of Care (SOC) that linked their mental health supports in a way that created opportunities for self-advocacy and working toward post-secondary goals. This linkage of supports created a bridge between outside supports and in-school programming that

allowed care to be coordinated and braided to best support students' needs. In both studies, implemented in small alternative schools, the authors reported student improvements in academics, attendance, overall self-concept, and planning of future goals. Further, both studies highlighted the importance of carrying care across settings to bridge mental health needs with goals toward successful completion of secondary goals (Brennan et al., 2016; Wisner & Norton, 2013).

Swank and Huber (2013) furthered this individualized approach in their work focusing on student mental health through programming to develop self-advocacy, independence, and employment skills. This project-based learning included the development of vegetable gardens, raised worm beds, and sewing programs. In this approach, students learn job skills and perseverance while also improving their overall attendance, grades, and mental health (Swank & Huber, 2013).

While targeted programming can vary among schools, the critical component is that students with an ED receive individualized mental health programming, development of social emotional skills, and the opportunity to practice these skills. The examples above were all implemented in a small alternative school with dedicated mental health staff. Without proper resource allocation and training, it is difficult to implement this programming in larger comprehensive school settings. Factors such as scheduling demands, academics, staffing, time, and school culture all impact a school's ability to offer necessary targeted supports to students (Cahill et al., 2019). Additionally, the increased demands of earning high school credit often drive school culture by placing academics as the most important variable for school planning (Cahill et al., 2019). While academic achievement is certainly the end goal, students with an ED will not be able to access the academics without needed mental health programming (Cahill et

al., 2019). As researchers have shown, there are many mental health supports available to schools; however, schools must shift their cultural focus, resources, and time for these programs to be implemented. Katsiyannis et al. (2018) pointed out that programming and mental health supports do exist; however, school culture, time, and staffing directly impact the implementation of these programs and, ultimately, the effectiveness of mental health supports and programs in secondary school. Freeman et al. (2017), in their work on improving secondary behavior and academic outcomes, highlighted the need for systemic cultural changes in secondary education. The authors acknowledged the positive outcomes associated with mental health supports, but also recognized that teachers report a lack of time, resources, and professional development to support them in delivering this programming.

Given that students with an ED are more likely than students with other disabilities to disengage from school, show signs of depression, or even drop out of high school, their access to mental health supports are critical to their success in education (Chow et al., 2016). Current practices in education do not adequately support teachers or schools in the implementation of such programs. As a result, programming for students with an ED is at risk of being implemented without fidelity, time, or resources needed to positively affect student outcomes (Freeman et al., 2017).

Teachers of Students With Disabilities: Preparation, Expectations, and Perceptions

Teachers working with students who have an ED require increased training and resources to successfully support their students. Nationally, teachers report frustration and burnout related to resources available to support them in working with students who are diagnosed with an ED (Kern et al., 2016). Specifically, teachers report a lack of professional learning, resources, and staff as significant contributors to teacher attrition and low student performance (Henderson et

al., 2005). To better understand these constructs, I outline teacher current trends in teacher preparation, general demands on teachers, and perceptions of what teachers need to adequately support students with an ED in this section.

Teacher Preparation

Reven et al. (1997) reported the importance of varied preservice placements and a range of growth opportunities for special education teachers during training. While the preservices training is critical in teacher readiness, it was noted that variances in experiences and circumstances led to inconsistent reports of training and overall learned skills (Reven et al., 1997). This lack of consistency in training impacts teacher preparedness to work with students who have disabilities, particularly ED (State et al., 2019). State et al. reported that 50% of students with an ED are taught in the general education setting for at least 80% of their school day. Despite the large number of students with an ED in general education, however, teachers report that their preservice preparation did not include in-depth approaches to working with students who have an ED (State et al., 2019).

Preparation that does not include guidance on programming, critical high leverage practices, and evidenced-based classroom management strategies contributes to inconsistent implementation of programming and less than adequate support of students with an ED (State et al., 2019). Greif Green et al. (2020) identified that 78% of teachers surveyed for their study indicated feeling underprepared to support students with mental health needs. Further, the authors shared that in an evaluation of university-level classes for teachers, few addressed mental health or strategies aimed at engaging students with an ED (Greif Green et al., 2020). Blake and Monahan (2007) stated that preservice teaching needs to be aligned with various exploration options, including experiences working with students diagnosed with an ED.

Current teacher preservice preparation for special educators has become a heterogeneous experience that lacks the specificity that special educators need in their field (Brownell et al., 2010). Through improved training, however, preservice teachers gain experience in collecting data, best practices, and time in the field to learn classroom management in support of students with an ED (Blake & Monahan, 2007). Once teachers onboard, they receive various professional developments throughout their career. Teachers of students with an ED require consistent training grounded in evidence-based practices in improving outcomes specific to students with an ED (Leggio & Terras, 2019). Knowing that teachers of students with an ED are more likely to be untenured, less experienced, and less credentialed (State et al., 2019) makes the intentionality of their in-service training opportunities even more necessary.

At present, teachers report varying degrees of success in supporting students with an ED (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Specifically, many secondary teachers share concerns about students with ED having the ability to fully attend to classroom expectations without significant supports (Brownell et al., 2010). Oliver and Reschly (2010) reported that in addition to skills important to the success of all teachers, teachers of students with an ED must also be highly skilled in de-escalation and classroom management techniques to be successful with students diagnosed with an ED. Although in-service training is an important resource to teachers working with students who have an ED (Blake & Monahan, 2007), many teachers working in schools report a lack of consistent professional learning from their district to prepare them for working with this specific and complex group of learners. According to McKenna et al. (2019), special educators are not alone in their perceptions of lack of training: general education teachers have also reported a lack of preparation for working with students who have ED and, therefore, do not know how to support them within the general education classroom. Given that approximately 50% of students

with an ED receive 80% or more of their education in general education (McKenna et al., 2019), it is critical that all teachers and staff are prepared to support this group of students across the school day.

Kern et al. (2016) stated that teacher preparation improves student performance and better addresses the complex and varied needs of students with an ED. Teachers require preparation in terms of how to plan effective expectations, remain positive in their approach, and provide instruction in the behaviors they expect students to learn and utilize (Kern et al., 2016). According to Landrum and Sweigart (2014), examples of highly effective practices that may aid in teacher preparation include expanding professional learning for educators into a more intensive training of skills acquisition, viewing new skills being modeled, practice across time, and peer coaching. This model, according to Landrum and Sweigart, utilizes a school-based coaching approach to introduce and review skills on an ongoing basis while under direct support. Landrum and Sweigart further stated that a well-planned teacher induction process leading into intentional coaching may improve teacher preparation to teach students with an ED.

Teacher Perceptions of Training

Teachers must be able to draw on a range of pedagogies and evidence-based practices that support students with an ED. At present, teachers report little direct support or coaching from their districts on the intensive needs of students with an ED or the pedagogies and evidence-based practices to support them (Sutherland et al., 2010). Teachers also report that when they receive training, it is often on an individual basis, lacking a comprehensive training on appropriate pedagogy and evidence-based practices for all staff. Further, there is a lack of follow-up coaching or onsite training to model best-practices for teachers (Sutherland et al., 2010). Practices such as behavior support strategies, structured environments, and school-wide

expectations are most effective when they are implemented with fidelity by the whole team (Oliver & Reschly, 2010). Teachers of students with an ED feel that for professional learning to be effective, all school-based staff should engage in the learning and be held accountable to evidence-based practices in a team approach (Oliver & Reschly, 2010). Additionally, whole team implementation, collaboration, and modeling leads to improved outcomes for students and reduces student time spent outside of the general education setting (Oliver & Reschly, 2010).

The literature consistently outlines the need for systematic approaches to teacher in-service learning (Reinke et al., 2011). Teachers need system-wide training on expectations, common language, and strategies to be able to adequately support students with an ED (Reinke et al., 2011). In the following section, I review the literature regarding expectations and demands on teachers.

Expectations (Demands) on Teachers

The challenge of daily teaching demands is exacerbated, given that teachers report receiving little professional development specific to ED. Without a wide range of skills and pedagogies to draw upon, teachers are left to learn from their colleagues and administrators who may also lack specialized training in this area (Leggio & Terras, 2019). In addition to general teacher responsibilities, special educators face considerable challenges in balancing the demands of paperwork, data collection, collaboration with stakeholders, and teaching (Leggio & Terras, 2019). In addition to the typical responsibilities placed on special educators, those working with students who have an ED must also consider, implement, and support programming to address the complex behavioral needs of their students (Freeman et al., 2019). Teachers report that they cannot adequately implement these programs without additional training in behavior, evidence-based programs, or collaborative methods to support their work (Leggio & Terras, 2019). As a

result, teachers often express feelings of exhaustion and inadequacy in keeping up with the evolving demands and programming aimed at educating students with an ED (Soinia et al., 2019). This lack of support for teachers impacts their self-efficacy and ability to support students (MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013). Further, the lack of supports ultimately impacts teachers' ability to support students with an ED. The number of responsibilities teachers face, combined with a need for training in evidence-based programs, leads teachers to struggle with lack of time and knowledge regarding how to best utilize the resources available to them.

Teacher Perceptions of Time

In general, teachers report feeling that they do not have enough time to meet the requirements of their job (Nazareno, 2016). Teachers of students with an ED report they are particularly impacted by a lack of time due to the additional requirements for support and programming (O'Brien et al., 2019). Teachers report that additional time for planning leads to better implementation of programming and time to implement additional supports for students with an ED (O'Brien et al., 2019). An example of additional supports includes the need to foster relationships with students who have an ED. Researchers have indicated that teachers believe relationships foster positive outcomes for students; however, they also state that there is a lack of adequate time in a school day to implement strategies leading to better relationships (Duong et al., 2019). Lack of time is a factor that often negatively impacts the implementation of programming, relationships, and, ultimately, student outcomes (Oliver & Reschly, 2010).

In their study on teacher stress, Brunsting et al. (2014) stated that teacher burnout happens most often when teacher stress is coupled with a lack of time and resources to cope with the demands. This is particularly true for teachers working with students who have an ED and those who feel they are working a significant number of hours beyond their work day to

adequately support student needs (Brunsting et al., 2014). Specifically, Brunsting et al. shared that special education teachers report overloaded roles requiring them to balance compliance, paperwork, data, student behavior, interventions, and other noninstructional tasks on top of their teacher responsibilities. Teachers report a lack of sufficient time to complete these tasks, which leads to burnout and teacher attrition. According to Cancio and Johnson (2013), in order for supports for students with ED to be effective, systems must be consistent across settings, time, and staff. When teachers do not have adequate time to support students, negative behaviors increase, program fidelity suffers, and access to curriculum is impacted (Cancio & Johnson, 2013).

Teacher Perceptions of Collaboration Across School Staff

Teachers of students with an ED need time to collaborate with other staff to ensure continuity of programming (Brown-Chidsey, 2016). Due to the intensity of requirements for educators of students with an ED, teachers report that they feel disconnected from larger school staff and that they are held responsible for the behaviors of their students (Pas et al., 2010). Many teachers report feeling unsupported by the school team and state that better collaboration on the supports of students with an ED is necessary to improve outcomes for both students and staff (Pas et al., 2010). As revealed in the literature, there are many collaborative components to programming for students with an ED that must work succinctly to provide the structure required for students' success. Teachers report feeling that the success of student programming is solely their responsibility and not equally shared among staff, including mental health professionals, other educators, or administrators (Pas et al., 2010).

Summary

As outlined in the literature, there are several factors that impact outcomes for students with an ED. Factors such as the history of education and evolution of law have impacted current classroom programming, expectations of teachers, and resources currently available to support students with an ED. There are many layers to the problem, as well as many stakeholders who shape district priorities and the allocation of resources.

Various themes emerged from the literature, such as the need for pedagogies and evidence-based practices to support students with an ED (McKenna et al., 2019), professional learning for teachers to be able to implement programming (Weist et al., 2018), and teachers reporting a feeling of lack of time, training, and tools to implement to adequately support students with an ED (McKenna et al., 2019). Based on these themes, and given my context within the system, exploring teacher perceptions of time, training, and tools may lead to insights about factors that may improve the problem of practice.

Through a mixed methods approach, I will explore teacher perceptions around time, training, and tools necessary to adequately support students with an ED in the general education classroom. From this data, I hope to gain a better understanding of the factors that both support and hinder teacher ability to support students with an ED. I seek to ascertain an understanding of the most fruitful place to intervene and improve the problem of practice.

Chapter 2

Needs Assessment

Introduction

The literature in Chapter 1 highlighted a need for pedagogies and evidence-based practices specific to students with an ED and professional learning for teachers to implement pedagogies and evidence-based practices. Further, the literature revealed that resources such as time, training, and tools may not be consistently available to teachers who work with students with an ED in the general education setting (Brunsting et al., 2014; Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Although there are many factors that contribute to the problem, this needs assessment will focus on teacher perceptions of time, training, and tools needed to adequately support students with an ED. These factors consistently emerged in the literature and, given my professional context, will be the most likely area where I can affect change.

Context of the Study

To investigate the factors of time, training, and support within the district, a mixed methods needs assessment was conducted. The district is a large east coast district with approximately 38,000 students and almost 3,000 teachers. The demographic make-up of students is 64% White, 19% African American, 7% Hispanic, and 3% Asian (District, 2019). There are approximately 5,100 students served in special education, 1,600 of whom are aged 14 or older. Of the students identified with a disability, approximately 243 have an ED (Maryland State Department of Education, 2019). In the following sections, special education programming, student demographics, school demographics, and teacher demographics will be discussed in relation to the local district and high school that participated in the needs assessment.

Study Purpose

In this needs assessment, I employed a convergent-parallel, mixed methods approach to explore teacher perspectives around the constructs of time, resources, and support needed to adequately support students with an ED. Using a mixed method design, I collected both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a comprehensive view of the perspectives of teachers working with students who have an ED (Almalki, 2016). The benefit of this design is that data can be analyzed separately and together to compare themes found in each data set as well as themes that emerge across both quantitative and qualitative data sets (Creswell, 2015).

The following research questions guided the investigation:

RQ1: What are the general education and special education teachers' perspectives of the challenges in supporting high school students with an ED?

RQ2: What professional learning opportunities have teachers had to prepare them to work with students diagnosed with an ED?

RQ3: What are teachers' perceptions of the knowledge, skills, and resources they would need to support students with an ED?

Method

I utilized a mixed methods approach that leveraged quantitative and qualitative methods to explore teachers' perceptions of resources and training available to support them in working with students who have an ED. In this section, I outline the methodology for the study, including participants and instrumentation as well as the procedure for data collection and analysis. In the next section, I discuss the research design utilized for this study.

Research Design

The convergent parallel research design allowed me to explore the constructs impacting teachers' ability to support students with an ED (Creswell, 2015). I was able to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data (Almalki, 2016) around the constructs, as well as mix the data together (Creswell, 2015). Collecting data from multiple sources improved the understanding of the problem of practice (Creswell, 2015) and improved my ability to validate findings through triangulation, clarify results from each instrument, and expand the breadth of the study (Johnson & Onwugbuzie, 2004). Triangulation, the process of using of multiple data sources to improve the understanding of a problem or question, improved my interpretation of results by allowing me to better understand the themes, such as time, that developed across the data sets as well as expand on why these themes emerged (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017).

Ultimately, the mixed method convergent parallel design was optimal for reducing threats to validity by collecting multiple data sets. Further, it enabled me to establish patterns in the data regarding what teachers report as impacting their preparedness to support students with an ED and the resources perceived necessary to do so. In the next section, I discuss the participants who participated in this study.

Participants

The needs assessment was conducted in one comprehensive high school in a diverse east coast district. The high school has approximately 1,431 students attending in Grades 9-12 with a student to teacher ratio of 16:1 (District, 2019). All teachers at the high school, 83 in total across all content and grade levels, were invited to participate in the study to maximize a diverse sampling of perspectives (Creswell & Clark, 2018). To meet the typical survey return rate of 30%, I aimed to obtain at least 25 surveys from the 83 possible participants (Fryrear, 2019). At

the close of the survey and interview, the total number of participants in the survey was 29, with five teachers participating in the interview.

There were 34 participants in the needs assessment, including 24 female and 10 male teachers. Participants included both special educators and general educators teaching in Grades 9-12. Of the 34 teachers, one has earned a doctorate as their highest degree, 30 have earned a master's degree, and four have completed a bachelor's degree. Further, the teachers have varying years of teaching experience. Seven of the teachers have teaching experience ranging from 0 to 3 years, 10 teachers have between 10 and 12 years of teaching experience, and 17 teachers have 13 or more years of experience. Of the teachers who participated in the needs assessment, 100% reported experience teaching students diagnosed with an ED.

Instrumentation

The needs assessment utilized both a survey and interviews to collect data about teacher perspectives on the knowledge, skills, and resources they would need to support students with an ED. In the following section, I discuss the surveys utilized to obtain data for the study.

Survey

A survey originally developed by Dr. Yu Wen Grace Lee (2013) called "The Survey on Teacher Perceptions of Inclusionary Practices for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders" was used to collect quantitative data around the three constructs of teacher perceptions around time, training, and support needed to adequately support students with an ED. The survey (see Appendix A) included 32 close-ended questions that operationalized the three constructs that probed teachers' perceptions about inclusionary practices, teacher perceptions of students with an ED in the general education setting, and resources available to teachers in supporting students with an ED. A Likert-type survey was used to collect data through forced

choices and use of a psychometric rating scale that asked participants to categorize their answers on a scale ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree (Grace, 2013; Lochmiller & Lester, 2017).

The survey questions included two sections. The first section explored demographic information, which provided me with insight into teacher experience and credentialing. The demographic section explored topics like certification, years of teaching, and experience with students with ED. The second section explored teacher perceptions of inclusionary practices including constructs of time, tools, and professional learning that teachers perceive they need to be successful with students who have an ED. The survey asked teachers about their time to work with students and engage with professional learning.

Semi-Structured Interview

I used a one-on-one, semi-structured interview to collect data on teacher perceptions of preparedness and resources needed to support the learning of students with an ED. The semi-structured interview (see Appendix B) included predetermined and open-ended questions that allowed for expanded conversation with participants as appropriate (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). Participants were asked five questions, and three of the questions had subsets of additional questions (see Appendix B). The first and second questions probed the resources available and additional supports that teachers report having access to currently within their school. The third question explored a specific instance of success with a student and factors that attributed to the success and includes follow-up questions on teacher perceptions of this student's success. The fourth and fifth questions probe professional development available within the district as well as professional development teachers perceive would be helpful in supporting students with an ED

and included extension questions exploring teacher perceptions of what kinds of professional development topics would be most helpful.

The semi-structured approach to interviewing was selected based on my ability to capture qualitative data around participant feelings and experiences (Donalek, 2005). Additionally, I utilized the interactive nature of interviews to probe for additional information. This allowed me to gather deeper knowledge of the participants' thoughts and feelings around a topic (Appleton, 1995).

Procedure

In this section, I discuss participant identification and selection, consent, data collection, and data analysis for the needs assessment study. In the following section, I specifically discuss participant identification and selection for the study.

Participant Identification and Selection

Participants included teachers from an identified comprehensive high school in the district. The high school services a wide variety of students, including students who require special education in supporting an ED. There are 83 classroom teachers at the identified high school, all of whom were invited to participate in the survey and interview for the needs assessment. A school administrator outside of the study utilized my pregenerated email invitation to invite teachers to participate in both the interview and survey for the needs assessment. Per HIRB and local IRB guidelines, the email included a researcher introduction as well as a discussion of the purpose of the study and a link to the consent document. In addition to the consent document, participants could also choose to participate in the survey via a separate link in the email. Teachers choosing to participate in the interview were directed to email the student investigator indicating their interest in participation.

Data Collection

Data were collected through both survey and interview over a 3-week period from May 25, 2021, to June 15, 2021. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected around the constructs of time, resources, and professional development available to teachers supporting students with an ED. A Microsoft form was used to administer the survey on Teacher Perceptions of Inclusionary Practices for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders. A link in the email invitation directed teachers to the survey. The survey opened on May 25, 2021, via the email invitation to participate and remained open for 3 weeks until June 15, 2021. A reminder email was sent to teachers on June 1, 2021, as well as a final reminder email sent to teachers on June 14, 2021.

In addition to introducing the survey, the recruitment email asked teachers to self-identify interest in an individual interview. Five teachers chose to participate; three were general education teachers and two were special educators. Interview days and times were set up with participants based on their preference and availability. Interviews were conducted in a 3-week window from May 25, 2021, to June 15, 2021.

Data Analysis

The quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed for patterns and trends (Newcomer et al., 2015). This data triangulation, or use of multiple data sources to analyze data, led to a clearer picture of the impacting factors and improved validity (Hoffman, 2009). The specific approach to data analysis is described below.

Survey Data

The response rate for the survey was 35%, based on the number of survey respondents ($n = 29$) compared to the possible total number of participants ($n = 83$). Responses were analyzed

to look for frequency of variables. Descriptive statistics were used to look for patterns in attitudes and preferences of participants (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017; Weisberg et al., 1999). For instance, patterns of concerns around time and lack of professional learning were both patterns established from the survey data. From the established patterns, categories were developed to further aggregate the data and determine trends among the population surveyed (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). For instance, 62% of the staff surveyed found time to support students a concern, 83% felt they did not have enough professional learning, and 83% also indicated a general lack of resources to support students with an ED.

Interview Data

During the interviews, I used the process of condensed transcripts that allowed me to capture the interviewee responses, while also eliminating unnecessary utterances or words (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). Following the interviews, I began the analysis by reading through the transcripts several times (Saldaña, 2013). I created a codebook in Excel to examine interviewee responses to questions, look for patterns across the data, and track the progressions of analysis (Saldaña, 2013). The emergent coding process was used to analyze the interview transcripts.

There are several layers to analyzing qualitative data through the emergent process. I first looked for large patterns over the entire data set, noting words or ideas that repeated themselves across interviews, across same questions, and across different questions. Next, with emerging patterns established, I color coded the data and noted the number of times words emerge around topics (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). Finally, through sorting transcripts according to patterns and relationships, I was able to use the coded data to establish themes that arose across the interviews (Saldaña, 2013).

In addition to individual analysis, qualitative and quantitative data were also analyzed together to look for patterns across the data sets (Newcomer et al., 2015). The data were first compared to identify patterns, validate findings, and further themes. These findings were organized and coded based on the mixed data results. I used the combined findings to establish themes based on trends across the data and in response to the research questions.

Findings and Discussion

An analysis of the data revealed a set of themes regarding teacher perspectives on time and lack of professional learning and overall resources to adequately support students with an ED. The findings are organized by theme. The first theme, insufficient time, is discussed in the following section.

Insufficient Time

Time to provide support and individualized attention to students is a chronic problem for teachers (Kern et al., 2016). Leggio and Terras (2019) indicated that teachers feel a great deal of pressure around the construct of time; they report multiple demands on their time and that there is insufficient time to meet expectations, specialized support for students with ED, paperwork, teaching, and other responsibilities. This shortage of time was evident in both the survey and interview responses, as participants indicated that time was a significant factor in their ability to support students. Teachers identified four ways that lack of time impacts their ability to adequately support students with an ED: (a) time for relationships with students, (b) time for professional learning to build skills related to working with students who have an ED, (c) time to collaborate with other staff on programming for students with an ED, and (d) other teaching responsibilities that impact their ability to dedicate needed time to students with an ED. These

challenges create consequences in their ability to adequately support students with an ED. The following sections includes the data regarding time from both the survey and interview.

Time for Relationships With Students

Teachers indicated that relationships with students who have an ED are important to student success; however, teachers also reported needing more time to develop and maintain these relationships. For example, all five teachers interviewed shared instances where they felt that students were particularly successful; in those instances, all five participants shared examples of individual relationships and individual time spent with students that they felt was most impactful on the student's success. In one instance, a teacher shared that she felt her relationship with a student reduced the number of times the student was leaving the building or getting in trouble (Participant 4, Interview). Additionally, one special education teacher shared,

I had one student this year who was really struggling, not turning on laptop, minimal attendance. I started meeting with him every Friday. At first, he was not having it but as he got to know me it seemed he really trusted me. He made it through ramp up (Intro to Algebra) because of that. (Participant 2, Interview)

The survey confirmed qualitative findings around issues around time. Seventeen out of 29 respondents indicated concern about their ability to make students feel comfortable in the classroom. Twenty of the 29 respondents also shared the belief that there was insufficient time to support students in the general education classroom. Interview participants also indicated concerns about insufficient time for relationships in the classroom. For instance, one interview participant shared, "Spending extra time makes [students with ED] most successful... they get frustrated because I have a whole class to teach and their needs aren't being met" (Participant 1, Interview).

As the literature in Chapter 1 revealed, teacher relationships with students who have an ED are critical to their success in the classroom (Regan, 2003). These relationships are especially important because students with an ED thrive on consistency and relationships they build with others (Regan, 2003). This was evidenced by special educators who indicated they relied on relationships with students to best support them in the classroom. Interestingly, special educators also shared that this relationship building took significant time and often happened outside of the classroom setting. For example, one special educator shared, “Small group and meetings with students this year one on one, outside of class has made the biggest difference in building rapport and trust” (Participant 3, Interview). General educators also shared that they did not have time to meet with students outside of the classroom and relied on special educators for this support. The literature regarding general educator readiness and understanding of students with an ED aligns with the findings in the needs assessment. Most research has highlighted the lack of training and reliance on special educators to facilitate specialized curriculum, relationships, and strategies (McKenna et al., 2021). As one general educator shared,

I don't know if [students with an ED] are successful elsewhere [in the school]. I don't have time to meet with anyone other than other content teachers. I think his special educator tracks that information and works with him separately on how classes are going. (Participant 1, Interview)

Overall, teachers shared concerns about having adequate time to build relationships as well as concerns of skills to adequately build those relationships and implement strategies that support students with an ED. The following section outlines what teachers said about time for professional development specific to learning skills supportive of students with an ED.

Time for Professional Learning to Build Skills Related to Working With Students Who Have an ED

Research from the literature review highlighted a need for professional learning specific to supporting students with an ED (Reinke et al., 2011). This need was also highlighted in both the survey and interview responses in the needs assessment. Of the 29 survey participants, 100% responded positively that they view “inclusion of students with ED into a general education classroom setting represents an opportunity for a teacher to grow.” However, 24 out of 29 also indicated they do not receive the specialized professional learning to support this work and, therefore, learning opportunity is missed. Table 1 illustrates the data regarding the theme of time for professional learning.

Table 1

Responses To Survey Questions Around Professional Learning

Survey Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
My district provides me with resources, including professional development, needed to support students with ED	16	8	4	1
In general, I believe that there is sufficient time to participate in professional learning	20	9	0	0

All five interview respondents, both general and special education teachers, shared a lack of time for professional learning in their responses. When asked about time for professional learning, participants shared comments such as, “I really don't know. We have no time. Maybe beginning of year or that day in November” (Participant 4, Interview); “I would love PD any

time. We are really busy and don't have much extra time, but I could do summer or after school” (Participant 5, Interview); “After school or beginning of year to talk through students in general. We don't have a lot of time for PD and can't miss content so I'm not sure” (Participant 3, Interview). These responses all acknowledge the need for professional learning while also highlighting constraints such as other professional learning and responsibilities that limit time teachers have available to participate in professional learning specific to students with an ED.

In summary, evidence from the interviews and survey suggests that issues related to time for professional learning contribute to teachers’ ability to adequately support students with an ED. As highlighted in the needs assessment, both general and special educators feel that time for professional learning is important to improving outcomes for their students with an ED. In addition to time for professional learning, teachers also report that they require time to collaborate with school-based teams to help them in planning and support of the unique needs of learners with an ED. In the following section, I describe teacher perceptions of time for opportunities to collaborate and the impact of time on teacher ability to support students with an ED.

Time to Collaborate with School-Based Teams

Teachers need time to collaborate with one another about how to best support students with an ED (Brown-Chidsey, 2016). When asked about ways teachers commonly learn or plan with one another, general educators identified special educator as their primary resources for supporting students. When asked the same question, special educators indicated that they reach out to one another and, as one special educator mentioned, sometimes they reach out to a special education specialist for help supporting complex students. Another special education teacher commented, “I usually just Google ideas, ask the department chair, or try things that have

worked before. I do think rapport with teachers really helps but that takes a lot of time and kids slip through the cracks for sure” (Participant 5, Interview).

Educators reported in the interviews that they do not receive enough time to collaborate with one another and are therefore often unsure of the supports being offered outside of their efforts. For instance, when asked how students performed outside of his room, a general educator interview participant commented, “I don’t know if they were successful elsewhere. I don’t work with the other teachers outside of content” (Participant 1, Interview). When asked the same question about student performance outside of their classroom, other teachers shared a similar lack of knowledge. One special educator shared,

I don't think he had as much success with other classes. I wasn't his case manager, so I only met with him for Math, but I don't think others met with him. I could be wrong, his case manager would know. (Participant 3, Interview)

Further, in the interview, a general education teacher commented on the need to collaborate, sharing,

I think the teaching staff and administration need to have a strong understanding of the “whole” student and their needs, learning styles, comfort levels and triggers. Appropriate placement will be a case-by-case basis, but the “whole” student should be taken into the decision-making process. It should be a team decision. De-escalation, work completion, how to implement tools and collect data on what is working/not working. (Participant 3, Interview)

Teachers need opportunities to collaborate with one another to provide adequate services to students with an ED (McKenna et al., 2019). The needs assessment highlighted the desire to collaborate, but the data also highlighted that teachers do not have time to collaborate or plan

together. In the interviews, those who mentioned consulting other teachers identified the interactions as “in passing” (Participant 3, Interview) or limited to those in their content area, and not specific to student needs (Participant 1, Interview). As is stated in the following section, while there is a need for teachers to plan together, they have many competing responsibilities that often impact their ability to do so. The following section outlines teaching responsibilities highlighted in the needs assessment as impacting teacher ability to support students with an ED.

Impact of Time for Other Teaching Responsibilities on Support Students With an ED

Teachers report that they have significant responsibilities outside of the classroom that impact their ability to adequately support students (Soinia et al., 2019). Similarly, the survey and interview data suggested that other responsibilities during the teacher’s workday represent barriers to supporting students with an ED. Of the 29 survey participants, 68% responded that they felt there was insufficient time to support students due to other requirements. Further, interview respondents shared, “The district needs to be honest about the amount of work we have and [that] we don't have time to also address behavior” (Participant 4, Interview). Another shared,

Being able to spend the additional time makes them [students with an ED] most successful. Cases where time isn’t available because I have a whole class to teach, is where students with ED start to get frustrated because their needs are not being met. They just shut down. (Participant 1, Interview)

Three of the five interview participants were special educators who all shared that they are overwhelmed with additional responsibilities outside of support for students with an ED such as paperwork, other student needs, and teaching multiple classes per day. For example, one participant shared, “We need building coordinators like [neighboring] county so that some

teachers can teach, and others can complete paperwork. That would give us a little more time for behaviors and being consistent” (Participant 5, Interview).

The theme of time was consistent across the survey and interview responses. Teachers reported that students with an ED require significant time for relationships and implementation of strategies to support their learning. The literature and needs assessment both highlighted that teachers do not feel they have enough time for this support. Further, teachers who support students with an ED reported not having sufficient time to collaborate with other staff members or fulfill their other teaching responsibilities. In addition to time, teachers also reported needing resources such as staff, smaller class sizes, and professional development to improve their success with students who have an ED. In the following section, I describe teacher perceptions of needed resources and the impact of the availability of those resources on teacher ability to support students with an ED.

Insufficient Resources

Participants indicated that insufficient resources were also a factor in their ability to support students. Within the needs assessment, teachers identified issues around the need for further (a) preparation and (b) resources beyond professional learning as significantly impacting their ability to adequately support students with an ED.

Teacher Perspectives on Professional Learning

The literature in Chapter 1 revealed a lack of consistency in teacher preparation for working with students who have ED. As shared by Oliver and Reschly (2010), teachers want to be prepared to support a variety of learners, and they want to learn these strategies in their schools as part of in-service learning. As shared by Reinke et al. (2011), however, teachers do not feel they experience this type of consistency in their professional learning and are, therefore,

insufficiently prepared to work with students who have an ED. Professional learning is important to teacher learning, specifically when supporting the complex needs of students with an ED (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). This need was further evidenced in the findings of the needs assessment, which highlight a lack of professional learning available to teachers as well as a desire by teachers to learn how to support students with an ED. The survey and interview data highlighted that teachers feel they do not have sufficient professional learning to prepared them for working with students who have an ED. Additionally, the interviews revealed that professional development opportunities currently offered, such as teacher specialists support, are not viewed by teachers as professional development. The survey and interview data presented below further highlight teacher perceptions of professional learning opportunities.

The survey results indicated that 83% of participants felt that there were insufficient professional learning opportunities available to develop their capacity in working with students who have an ED. Of the 24 (83%) respondents who felt they needed more professional learning, 11 of them also reported feeling a lack of confidence in their ability to make a student with ED feel comfortable in their classroom. Further, in interviews with both general and special educators, teachers shared that they did not receive professional development regarding support for students with an ED. Of the five interviews conducted, 80% of the teachers shared that they learn “tips and tricks” (Participant 3, Interview) to working with students who have an ED from other teachers, suggesting that learning is informal and impromptu and based largely on relationships within the school.

The special educators identified the people who assist them, such as one respondent who commented that they ask their department chair and another who indicated they reached out to a district teacher specialist. When asked what kinds of additional supports would be most helpful

to them, all interview participants shared that they wanted to learn more about how to support students with an ED. Both general educators and special educators indicated in the interview that they wanted additional training and would be interested in participating in professional development in areas such as de-escalation, keeping students with ED engaged, tips for building student skills in the classroom, and strategies that might be useful. Comments such as, “[It] would be very beneficial to have an early on PD. Like with guidance to set the stage” (Participant 1, Interview); “Doesn’t have to be for a specific student. Good to learn supports ahead of time” (Participant 2, Interview); and “I would love professional development any time” (Participant 5, Interview), were common themes across all interviewees. Comments regarding preferred professional learning were focused on learning preventative supports through small, chunked learning opportunities that also allowed them to manage their limited time.

Teachers participating in the survey all shared that they felt working with students who have an ED could potentially increase their overall teaching competency. Interestingly, 83% of the teachers also reported insufficient preparation to support students with an ED. The data reveal that teachers look positively at the opportunity to grow professionally from working with students who have an ED, but also report a lack of formal preparation to do so effectively. Participants’ responses were similar across the interview and survey. For instance, when asked about the district-provided professional learning that they have found most useful, participants shared comments such as, “I have nonspecific to list by name” (Participant 1, Interview); “I don’t know that I have had support or learning from the district in this area” (Participant 2, Interview); and I haven't had anything specific to ED. I usually follow the lead of the SE teachers and read the BIP” (Participant 3, Interview). All participants were interested in learning more, even offering ideas about topics that could be helpful to their support of students with an

ED. However, despite interest in these opportunities, 100% of both general and special educators reported that they did not currently receive this type of professional learning from either their school or district. Table 2 highlights teacher survey responses around preparation.

Table 2

Responses To Survey Questions Around Teacher Preparation

Survey Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Teaching students with ED increases my overall teaching competence.	0	0	0	15	14
My district provides me with resources, including professional development, needed to support students with ED	16	8	4	1	
In general, I am confident I can work effectively with students who have an ED	12	5	4	6	2

As depicted in Table 2, 59% of the teachers surveyed felt they would be unable to support students with an ED in the general education setting. Interestingly, of those surveyed, 15 have been teaching for 13 or more years and 8 have been teaching for 10-12 years. Despite their years of experience, including 14 of the 29 teachers being dual certified in special education and general education, teachers still reported they felt they needed additional skills to support students with an ED.

All 29 of the teachers surveyed indicated that working with students who have an ED could help them grow in their profession. Further, all five teachers interviewed indicated that while they do not currently have the skills needed, they are interested in learning how to improve supports. The following section outlines what teachers shared about professional development they felt would help them be successful with students who have an ED.

Professional Learning: What Teachers Say They Need. The literature in Chapter 1 revealed that for teachers to be successful with students who have an ED, they need to participate in professional learning to learn the specific evidence-based practices most impactful to students with an ED (Cancio & Johnson, 2013). Teachers indicated a desire to support students coupled with the feeling that they lacked resources, including professional development, to adequately support them. The survey indicated that 24 of the 29 teachers felt they lacked sufficient professional development to be able to support students with an ED. Of those interviewed, one teacher shared, “I would like to know how to keep kids in the classroom. We need real world ideas” (Participant 2, Interview). Another shared wanting to learn skills that would “set the stage [for student success]” (Participant 1, Interview). The interview data revealed that both general and special education teachers would like to “keep kids in the classroom” and “be trained in [the student’s] plan and unique needs” (Participant 1, Interview).

The teachers also shared what they thought would be helpful to learn. In the interview, teachers consistently shared that they wanted to improve their ability to keep students in the classroom. As noted above, teachers shared an overarching feeling of wanting to, “keep kids in the classroom” (Participant 1, Interview), but lacked the skills to do so effectively. The teachers furthered this to say that they would like professional development on general strategies to keep students in the classroom and engaged in learning.

Teachers shared that they would like to learn strategies prior to working with a student who has an ED, without a specific student in mind, that “set the stage” (Participant 1, Interview). They would like to learn how to better support rising 9th graders and “real world” strategies that are already working for other teachers (Participant 2, Interview). Another teacher shared that they wanted strategies on data collection to find out, “what’s working and what isn’t working”

(Participant 3, Interview). Collectively, the teachers are looking for “tips and tricks” to improve their interactions with students in the general education setting.

One of the common concerns among general education teachers was classwork completion. They felt that students in their room often “shut down” when they get frustrated or are asked to work independently for any length of time. Concerns such as, “[students] walking out the room” (Participant 4, Interview) and “because I have a whole class to teach, students with ED start to get frustrated because their needs are not met. They just shut down” (Participant 1, Interview) were consistent among the interviewees. Teachers shared that they need strategies and professional learning on how to help students develop perseverance and endurance in course work. Teachers noted the low tolerance for frustration that many students who have an ED exhibit and indicated that they want to learn skills specific to improving students’ work endurance. For instance, one participant furthered this to say that they need professional learning to “build on [student] ability to push through classwork or not give up” (Participant 1, Interview). Teachers shared that they wanted students to feel connected to the classroom and felt learning “learning styles, comfort levels, and triggers” would improve student success (Participant 3, Interview).

Concerns about de-escalation was also a common theme among the teachers interviewed. All five of the teachers noted examples of students exhibiting behaviors of escalation, such as shutting down, walking out the class, and refusal. General educators shared that they relied on the special educators to intervene. Interestingly, while special educators did report intervening and supporting students in crisis, they also reported not feeling prepared to support in crisis or escalated situations. Teachers reported relying heavily on the advice of their peers or prior experience when supporting an escalating situation. All teachers reported wanting professional

learning specific to preventing students from leaving the class and building, helping them to use strategies to stay in class, and preventing students from escalating into crisis when they start to get frustrated.

Needed Resources Beyond Professional Learning

In addition to time for professional learning, teachers working with students who have an ED also require additional supports, such as additional staff and smaller class sizes (Henderson et al., 2005). Of teachers who participated in the survey, 83% reported feeling they did not have sufficient resources provided to them from the district to support students with an ED. During the interviews, when asked about the kinds of resources are provided by the school to support students with ED, all five participants indicated that they do not receive additional supports in their work with students who have an ED. One general educator shared, “Beyond having IH [Inclusion Helper] in room, no other resources” (Participant 1, Interview). Two special education teachers indicated that they would ask another teacher in the building for ideas on how to support, but received no additional resources like staff. The third special education teacher shared, “I usually just google ideas, ask the department chair, or try things that have worked before” (Participant 5, Interview). As shared by another special educator, “We don’t get extra time or people to help unless it’s really bad” (Participant 4, Interview). Participant 4 was also the only special educator to indicate that they would solicit help from a district-provided teacher specialist as a resource for seeking help with a student. In further analysis, only one teacher identified that they had taken the Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) training to learn de-escalation and restraints; beyond this, teachers reported no formal resources for working with students who have an ED.

Both special educators and general educators indicated that smaller class sizes would help them in supporting students with an ED. Of the survey participants, 28 of the 29 all agreed that they felt smaller class sizes were necessary to adequately support students with an ED. One teacher shared their feelings about how to best support students with an ED at the high school level:

If there cannot be a whole school set aside for ED kids (although CEO would be a great location for that), then at least having some regional programs at a few high schools in the county would help. That way some classes could be small and intimate, and those behavioral classes could be offered, and those students could still take some classes with the general population to ease into it, rather than being thrown in with no real support.

(Participant 3, Interview)

As shared previously, special educators felt they were most successful working in small groups or one-on-one with students. As indicated by one special educator,

Small group and 1:1 meetings outside of class made the biggest difference with building rapport and trust. They feel we are better supporting them. I can think of more than one student that would have not made it without the direct support every week. I guess that's a positive of COVID, we had more time. (Participant 3, Interview)

Table 3 highlights the survey questions around resources needed beyond professional development.

Table 3*Survey Responses Related to Resources Needed Beyond Professional Learning*

Survey Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
My district provides me with resources, including professional development, needed to support students with ED	16	8	4	1	
If a teacher is to be successful in teaching students with ED, he/she should have fewer students in the classroom to meet the students' academic and behavioral needs.		1	0	9	19

As outlined in the literature from Chapter 1, teachers need resources to support their work with students who have an ED. Additionally, the literature revealed national reports of a lack of resources leading to teacher burnout (Kern et al., 2016). The needs assessment confirmed feelings of lack of support in the district and cited specific concerns around staffing, class sizes, and support from specialists. The literature and needs assessments support teacher perceptions and need for increased access to resources to improve support for students with an ED.

Conclusion

In Chapter 1, I highlighted the three major constructs of time, resources, and professional learning as areas in which teachers require additional tools to adequately support students with an ED. For this research, I implemented both quantitative and qualitative instruments to explore whether these constructs also exist within the researcher's context. Three themes emerged from the data, including time, resources, and professional learning. Of these themes, time and resources are driven by decision makers beyond my reach as a researcher. Professional learning was a consistent need noted in both the interview and survey by both general and special educators. Additionally, while time and resources are difficult to manipulate at this level, quality

professional learning for teachers may improve their ability to maximize the resources that are available to them. Therefore, given the literature and data that support the need for professional learning, along with my context as a researcher, it was important to explore opportunities to improve professional learning available to teachers who work with students who have an ED. Improved professional learning may positively impact many of the factors that contribute to the problem of practice, thereby positively impacting outcomes for students with an ED.

Chapter 3

Intervention Literature Review

Introduction

The literature from Chapter 1 revealed that students with an ED require significant supports to be successful (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). The literature also highlighted that both general and special education teachers report needing additional tools such as resources, time, and knowledge to adequately support students who have an ED (State et al., 2019). The empirical study in Chapter 2 explored teacher perspectives of time, resources, and professional learning needed to support students in the general education setting. The findings from this needs assessment largely aligned with the research literature in Chapter 1 and provided further insight into the challenges teachers face in supporting students with an ED. Analysis of the data illuminated three themes, which were consistent with the literature explored in Chapter 1. First, teachers expressed insufficient time to build relationships, support student needs in general education classes, and support students outside of the classroom. Second, teachers expressed feelings of insufficient resources, such as additional staffing, to support the needs of students in their classroom. Third, both general education and special education teachers reported that they did not receive sufficient or specialized professional development and, therefore, lacked skills and knowledge needed to adequately support students with an ED. Data analysis revealed that teachers are offered support and modeling from teacher specialists; however, they did not identify teacher specialists as a type of professional development. Teachers felt that specialists were there to help them with difficult behaviors, but did not see the relationship as an opportunity to learn. Finally, the teachers reported that professional learning topics available at the county level did not provide necessary knowledge for teachers working with students who

have an ED. Within the needs assessment data, teachers reported feeling that options for professional learning should be expanded to include those relevant to teachers supporting students with an ED in their classrooms.

Data in the needs assessment illuminated that teachers reported needing more time, resources, and unique knowledge to support students with an ED. Time and resources, while significant contributors to the POP, are beyond my influence and professional context. Therefore, in considering data from the needs assessment as well as my given context, investigation into improving professional learning available to teachers is an important next step in understanding how to improve the problem of practice.

As was highlighted in Chapter 1, and as the empirical study confirmed, in addition to fewer professional learning opportunities, teachers working with students who have an ED are often less credentialed and have less teaching experience than other teachers new to the profession (Henderson et al., 2005). This deficit, combined with the lack of professional learning that teachers experience once onboarded, illuminates a gap in the professional learning structure currently used for preparing teachers to work with students with an ED. Therefore, professional learning that is scaffolded to include structured onboarding as well as a mapped progression of learning opportunities may be a tool to improve teachers' ability to support students with an ED.

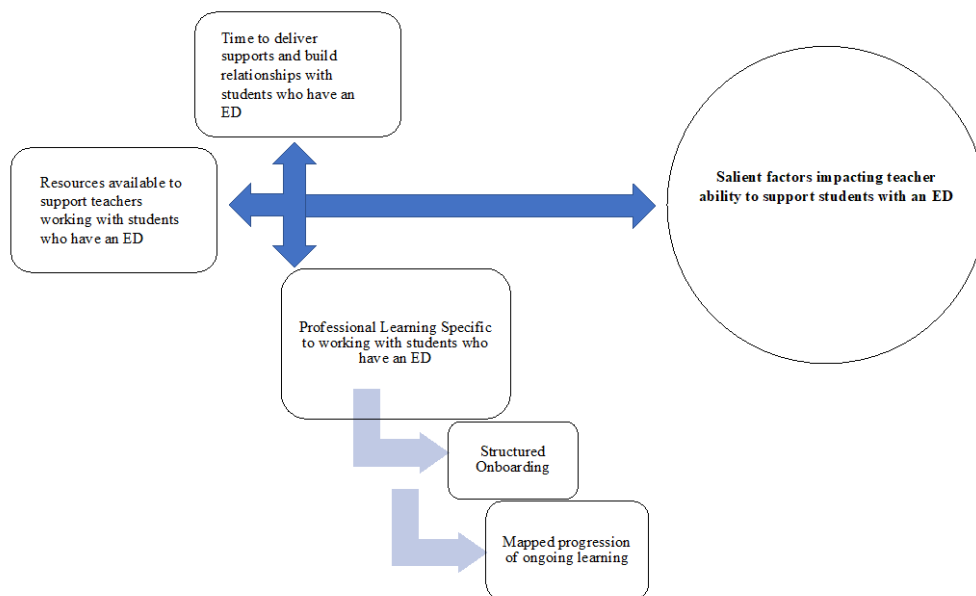
To explore this further, the following section outlines a conceptual framework, highlighting the alignment of the literature in Chapter 1, findings in Chapter 2, and the state of current professional learning practices. Following the conceptual framework, I then review literature on best practices and common trends in professional learning and identify a proposed intervention based on findings in the literature.

Theoretical Framework /Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is grounded in the themes of time, resources, and professional learning that were identified in the needs assessment as most impacting teachers' ability to support students with an ED in the general education setting. The blue arrows in Figure 2 depict the interrelationship of time, resources, and professional learning impacting teachers' ability to support students with an ED (Zaheer et al., 2019). The constructs do not exist in isolation, but instead are also interrelated and, as the research in Chapter 1 identified, influence one another.

Figure 2

Factors Influencing Teacher Ability to Support Students With an ED



Because the factors are interrelated, building teacher knowledge and skills could have a secondary impact on teacher capacity to better manage the resources and time available to them. Given these factors, I first explore the literature regarding what was working well in professional learning for teachers who support students with an ED. I then explore the most common trends in

professional learning today, as well as distinctive elements of quality professional learning. Finally, I summarize my findings based on the literature and conclude with a recommended intervention based on those findings.

Intervention Literature Synthesis

To better understand the structures of professional learning that may improve a teachers' ability to support students with an ED, I explored literature regarding what teachers report as successful experiences in preparation to work with students who have an ED. I then explore literature on current trends in teacher professional learning and distinctive elements in quality professional learning that are also most effective for teachers to use with students with an ED. Finally, I conclude this paper with a summary of the findings and proposal of a tool to address my problem of practice.

Instances of Successful Professional Development

In this section, I highlight instances of successful professional learning among schools working with students who have an ED. There is, however, a dearth of literature regarding the professional learning available to teachers who work with students who have an ED. Consequently, I explore professional learning in the closely related field of supporting students experiencing trauma. There are similarities between trauma and emotional disorders, including both the comorbidity of characteristics between students with an ED and those experiencing trauma, as well as the similarities in programming required for both students with an ED and those experiencing trauma (Lensch et al., 2021). Therefore, literature around pedagogies and professional learning to support students experiencing trauma provided similar insight into the learning needed for teachers working with students who have an ED. In the following section, to better understand the interrelationship of trauma and ED, I first explore literature that has

established the effects of trauma present in students as well as strategies used to support students in school. Given the interrelationship between trauma and ED, I then explore successful examples of professional learning that support professionals working with students experiencing trauma.

Understanding Effects of Trauma on Students in Schools

Trauma occurs across a continuum (Walkley & Cox, 2013) and, as a result, the effects and impact of trauma vary widely (Griffen et al., 2011). While the actual traumatic event may not occur at school, the impact of trauma can permeate any environment, including a student's school day. Therefore, teachers must have professional learning specific to understanding trauma, how it may impact the lives of their students, and how their role as a teacher can either support or degrade the learning for a student experiencing traumatic stress (Sage & Browne, 2017).

Like students with an ED, students experiencing trauma often struggle with emotional regulation along with impairments to cognitive and physical development (Walkley & Cox, 2013). Comorbidity of symptoms or behaviors prevalent across disabilities and trauma can further exacerbate this challenge for school staff (Griffin et al., 2011). Given this complexity, school staff require professional learning specific to understanding characteristics of trauma, best practices, and appropriate interventions to support students. Given the similarities between trauma and ED, these practices may help uncover best practices for working with students who have an ED. In the following section, I explore the professional learning practices that are working well in supporting teachers who work with students who have experienced trauma.

Professional Learning Supporting Trauma Informed Responses

By implementing strengths-based, trauma-informed practices, schools have the unique ability to create a safe and nurturing environment that can reduce effects of trauma in the lives of their students (Scott et al., 2021). Teachers are key stakeholders in implementing these practices and, therefore, need training in best practices and pedagogies. I will explore the two critical areas of (a) schoolwide use of trauma practices and (b) consistent training on trauma-informed pedagogies as effective in preparing teachers to support students with trauma backgrounds.

Brown et al. (2022) shared that to be successful in supporting students with trauma backgrounds, schools must be trauma-informed and prepared to support varying student needs. To do this, Brown et al. (2022) shared that while trauma informed pedagogies and interventions are important, it is the commitment to total staff change and understanding that makes a difference for students experiencing trauma. Beyond training in trauma-informed practices, teachers also need to participate in school-wide training on mental health, effective classroom management for supporting trauma, as well as their roles within the larger system of school support. Berger (2019) also highlighted that teachers are most successful in supporting trauma when they have team training in practices, understand their role in the larger setting, and feel supported by both peers and administrators. Specifically, Berger found that in addition to implementing programming, it was administrator support through monitoring, consistent and ongoing training, and teacher coaching that supported building teacher capacity and improved their work with students.

Another example of successful school-wide professional development came from Douglass et al. (2021), who reiterated the necessity of schoolwide buy-in of both programming and training. Douglass et al. found that there are key components to successful teacher

preparation as it relates to working with students who have experienced trauma. First, schools need to establish a framework to identify current data, goals for improvement, and a metrics to measure progress toward goals (Douglass et al., 2021). Next, schools must utilize cross role teams to lead change, implement continuous improvement tools, utilize coaches to support learning, and collaborate with other organizations to learn from one another (Douglass et al., 2021). Douglass et al. found that establishing an intentional cycle of training improved teacher capacity and feelings of readiness to support students with trauma. Additionally, teachers reported better empathy of students and families, increased confidence in field of trauma, and understanding of trauma informed tools (Douglass et al., 2021).

Building a bank of skills that teachers can use to support students is important, as is access to continual professional development to adequately respond to the needs and continue to build their capacity (Brown et al., 2022). Brown et al. stated that teachers require training that prepares them to support students holistically. As shared previously, trauma does not occur in a vacuum; therefore, teachers must have a variety of strategies that they feel comfortable implementing to support the whole student. In a study by Brunzell et al. (2018), teachers utilized a combination of curriculum geared toward supporting trauma and targeted classroom management skills to meet the needs of the students with trauma background. Through additional professional learning, teachers also had the opportunity to learn about trauma, best practices, and theory around trauma to help build their capacity in supporting students with trauma in their classrooms (Brunzell et al., 2018). This additional time spent in training was viewed by teachers as invaluable; however, some feel it is difficult to continually participate in professional learning due to competing demands. To combat this, Brunzell et al. shared that schools should consider a whole school approach to learning that sets learning as a priority.

Another suggestion was to modify the school schedule to incorporate training for teachers as well as time for teachers to implement tools with students (Brunzell et al., 2018). For instance, a schedule change might include that teachers spend part of a planning in small groups learning about specific trauma skills. Another option may be that part of homeroom is used to focus on trauma curriculum as a school initiative (Brunzell et al., 2018). Brown et al. furthered this to say the most successful schools think outside of the box with training and embrace options such as coaching, modeling, virtual professional development, and even virtual small group professional learning communities to promote ease of access and timeliness of professional learning.

This framework for supporting students with trauma backgrounds, whose characteristics are similar to those experiencing ED, may be helpful in supporting teachers who work with students who have an ED. For instance, Douglass et al. (2021) outlined the importance of structure in professional learning to include grounding learning in individual school data. This technique may translate well to working with students who have an ED. Further, schools could use their individual data to drive professional learning needs specific to their school, students, and staff. Brunzell et al. (2018) described a whole school approach with creative scheduling that improved teacher participation in training as well as developed school-wide capacity in pedagogies to support students requiring behavioral/emotional supports (Brunzell et al., 2018). These professional learning structures, grounded in data, consistency, and school-wide participation, are examples of establishing a foundation of learning within a school that leads to a team ready to support students with varying social/emotional needs, including those who have an ED.

As the literature highlights, professional learning is an important tool in supporting students with trauma backgrounds. The most successful professional development offers variety, consistency, and buy-in from stakeholders (Brown et al., 2022; Brunzell et al., 2018). Further, teachers report feeling best prepared to support students with trauma when they are part of a larger network of support, leaning on their leaders and peers for both support in implementation of programming and their own mental health support (Douglass et al., 2021). The literature has established examples of professional learning that successfully prepare teachers to work with students who have trauma backgrounds. Given the success of establishing a foundation for professional learning, in the next section, I explore current professional learning practices to better understand how schools commonly deliver professional learning to their teachers.

Current Trends in Teacher Professional Learning

Professional learning has become more formalized over the years and, in some instances, offers more options and collaboration. While there have been some improvements, there are also commonalities that have arisen due to factors such as availability of funds and staffing (Romijn et al., 2021). One of the more common methods leaned into for cost effectiveness or minimal staff is the use of stand and deliver method. Stand and deliver is used to teach new systems or approaches to teaching, where the presenter delivers information with little input or interaction with those learning from the presentation (Korthagen, 2017). This professional learning is effective for conveying a unified message to groups; however, it tends to be transactional, which can lead to little acquisition of new skills or changed behavior (Korthagen, 2017). Additionally, these large professional learnings tend to be offered in a one-time session without the benefit of follow up. As Guskey (2002) shared, teacher learning is complex and happens slowly. Due to the limitations of time and lack of relationship building, one-time interaction with a presenter is

not likely to bring about change, nor does it support teachers working with others who can reinforce what is working in the classroom and extinguish what is not (Guskey, 2002).

Therefore, while stand and deliver is a common option in school-based learning, the following section includes a discussion of three current trends in professional learning that lean into either collaboration or feedback to the learner. These trends will help to establish a baseline around what is most readily available to schools as well as highlight opportunities for growth in implementation.

Feedback to Teachers

Feedback to teachers on their practices is an important part of the learning process and is known to be highly impactful in building capacity (Guskey, 2002). Feedback can be both formal, through an evaluation process, and informal, such as coaching and mentoring. In both models, feedback is most positive and useful to the teacher when grounded in trust and establishing a forum for learning (Woulfin & Jones, 2021). Myung and Martinez (2013) stated that one of the negatives to feedback is that if teachers feel threatened, they will not be able to grow from the experience. Huston and Weaver (2008) further discussed the importance of the structure of feedback, stating that feedback in a timely manner can also provide context for the teacher, which creates a greater opportunity for impact. Teachers report improved feelings regarding feedback when they know their work is valued and not evaluated within the vacuum of one observation; therefore, feedback is most effective when it is consistent, nonjudgmental, and based on a variety of interactions (Myung & Martinez, 2013).

Teachers can also learn from peer feedback in the form of mentors or instructional coaches (Keiler et al., 2020). Coaching is considered an effective model in professional learning and has become of particular interest to districts due to the extended and ongoing support that

coaching offers (Zhang et al., 2017). Unlike professional development offered in singular sessions, coaching is specific, measurable, and personalized to the needs of the practitioners (Beddoes et al., 2020).

Specifically, the coaching model is highly effective in providing immediate feedback and insights into specifics the teacher can improve upon in real time (Flückiger et al., 2017). Further, when coaching is provided by a trusted colleague and someone who has a deep understanding of the content, the professional learning relationship builds teachers' confidence in their practices through trusted sharing of information and immediate feedback (Keiler et al., 2020). Teachers also share that the collaborative practice and shared experience offered in coaching is preferred over other methods of feedback (Bridge et al., 2005; Flückiger et al., 2017). Lia's (2016) research on coaching indicated that teachers were more receptive to feedback that was given in real time, and they liked checklists from coaches that quickly emphasized what was working well and tips on what could be altered to improve outcomes. Overall, Lia emphasized that the response to coaching is positive and viewed by both the mentor and mentee as valuable time resulting in measurable improvements in the teacher capacity.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities (PLC) are an opportunity for teachers to work collaboratively with their peers on improving their teaching practices, analyzing student data, and improving outcomes for both their students and themselves (Battersby & Verdi, 2015). These highly organized teacher-led groups operate within the school building in an effort to reflect on practices, evaluate effectiveness of strategies, and, ultimately, improve student outcomes (Battersby & Verdi, 2015). Further, teacher-led groups cultivate opportunities for mentoring and support of peer work as well as exploration of alternative instructional methods to

reach students (Haggerty et al., 2019). Akiba and Liang (2016) conducted research on middle school teachers participating in PLCs and found that those who participated reported feeling supported in collaborative groups, that participation in a PLC also improved their informal interactions with group members, and that student outcomes were improved (Akiba & Liang, 2016).

PLCs have a strong reputation for collaboration and effectiveness; however, one of the challenges to implementing a PLC is providing sufficient time for the PLC. Teachers report that while they want to participate, they often feel they have to choose between other responsibilities and participating in the PLC. A well-constructed PLC can incorporate teacher responsibilities such as analyzing data, grouping students, and decisions about content; however, this development requires leaders and team members who are trained in PLCs and committed to the structure and goals of the group. Therefore, while PLCs are an excellent opportunity for learning, feedback, and growth, they can be difficult to develop and maintain over time.

Alternatives to In-Person Learning

Schools have adapted professional learning modalities to be responsive of varying teacher needs. Virtual professional learning (VPL) has become an increasingly important tool used by districts to provide quality, low cost professional learning to their staff (Bragg et al., 2021). As teaching practices evolve to incorporate VPL, so should the professional learning options for the teachers delivering the education (Adjapong et al., 2018). Rice et al. (2018) agreed that professional development in K-12 public education needs to evolve in virtual learning options to meet the needs of its learners. Virtual learning opportunities have become a model by which other techniques can be embedded for optimal learning (Adjapong et al., 2018). The use of virtual learning not only improves availability of resources, but also broadens the

sources of professional learning available (Chen et al., 2009). While virtual learning had started to find roots across districts through use of shared documents, webinars, and conferences, the COVID-19 pandemic forced districts to develop fuller opportunities to meet teacher learning needs. Bragg et al. (2021) found that VPL maximizes teacher experiences by allowing for versatility in choice of sessions, time of day, and location in which learning will occur. In a study conducted by Fulton and Britton (2011), teachers also reported that VPL offers increased flexibility for PLCs and enables cross departmental collaboration.

Ultimately, a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning creates options and a fuller continuum of resources for teachers (Callard et al., 2020). As found in their study on VPD, the combined model, high leverage learning practices are scaffolded and reinforced through multiple options for participation (Callard et al., 2020). Yoon et al. (2020) furthered the support for multiple modalities, sharing that additional options support teacher needs for flexibility and time. These options are versatile and support teacher learning and cultivation of new skills.

The combination of professional development practices described above are those commonly used in education to support teacher training. School administrators are largely responsible for the style and frequency of professional development, causing professional learning to vary widely from school to school (Nooruddin & Bhamani, 2019). Among the common themes in professional learning, the literature also revealed themes around professional learning that were highly effective in building teacher capacity and improving student outcomes. In the following section, I highlight the three elements of professional learning that were consistently evident in the literature as keystones to a solid learning foundation for teacher learning.

Distinctive Elements in Quality Professional Development

There are three practices in teacher professional learning that stand out as distinctive quality opportunities for teacher learning. Implementation of these practices varies widely among schools; however, as highlighted in the literature, each is identified as improving teacher skills and ability to support students. In the following section, I discuss the literature on these three areas, including the impact of highly structured onboarding, the importance of teacher choice in learning, and the importance of tying learning to goals and matrices that are measurable over time.

Structured Teacher Onboarding

Teachers do not all enter the profession with the same certifications or experiences, which further amplifies the need for quality onboarding to support their success (Brock & Grady, 2007). In particular, due to a nationwide shortage, districts often onboard new special educators through less conventional means than other teaching areas (Peyton et al., 2021). For instance, special educators may be offered teaching positions prior to the completion of their teaching certification and without any prior teaching experience (Peyton et al., 2021). Even for those who are certified, learning expectations of the district for which they were hired can be a steep learning curve and one that requires significant support (Peyton et al., 2021). For these reasons, onboarding is a critical step in establishing a shared repository of learning, building teacher capacity, and providing early and consistent support in the teacher's career (Fischer et al., 2018).

To initiate successful onboarding, Jayaram et al. (2012) recommended new teachers follow a highly structured professional learning process to ensure adequate skill acquisition in their initial training. The authors identified the method of differentiating learning for new teachers from those with more experience as segmentation. Segmentation is the process by

which leaders can identify the specific needs of their employees and thereby provide learning specific to those needs (Jayaram et al., 2012). Moser and McKim (2020) supported this onboarding process through their study on the effects of onboarding on teacher retention. Moser and McKim found that teachers who participated in onboarding professional learning were better connected to their schools, developed relationships within the schools, and understood expectations, leading to overall better outcomes for students and teachers. Schroepfer (2021) also found that professional learning and structured onboarding processes improved teacher feelings about preparation and overall self-efficacy. By standardizing the onboarding process, leaders can improve teacher experiences, teacher confidence, and build their capacity while also ensuring a model of professional development that can be measured for effectiveness (Jayaram et al., 2012).

While onboarding is key to successful onboarding of all teachers, Landrum Sweigart (2014) found that a well-planned teacher induction process is a particularly important component to preparing teachers to work with students who have an ED. The authors stated that teachers participating in training at onboarding began to build their capacity, self-efficacy, and self-reflection (Landrum & Sweigart, 2014). Given the unique skills required of teachers working with students who have an ED, districts must align their teachers with the most up-to-date, evidence-based practices; take time to teach school wide expectations; as well as provide performance appraisal at regular intervals (Landrum & Sweigart, 2014). Moser and McKim (2020) also found that teacher connection to school was a significant factor in teacher retention. The authors shared that teachers best build connections to their school through onboarding processes that support teacher introductions to staff and an understanding of the school culture and provides opportunities to cultivate relationships. Further, as shared by Moser and McKim,

onboarding can be an effective tool to improve teacher connectedness, build teacher communities, and improve retention. Given that Chapter 1 highlighted teachers working with students who have an ED as feeling isolated and professionally burnt out, onboarding may be a tool to help improve teacher readiness and their connection to others.

Teacher-Driven Professional Learning. Once onboarded, teachers need diverse opportunities that will not only build their capacity, but also challenge them to establish their career goals (Sancar et al., 2021). Today's teachers are balancing many roles simultaneously, and often view professional learning as a requirement that prevents them from completing other work (Fischer et al., 2018). To improve their feelings about professional development, teachers must be able to make choices about the modality by which they are participating, as well as topics that are relevant to building their capacity (Sancar et al., 2021). As described above in segmentation (Jayaram et al., 2012), professional learning is most successful when targeted to the needs of the learners (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Therefore, professional development should consider the interests and needs of those participating, capitalizing on a teacher choice (Jayaram et al., 2012).

Specific to working with students with an ED, McKenna et al. (2022) found that general educators often report feeling under prepared for students with an ED, which increased pressure on the special educator to support students in the inclusive classroom. McKenna et al. shared that to adequately support both the special educator and general educator, ongoing time for shared planning, professional learning in co-instruction, and ongoing learning in specialized instruction is critical for educators to feel better supported and prepared.

Further, due in part to high turnover rates as well as teacher shortages, teachers of students with an ED are often less credentialed and less experienced than other special educators

(Henderson et al., 2005). Therefore, in addition to structured onboarding, teachers need continual opportunities to participate in professional learning specific to skills related to working with students who have an ED. Opportunities for continued learning of evidence-based practices, collaboration with peers, and ongoing coaching feedback are tools that empower teachers to best support their students with an ED (Henderson et al., 2005). As Tomé et al. (2021), shared in their study on mental health programs, for programming to be effective, individuals leading need to learn their own strengths, weaknesses, coping strategies, and stressors to best improve student mental health. This process of learning must be embedded into the ethos of the school for learning to be intentional and continual over time (Tomé et al., 2021).

Colbert et al. (2008) further asserted that teachers shared that they want professional learning that is both specific to their areas of interest and flexible enough to participate at times that work best for them. The authors also found that many teachers who participated felt that self-directed PD improved not only their efficacy, but also the performance of students in their classrooms (Colbert et al., 2008). Examples of self-directed PD include surveying teachers on areas of interest that may lead to improved offerings, teachers leading learning to improve content offered to other teachers, and finally offering multiple means of participation to improve teacher feelings of satisfaction in their experience and outcomes (Kelleher, 2003). Offering a combination of options and a fuller continuum of resources for teachers improves their buy-in and builds their capacity (Callard et al., 2020). In sum, and as Noonan (2019) shared, teachers report that choice in professional learning leads them to feeling more positive about their work and their role in the organization and leads to positive perceptions of professional learning, which ultimately leads to better student outcomes.

Outcome-Oriented/Goal Driven Professional Learning. In addition to teacher-driven learning, successful professional development needs to be grounded in goals or outcomes that the organization is expecting to achieve (Jayaram et al., 2012). Guskey (2014) suggested that leaders use backward planning to first map out organizational goals and then include teachers in choosing professional development based on the intended outcomes. Guskey (2014) stated that this structure allows for a more targeted approach to professional learning where the leaders are building learning structures around the content, while the content is built to meet the goals. Jayaram et al. (2012) furthered this goal-oriented process to say that evaluation of the learning is also important in determining whether the professional development met the intended goals and whether modifications to professional development must be made for future learning sessions.

Fischer et al. (2018) found that professional learning grounded in a metrics allows teachers to plan their needed professional learning more fully. Through a framework of professional development, goal setting, and evaluation, the teacher and administrators can assess learning and determine next steps or learning needs (Fischer et al., 2018). Kunst et al. (2018) further asserted that goal-oriented professional learning combined with high performance approach goals yields the highest results in professional learning. These goals and standards elevate the work and set the team intention, which improves teacher performance and feelings of achievement (Kunst et al., 2018).

Teachers working with students who have an ED need explicit instruction on how to plan effective expectations of their students, remain positive in their approach with students despite setbacks, as well as best practice for teaching coping strategies and replacement behaviors (Kern et al., 2016). Landrum and Sweigart (2014) expanded upon the importance of this skill building through their study which highlights that teachers need professional learning in topics such as

how to deliver praise for behaviors, importance of immediate feedback to students, setting expectations, data collection, offering choices, and de-escalation. Further, due to the complexity of the skills, teachers need time to practice new skills through observing modeling of new skills, practicing over time with feedback from coaches, and finding time to collaborate with other teachers (Landrum & Sweigart, 2014).

The distinctive practices outlined above all share common threads of intentionality, structure, stakeholder buy-in, and measurability. These features are important to best practices, as they enable stakeholders to establish baselines, goals, and examine trends over time (Nooruddin & Bhamani, 2019). As shared by Brock and Grady (2007), whether veteran, newly certified, or by alternative certification, all teachers need structured support upon onboarding to ensure they are prepared and supported in their new role (Brock & Grady, 2007). Supporting teachers currently in service means establishing options for learning grounded in their individual needs (Sancar et al., 2021). As key stakeholders, teachers should be part of the planning and assessing of professional learning. As shared in the literature, leaders should establish a culture for learning across their team, a structure for learning (i.e., matrix, goals, assessment), and flexibility to their teachers in finding learning opportunities that are best fits to their needs (Brock & Grady, 2007; Sancar et al., 2021). Ultimately, distinctive professional learning provides enough structure to set and meet measurable goals while maximizing stakeholder buy-in through flexibility and partnership in decision making (Brock & Grady, 2007; Fischer et al., 2018).

Summary

The literature highlights successful instances of professional learning, common trends in professional learning, and distinctive elements of quality professional learning. Approaches such

as stand and deliver (Korthagen, 2017), PLC (Battersby & Verdi, 2015), and virtual learning (Rice et al., 2018) are some of the common professional learning models found in schools due to their ease of implementation and cost. As the literature highlighted, some of these models are more effective than others at sustaining teacher learning.

Teachers report that opportunities to collaborate, meet in recurring groups, as well as give and receive feedback are the needed tools to improve preparation and connectedness in schools. As shared in the work of Kern et al. (2016) and McKenna et al. (2022), teachers of students with an ED need additional and more specific learning opportunities than those of peers teaching students without an ED. Given the high teacher attrition rates of those working with students who have an ED, Blandford (2012) noted that teachers need to build relationships, understand support structures in their buildings, and have continual professional learning in evidence-based practices. To achieve this, Landrum and Sweigart (2014) recommended highly structured onboarding practices aimed at building staff relationships, building capacity in evidence-based practices, and establishing opportunities to become comfortable with giving and receiving feedback that will then become part of their ongoing professional learning. As shared by McKenna et al. (2021) and Henderson et al. (2005), the opportunity for professional learning in evidence-based practices that is ongoing and woven into the school year is critical to teachers continuing to build their skills and feel connected to support.

There is a gap between the current state of professional learning and the learning that research establishes as distinctive and necessary for teachers to adequately support students with an ED. Given this widespread discrepancy, school leaders require support in establishing an ecosystem of professional learning that both aligns with the related research and is responsive to their individual school data. Given the themes that have emerged in the literature, findings from

the needs assessment, and my professional context, I believe the most influential place to improve the problem of practice will be to develop a tool that supports school leaders and teachers in establishing a roadmap for learning. As a tool, this roadmap will formalize components grounded in literature, including structured onboarding, ongoing structured opportunities for learning in evidence-based practices, and opportunities to develop relationships and connections to resources in a school building and district. This networked system provides a foundation for teachers to build their capacity while also providing school leaders an established process to both adequately train teachers and reflect on the system of training in order to maximize outcomes.

Proposal

The proposed tool unifies three major themes revealed in the literature that are known to positively support teacher learning, including learning that is grounded in a framework, is consistent over time, and supports teacher connection to resources (Nooruddin & Bhamani, 2019). These structures grouped together create a tool for administrators to establish a learning baseline, establish a learning plan, as well as expected outcomes of learning. Implemented over time, this tool is the first step in building an ecosystem of learning that can be networked across a district and is sustainable and measurable for both teachers and school-based leaders.

There are three key components to this tool, outlined in Figure 2, including structured onboarding, a selection of consistent and ongoing professional learning opportunities, and data analysis to drive future programming. Additionally, Figure 3 highlights a brief description of component implementation and proposed outcomes based on literature around distinctive professional learning practices such as collaboration and feedback (Sancar et al., 2021).

Onboarding, the first of the three components, outlines three goals (see Figure 3). The proximal goal includes establishing a baseline of learning for all teachers new to working with students who have an ED. Establishing this baseline is accomplished through professional learning sessions aimed at teaching both vocabulary and best practices in working with students who have an ED. The intermediate goal is specific to improving teacher capacity in working with students who have an ED, and the distal outcome includes teachers applying learning to improve student outcomes.

The second component, establishing professional learning plan, describes the structured learning that teachers will participate in over a school year, as well as expected outcomes/goals that will be met as a result of participating successfully. The proximal goal associated with this component is to both establish a plan for learning as well a network of support for the teacher. As I will describe further, professional learning can be comprised of a matrix of support. The literature revealed distinctive elements of teacher learning, including the ability to collaborate and receive feedback (Sancar et al., 2021). Therefore, a network for teacher support to include opportunities to be mentored, observe veteran teachers, and receive coaching on teaching practices will all be embedded in the professional learning plan. Establishing this robust plan aligns with the goals of the proximal outcomes. The intermediate outcome focuses on teachers continuing to build capacity, and the distal outcomes includes improved student and teacher outcomes.

The data analysis component is two pronged, starting first with reflection with the teacher, followed by leaders evaluating data across data and the school. Both data analysis opportunities (see Figure 2) are necessary for teacher development and for optimizing program implementation. Teacher reflection includes outcomes such as ensuring that teachers have the

opportunity to talk with leaders about their learning. Second, the intermediate outcome continues this reflection with leadership and establishes that adjustments are made as needed. Third, the distal outcomes of teacher reflection are that teachers feel supported in their goals, are better prepared to work with students who have an ED, and that leaders are establishing a baseline of teacher learning as well as data on teacher growth that can be used in the second prong to data analysis.

Finally, school leader reflection is the opportunity for leaders to be intentional about evaluating teacher learning. The proximal outcome of school leader reflection focuses on ensuring leaders met with teachers to determine learning plans, discuss progress, and adjust as needed to support teacher needs. Second, the intermediate goal evaluates whether teachers met their established yearly goals. Third, the distal goal is an opportunity for leaders to evaluate all new teacher data over time. The data and reflection will drive future planning, learning, and goals for the next school year.

Figure 3

Proposed Tool, Learning Roadmap

Learning Roadmap: An Administrator’s Guide to Preparing and Retaining Teachers of Students Diagnosed with Emotional Disabilities				
	Component	Proximal Outcomes	Intermediate Outcomes	Distal Outcomes
Goal: Develop a tool for school leaders and teachers to use in support of a structured system of professional learning including onboarding, a system of professional learning, and data analysis to assess implementation strengths and areas for refinement.	Onboarding: All teachers new to working with students who have an ED will participate in onboarding to baseline skills, develop network, and determine ongoing learning goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a baseline of learning for teachers working with students who have an ED 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve teacher capacity in skills to work with students with an ED 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Given improved capacity, teachers will be able to provide improved supports to student with an ED and thereby improve outcomes for students with an ED
	Professional Learning Plan: In collaboration with leadership, teachers will develop a professional learning plan to support their learning needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a plan for learning and establish a network of support for the teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue teacher skill development, expand teacher network of support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve student outcomes Improve rate of teachers staying in the field of teaching students with an ED
Target Population <ul style="list-style-type: none"> General and special education teachers who teach students diagnosed with an emotional disability (ED) School based leaders 	Teacher Reflection (Analysis): In alignment with the designated evaluation schedule, teachers and school leaders will discuss learning plan, progress, and modifications needed to meet learning goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for teacher learning improves, discussions are consistent between leaders and teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers are supported in their learning. Leaders gain understanding of what is working well vs. areas for refinement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers are better prepared to improve student outcomes Teachers feel supported in their goals Leaders have multiple data points to drive what is working vs. areas for refinement
	School Leader Reflection (Analysis): As an admin team, leaders evaluate learning progress quarterly to ensure new teachers are receiving adequate support, learning, and making expected growth toward their learning goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze new teacher learning as a school, respond and adjust to meet learning needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze overall teacher success and achievement of learning goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use data over time to determine strengths and areas for refinement in learning program. Use data to drive decisions around resources

Of these components, onboarding is a tool used to establish a foundation for teacher learning and a sense of belonging, both ultimately impacting teachers' success with students (Brock & Grady, 2007). Without adequate onboarding, schools risk discrepancies in teacher capacity for working with students who have an ED, inconsistencies in network of support for the teacher, as well as inconsistencies in learning opportunities over time (Brock & Grady, 2007). As shared throughout the literature, teachers do not feel prepared to teach students with an ED, as they are often less credentialed than their peers and are likely to have fewer years teaching experience than other teachers (Peyton et al., 2021). Therefore, a structured onboarding program inclusive of teaching baseline technical skills for working with students with an ED, opportunities to connect with the other staff, and a plan for continuing learning over time is needed to establish a foundation for teachers (Landrum & Sweigart, 2014).

Given the foundational role of onboarding, my proposal is to develop a framework for all three components (i.e., onboarding, establishing professional learning plan, and reflection), with a deeper dive into the structure of onboarding. I propose this tool will include benchmarks for onboarding, such as guides on timeline for implementation, a guide for required learning, suggestions for implementation based on distinctive practices, and matrix for evaluating progress. This tool will utilize the Microsoft Office 365 suite, the existing software available within the county, to optimize ease of implementation and remain fiscally neutral. To do this, I propose optimizing the use of programs within Office 365 such as Workflow, Teams, and Outlook to create a synchronized and networked plans that are available to both teachers and leaders. Use of this platform ensures real time updates, multiple modalities for collaboration, and transferability among staff or even schools.

The intended outcome for this tool is that leaders will have a framework for implementing structured onboarding that is inclusive of a roadmap for implementation, guides for progress, and tools for evaluating outcomes and determining next steps. Additionally, a structure for next steps in developing teacher professional learning plans and a matrix for reflection of data over time will be developed for teacher and leader implementation. The goal of this tool is for leaders to have a ready-to-implement structure for onboarding as well as a path to developing a robust ecosystem of learning that is sustainable and measurable, ultimately building teacher capacity to work with students who have an ED.

Onboarding Tool Summary

As evidenced in the literature and empirical study, teachers report varying degrees of success in supporting students with an ED, attributing the inconsistency to lack of training and resources such as staff, time, and programming (McKenna et al., 2019; Wilkins & Bost, 2016). The inconsistency in teachers' readiness to support students with an ED impacts student outcomes. Three salient factors of training, time, and resources were illuminated as most impactful to teacher preparation in working with students who have an ED. Of these, given my professional context, I felt that developing a professional learning tool presented the greatest opportunity for impact and support for teachers.

Chapter 3 illuminated professional learning most used by public schools as well as characteristics of professional learning that was found to be highly effective. Based on the literature, in my Defense Proposal, I presented an ecosystem of learning (see Appendix C) that synchronized the best practices in professional learning into a system of support that addresses the need for teachers to learn evidence-based practices, build a network of support, and receive feedback on a consistent basis. This ecosystem is comprised of three major components including (a) structured onboarding, (b) outlined plan for professional learning (Teacher Development Plan), and (c) reflection on learning from both teacher and leader perspective.

As a concluding project for my Dossier, I have developed the structured onboarding component of the ecosystem as a first step in implementation. Derived from best practices in professional learning, the Onboarding Series includes three overarching areas of orientation, mentoring, and the teacher development plan (TDP) that are interconnected, highly structured, and measurable over time (Moser & McKim, 2020). Each component includes structured guides for facilitation and evaluation.

My final project is housed in a website (Appendix D) that showcases the tools, components, and embedded supports for utilizing the Onboarding Series. As depicted in Appendix D, the website includes an introduction, onboarding mission, links to each of the onboarding guides (Appendix E), and perspectives from the field. Additionally, as highlighted in Appendix F, the website includes a recorded Guided Tour that provides onboarding facilitators with a detailed look at tool components, implementation, and feedback from administrators and teachers. The Guided Tour concludes with (see Appendix G) facilitator support for next steps and utilizing a virtual platform to house the Onboarding Series.

This is the first iteration of the website and ecosystem of learning. The onboarding component of the website is ready for the pilot phase and can be implemented. Next steps for development include building out the remaining ecosystem components such as evaluation process and the feedback loop between teachers and administrators. An evaluation process will need to be established for the tool, once the components are operationalized. With user permission, I will seek feedback both formally and informally on the tool components, what's working well, and what needs further refinement. To start, I would use a combination of quantitative and qualitative assessments to engage with users. Ideally, input from both new teachers receiving training as well as facilitators of training would be used to gauge strengths and areas for revision within the tool components. I will make revisions based on feedback.

The website itself will also continue to be revised based on user input. To maximize the reach of the tools offered, I will seek quantitative input from site users through survey. Additionally, I will seek qualitative input from colleagues in the field on items such as usability, overall look of the website, interest, and ease of use. With evaluative measures in place, the

website and tool will continue to evolve in response to user needs and feedback. Please follow this [link](#) or scan the QR code below to view To view the website and tools.



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Appendix A

Needs Assessment Survey

The purpose of this survey is to gather information that may help to examine the perceptions of general and special education teachers regarding inclusionary practices for students with an Emotional Disability (ED). The result of the research will help improve the quality of education for students with ED.

Please view the complete consent form at this [link](#).

- Participation in this survey is voluntary. You have the right to withdrawal at any time with no penalty or loss of rights.
- The survey will take approximately 10 minutes.
- All data obtained will remain confidential. The confidentiality of your information will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding the present study.
- There are no foreseeable risks for completing this survey.
- You may print a copy of this notice for your records.

- By completing this survey, you are agreeing to take part in this portion of the study. If at any time you would like to withdraw from the survey, please close your browser.

- If you have questions regarding the present study, please contact the investigator by email at ksnow9@jh.edu

CONTINUE WITH SURVEY

DO NOT CONTINUE WITH SURVEY

2. What is your gender? *

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

3. What is your highest degree earned? *

- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctoral Degree

4. Altogether, how many years of teaching experience do you have? *

- 0-3
- 4-6
- 7-9
- 10-12

13 or more

5. As a general educator or special educator, how many years of teaching experience do you have working with students who are diagnosed with an Emotional Disability. Experience includes any work with students who have an ED. Examples of this work could include: students in your general education classes, intervention, crisis support, special education services in/outside of general education. *

None

1-3

4-6

7-9

10-12

13 or more

6. Currently, what is your principal teaching assignment at the school where you work?

General Education Teacher

Special Education Teacher

7. In general, which best describes the teaching credential you currently hold? *

General Education Credential

Special Education Credential

Dual certified in Special Education and General Education

Not certified in teaching

other

8. Which best describes the age level of students you teach? *

9th grade

10th grade

11th grade

12th grade

other or more than one grade

9. As a teacher in a general education classroom, how many students with ED have you had altogether in your class or classes? (Note: Special education teachers skip to item #10.) *

1-2

3-4

5-6

7-8

9-10

11 or more

10. As a SPECIAL education teacher, how many courses in special education have you taken at the college/university level? *

None

One

- Two
- Three or more

11. As a special education teacher, which one best describes the framework in which you work:
(Note: General education teachers skip this item.) *

- Teacher in a self-contained classroom for students with ED.
- Teacher at a school for students with ED.
- Resource room to support students with special needs who are assigned to general education classrooms.
- Co-teacher working with students with ED who are being served in a general education
- Other

12. The following items are designed to solicit your perceptions about inclusionary practices for students diagnosed with an Emotional Disability (ED). *

Strongly Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Agree Agree

A student with an ED will develop a more positive self-concept as a result of being placed in a general education classroom.

I believe my work is more interesting when given the opportunity to work with students with an ED.

I am concerned that I may not be able to work effectively with students with ED

The inclusion of students with ED into a general education classroom setting represents an opportunity for a teacher to grow professionally and personally.

A student with ED is likely to be disruptive in a general education classroom.

If a student with ED is placed in a general education classroom, there will be an increase in management problems.

I believe that the inclusion of students with ED into the general education classroom will harm the educational achievement of normal achieving students due to their disruptive behavior.

I am confident that I will be able to make students with ED feel comfortable in my classroom.

If a teacher is to be successful in teaching students with ED, he/she should have fewer students in the classroom in order to meet the students' academic and behavioral needs.

General education students will benefit from contact with students with ED.

In general, I am not temperamentally suited to be successful with students with ED.

Referrals to the school principal for disciplinary actions will likely occur more frequently for a student with ED than for other students in a general education classroom.

A student with an ED assigned to a general education classroom will adversely affect other children's motivation to learn.

The disruptive behavior of students with ED in the general education classroom will likely increase the number of behavior problems among other students.

The assignment of a student with ED to a general education classroom is a wise administrative decision.

Teaching students with ED increases my overall teaching competence.

If I were a parent of a student with emotional/behavioral problems, I would want him/her to be in a general education classroom for most of the school day.

There is insufficient time in a teacher's day to deal satisfactorily with the varied needs of both general education students and students with ED.

A student with behavioral needs in my classroom necessitates an excessive amount of time for curriculum planning.

A student with ED who is assigned to a general education classroom is likely to develop a more positive attitude toward school.

Appendix B

Needs Assessment Interview Questions

1. What kind of resources does your specific school provide you in supporting students with an Emotional Disability?
2. What kinds of additional supports would be most helpful to you (and fellow staff members) when supporting a student with an Emotional Disability?
3. Tell me about a time when a student with an Emotional Disability was particularly successful in your class. In your opinion, what about this experience made the student successful?
 - a. Was that student experiencing similar success in other classes?
 - b. Was there something you felt you wished others new about interacting with him/her that would improve the experience for everyone?
4. In thinking about professional development available within your district, which professional learning opportunities have been most useful to you in working with students who have an Emotional Disability?
 - a. Who provided these opportunities? Example: were they school based or district wide?
5. What other kinds of professional development would be helpful to you in supporting students with an Emotional Disability?
 - a. What kind of topics would be most helpful?
 - b. How should this professional development be structured to best support you?
 - c. Are there tools or topics that you feel you know a lot about and therefore wouldn't be a good use of your time?

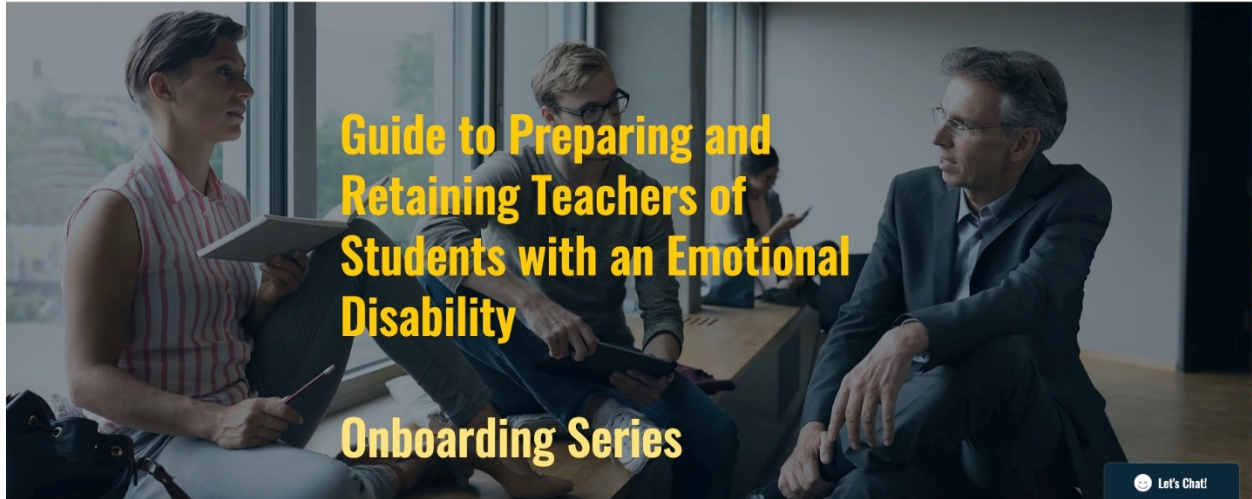
Appendix C

Ecosystem of Learning to Support Teacher Readiness and Retention

Ecosystem of learning to Prepare and Retain Teachers of Students with Emotional Disabilities	
1	
Onboarding	2 weeks initial, 1 year to complete Baseline skills Develop network Determine ongoing learning goals Mentor assigned
2	
Professional Learning Plan	Teachers will develop a structured learning plan Learning is predetermined, time allotted activity Coaching and feedback
3	
Teacher Reflection (Analysis)	Discuss progress, plans, adjustments, growth, needs Based on reflection of progress(data) determine next steps in learning
School Leader Reflection (Analysis)	leaders evaluate learning progress for participation, progress, and needs Use data to drive future learning

Appendix D

Website



Appendix E

Links to Guides

Orientation

Two Week Teacher Orientation

Orientation includes two weeks of full-day sessions that can be modified to meet the needs of your teachers.

Orientation Tools:

- [Two-Week Orientation Agenda](#)
- [Facilitator Guide](#)
- [Orientation evaluation tool for facilitators](#)
- [Teacher Competencies Framework](#)

[Read More](#)

Mentoring

Mentor Support Throughout Orientation

Onboarding includes support from an experienced veteran teacher who will provide mentoring support throughout the first year.

Mentor Tools:

- [Mentor Checklist and Sample Activities](#)

[Read More](#)

Teacher Development Plan

Teacher Development Plan

The Teacher Development Plan (TDP) is a tool to assist teachers and school leaders in career and professional development planning. Its primary purpose is to provide a roadmap for teachers to reach short and long-term professional goals, as well as improve current job performance.

Teacher Development Plan Tools:

- [TDP Sample](#)
- [TDP Template](#)
- [Sample of Recommended TDP Activities and Teacher Career Progression](#)
- [TDP Evaluation Tool](#)
- [Sample of TDP Evaluation Structure](#)
- [Supervisor Guide: teacher Competencies Framework](#)

[Read More](#)

 Let's Chat!

Appendix F

Guided Tour



Appendix G
Tour Conclusion

WHAT'S NEXT?



Link to Onboarding Teams Channel:

```
https://teams.microsoft.com/l/channel/92334e181-81d1-41f0-b173-2739Xmcc29cc8B654F24D7E34c0e6 read.teams?groupId=66dd8e72-b1ca-42fd-9428-d65285f2f333&tenantId=5614f188-b1ca-422b-8031-6f82ae3101de
```

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Kate Snow
katesnow723@gmail.com