Chapter One Outline

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"Leaders must be close enough to relate to others, but far enough ahead to motivate them." John C. Maxwell

INTRODUCTION:

As recently as 40 years ago, individuals with disabilities were not visible in the halls and classrooms of public schools. Prior to the mid 70's, children with disabilities could be excluded from public education, were warehoused in out-of-district programs, or were inadequately served by public schools (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). A 1919 Wisconsin Supreme Court ruling, in fact, held that "a mentally normal, blind child could be barred from school since his/her handicap had a depressing and nauseating effect on teachers and children" (Hensley, *1973).*

Those of us who went to public schools before the mid-70's probably remember, however vaguely, the one "special" kid in our grade level or the one small class of special education kids that we sometimes saw leaving the school cafeteria when we entered. That one student, or that one tiny, mysterious class, represented all special education in the public school.

However, the nature of special education in public schools has changed significantly over the past 40 years. This wave of change began as a ripple with Title VI of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act created the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (Peterson, 2007). Title VI did little to change the functional practice in the

public education of individuals with disabilities, but it finally acknowledged individuals with disabilities within the educational conversation, however minimally.

Title VI was the springboard that led to a series of laws and Supreme Court decisions including; Mills v. D.C. Board of Education in 1972, Section 504 in 1973, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) in 1974, Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) in 1975, the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) and Individuals with Disabilities Acts (IDEA) of 1990, No Child Left Behind in 2001, and President Obama's Race to the Top, *(Peterson, 2007, USDOE, 2014)*.

Fancy titles and additional acronyms aside, the result of all of this policy was that in a little less than 35 years, individuals with disabilities went from an invisible population to one that is now included, not only within the public school districts, but into the buildings in self-contained classes, into the general education classrooms alongside their non-disabled peers, and often responsible for the same curriculum and graduation requirements.

The changes brought about by these laws impacted educators as significantly as they impacted the students. Disabled students required the implementation of a variety of special classes, and special classes created the need for special educators. What made these educators "special" was that "in addition to the skills and knowledge that are required of a highly qualified general education classroom teacher, special education teachers are required to have specialized skills for addressing unique student needs; extensive knowledge of highly effective, evidence-based practices; and the ability to collaborate effectively with other teachers to ensure that students with disabilities make

academic and social progress that enables them to be successful in life" (*Billingsly, 2005*).

Special educator certification programs, therefore differed from general education programs in that, for the most part, general educators were trained to teach academic subjects, and special educators were trained to teach the student according to his/her disability. Curriculum for the majority of students with disabilities consisted of the general education curriculum simplified, differentiated, adapted, taught, and assessed by the special education teacher. Graduation with a "local" or "IEP" diploma was based on passing these special classes as determined, for the most part, by the special educators.

With special educators being as self-contained as the students themselves, building-level administrators (principals and assistant principals), typically left the running of these programs to the special education staff and special education coordinators or directors, found out of the building at the district office level. (Rhys, 1996).

Stakes were raised for special educators as well as students when the reauthorization of the IDEA in 1997 required students with disabilities to be included in on state and district-wide assessments. With little lead-time, special educators had to become as knowledgeable about the higher-level assessments as general education teachers who had extensive content area training and experience teaching towards these exams. At the same time, they still had to adapt and differentiate the curriculum for a population that was unprepared, and in many cases, unable, to meet with academic success on those exams. Special educators, many for the first time, were thrown into the general education world with little, if any, supports. And the demands didn't stop there.

Academic demands on students with disabilities continued to increase as a result NCLB, RTTT, CC, and APPR.

The only thing that didn't change for special educators was that their students were still disabled, some becoming more and more difficult to teach due to the increased academic demands. Special educators needed more immediate and accessible administrative direction and support than ever before, but the administrators most available to them were generally not trained, experienced, or prepared to address the unique needs of special education students and programs. Administrators knowledgeable about special education were too often located in the district office where they had the knowledge of special education policies and programs, but were detached from the practical knowledge of building-level, day to day issues experienced by special educators in classrooms.

In Preparing Principals for Leadership in Special Education, Crooner, Tochterman & Garrison-Wade write, "…with the advent of new school reforms including site-based management and full inclusion of special education students, more principal involvement is demanded in the education of students with special needs. General education administrators must be prepared to lead in all administrative areas, including special education, in order to reduce the separateness that has come to exist between general and special education and to create instructional programs that meet the needs of all students" (2000).

However, many principals feel unprepared for their roles as administrators of special education programs and students (Goor & Schwenn, 1995). Without the necessary support, many special educators experience greater burnout than their general

education colleagues. They burn out earlier in their careers, and either leave teaching altogether or switch into general education classes and programs. (Crooner, Tochterman & Garrison-Wade, 2000, Billingsley, 2005, Billingsley, 2007, Seltzer, 2011).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Academic demands on special education students and the teachers working with them are increasing. Not surprisingly, so is the rate of special education teacher burnout and attrition. Not only have academic mandates for students with disabilities increased, but also the number of students with disabilities has increased, along with the types of disabilities found in the classrooms. Increasing numbers of students with severe autism spectrum disorders, students born addicted to alcohol & drugs, and students requiring 1:1 support to function physically and/or behaviorally must meet the criteria of NCLB, RTTT, and Common Core.

Where the rate of students with disabilities ages three to twenty-one grew from 5.08 million students (1993) to 6.11 million students (2002), an increase of 20.3% (U.S. Department of Education, 1993; 2002), the increase in special education teachers during this same time was only by 8.0% (DeMik, S., 2008). "Nationally, between 7 and 15% of special education teachers leave each year" (Billingsley, 2005) and Garrison-Wade, Sobel, & Fulmer (2007), cite inadequate district and administrative support (among other things) as one of the main reasons for teacher attrition.

Building principals, however, most who are well trained and effective with the general education populations, staff, and programs, often feel unprepared for their roles in the administration of special programs (Goor & Schwenn, 1995). The lack of special preparation for school principals challenges their ability to meaningfully serve all

students. (Garrison-Wade, Soble, & Fulmer, 2007, Garrison-Wade, 2005, Goor & Schwenn, 1997). "Although inclusion has been a focus of recent school reform, many principals are still unfamiliar and uncomfortable with its concept and practice (Cooner, Tochterman, & Garrison-Wade, 2000). "According to Anderson (1999), despite the implication for school administrators to be trained in special education laws and policies, most school administrators have received little, if any, training related to special education in their leadership preparation training (Cooner, Tochterman, & Garrison-Wade, 2000).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which building-level administrators perceive they have been adequately prepared to provide leadership and support to special educators and special education programs in their buildings, and the extent to which this level of building level administrative support, or lack thereof, effects attrition and retention of special educators.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. To what extent do special educators feel that they have immediate access to building leaders with adequate knowledge of, and experience with, special education issues?
2. To what extent do districts require building-level administrators to have training related specifically to special education?
3. To what extent do administrative preparation programs provide adequate coursework specific to the unique laws, practices, and leadership of special education programs?

4. To what extent do building level administrators feel they were adequately prepared to assume leadership for special education programs, services, and staff?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

The shortage of qualified, effective, special education teachers in America's public schools is at a critical level (Nance & Calabrese, 2009). At a time when the numbers of students with disabilities is increasing (DeMik, 2008), academic demands on these students are increasing (USDOE, 2014), and work-related stresses outside of direct teaching (paperwork, data collection, meetings, case management, etc.,) is increasing (Billingsley, 2005). As a result, there is a dire need for building-level administrators to have the knowledge, training, and experience necessary to support special educators in their buildings (Billingsley, 2005, Nance & Calabrese, 2009, Cooner, Tochterman, & Garrisson-Wade, 2000, Garrison-Wade, Sobel, & Fulmer, 2007).

Without building-level, administrative support, special educators are at a greater rick of burnout and attrition than their general education colleagues (Billingsley, 2005), leaving our students with disabilities being educated by a revolving door of new, inexperienced teachers who are themselves at risk of leaving within their first 5 years.

These factors highlight the growing need for integrated administrative training and licensure programs to adequately prepare principals and assistant principals to address the unique needs of the special education programs, staff, and students in their buildings.

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