MEASURING THE ATTITUDES OF TEACHERS OF STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES ABOUT ASPECTS OF THEIR JOBS

By

Copyright 2010
Mary Margaret Pearson

Submitted to the graduate degree program in the Department of Special Education and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation Committee:

Mary Morningstar, Ph D.
Chairperson

Bruce Frey, Ph D.

Don Deshler, Ph D.

Amy Gaumer-Erickson, Ph D.

Earle Knowlton, Ph D.

Date Defended

The Dissertation Committee for Mary Pearson certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation

MEASURING THE ATTITUDES OF TEACHERS OF STUDENTS WITH

SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES ABOUT ASPECTS OF THEIR JOBS

Mary Morningstar, Ph D.
Chairperson

Date approved:_____

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout my doctoral program I have been provided a great amount of support from many people, whom I would like to acknowledge. First, I would like to greatly thank my Dissertation Committee for their genuine support and help throughout my completion process. So much of their time and efforts go without acknowledgement, but I am grateful for all of Dr. Mary Morningstar's amazing assistance as my advisor throughout all four years of my program, Dr. Earle Knowlton's positive comments and praise, Dr. Bruce Frey's willingness to answer every statistical question I had, Dr. Don Deshler's willingness, time, and kindness (even on late January Sunday nights completing comprehensive exams, after a natural gas leak at my home), and Amy Gaumer-Erickson's excitement and time working with me on revisions, I personally believe I have had the pleasure to work with one of the best committees possible. I would also like to personally thank and acknowledge Mickey Waxman for his patience, efforts, brain-storming, and time on my behalf.

I owe a large debt of gratitude for the opportunity to build wonderful friendships and relationships with current and future leaders in the field of Special Education. I thoroughly enjoyed knowing and becoming friends with many amazing future leaders, and look forward to interacting with them throughout our careers and lives. I would be remiss to not thank Dr. Deborah Griswold, Dr. Chriss Walther-Thomas, and Dr. Sean Smith for the opportunity to work with many future special and general education teachers throughout my program.

I must thank my family and close friends. I would never have been able to complete this program without the support of my family. From my parents ever-present

patience throughout the many phone calls, late nights, desperate pleas for brain-storming assistance, and love, to my sister's and brother-in-law's humor, kindness, and care. Most especially I must thank my nieces, Corianne and Melissa Ince, and nephew, Wesley Ince, for their love, sweetness, and joy. I am so grateful for their inspiration, and the much needed breaks and fun that they provided.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this final work of my doctoral program to a few people. First, to my grandfather, K. Jay Holdsworth, who showed me throughout his life that anything is truly possible, if you're willing to work for it. Next, to my other grandparents, Donna C. Holdsworth, who cannot remember much because of Alzheimer's, but does remember that she is proud of me, and Eugene and Shirley Pearson, who are proud as well.

I also would like to dedicate this work to all of my former students, friends with disabilities, and their families, and the many teachers of students with significant disabilities who participated or whom I've been able to interact with while teaching and throughout the program. None of this would have been possible without all of them, so I thank all of them for being such an important part of my life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

This study measured the attitudes of teachers of students with significant disabilities with the *Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities about Aspects of Their Jobs* survey. Teachers who worked with at least one student with significant disabilities were contacted via e-mail throughout four states in the United States, including a state in the west, midwest, south, and east. Teachers were also recruited via on-line methods, and through professional contacts. One-hundred and eighty teachers successfully completed the on-line survey. *Pearson* correlation coefficients were used to analyze the data, as well as means, standard deviations, and other demographic data were reported after data collection, in order to examine three research questions including:

1. Do the attitudes of teachers of students with significant disabilities about aspects of their jobs become less positive the older the students?
2. Do the attitudes about their jobs become less positive the longer teachers have been teaching?
3. Do the attitudes about aspects of their jobs become less positive the longer teachers of students with significant disabilities have been teaching students with significant disabilities?

Initial results indicated that no significant results supported the research questions for this study. Post hoc results displayed positive results when comparing two of the independent variables with two subdomains of the survey. These results do not support the research questions, but do suggest that further research and study should occur utilizing this survey with teachers of students with significant disabilities. Future research

should especially focus on examining what experiences teachers may have while teaching that create positive research results, and whether these findings could assist in designing interventions that may assist in bridging the gap between past research related to teacher attrition and burnout, and practices that occur within the design of special educator's jobs.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

For years, research has emphasized that teachers of students with significant disabilities "burn out" (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997), leaving their positions at a much higher rate than most groups of special educators. This population of teachers is often rated within the top three groups of special educators with high attrition resulting in positions left empty or filled with under-qualified teachers (American Association for Employment in Education, 2006). Attrition also seems to be higher for those who teach secondary-aged students with significant disabilities (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). While many researchers have studied teacher attrition within special education, few have specifically focused on this population of educators (Goessling, 1994; Goessling, 1998; Olivier & Williams, 2005; Ryndak, Clark, Conroy & Stuart, 2001).

Special educators who teach students with significant disabilities are less likely to be fully certified within the main area of their teaching assignments (Carlson, Brauen, Klein, Schroll, Westat, 2002). Being less qualified can lead to increased stress for beginning special education teachers (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997), and can impact outcomes for students with disabilities (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004). Billingsley (2004a) explicated the impact: "the hiring of unqualified special educators is especially costly for students with disabilities---those students who need the most assistance lose critical learning opportunities as these new teachers struggle to figure out what to do" (p. 370).

Further research has emphasized causes of attrition, although most of these research findings are not disaggregated by the different areas of special education (Brownell, Smith, McNellis, & Miller, 1997; Muller & Markowitz, 2003). This can create a problem when trying to discover reasons why teachers leave their specialized field. Although all special educators teach students with disabilities, teachers of specific populations of students are expected to fulfill widely varied roles and may have different responsibilities. Bouck (2004) stated that "aggregating data for students with [mild intellectual disabilities] with data for either [students with learning disabilities] or moderate to severe mental impairments makes effective, targeted, and informed decision making difficult" (p. 368). Unless research is disaggregated by the specific population of students, it cannot be known whether the theoretical causes are a factor in the attrition of different populations of teachers.

Some of the possible reasons researchers have theorized special educators leave their teaching positions have included: (a) large workloads (Carlson et al., 2002), (b) paperwork (e.g. especially that which is beyond the regular special education paperwork such as Individualized Education Plans [IEP], Coleman, 2001), (c) role conflict (e.g. information teacher is provided about job is different than actual daily and professional activities, Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997), (d) limited inclusion in workplace decisions (Ingersoll, 2001b), (e) lack of time for consultation and planning (Coleman, 2001), (f) lack of administrative support (Billingsley, 2004b), (g) lack of appropriate tools (e.g. training and supplies, The Southeast Center for Teaching Quality [SECTQ], 2004), (h) understanding the educational environment (Gehrke & Murri, 2006), and (i) dealing with emotional isolation or difficulties within working conditions (SECTQ, 2004). Such

working conditions may be different for teachers who work with students with differing disabilities. For example, although all special educators may be expected to advocate for their students, teachers of students with significant disabilities may find advocacy more arduous because others may view the population of students they teach as more difficult to understand or include (Carter & Hughes, 2006).

Purpose of Study

A paucity of research has focused on secondary special education concerning students with significant disabilities, especially regarding teacher job aspects (Bouck, 2005; Ginger, 2006). Unfortunately, research has shown that special education teachers of students with significant disabilities at the secondary level have higher levels of attrition than teachers at the elementary level (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). This leaves fewer secondary-level special education teachers to fulfill the educational needs of students with significant disabilities: "Inadequate numbers of special education teachers [at the secondary level] mean unreasonable responsibilities for those on staff" (Ginger, 2006, p. 6).

Teachers of students with significant disabilities at any grade level can have a harder time assimilating into the general education culture within most public schools (Goessling, 1994; Goessling, 1998). This group of teachers also may fulfill many varied and complicated roles throughout a school day (Conderman & Katsiyannis, 2002). For example, secondary teachers may have to modify curriculum across different general education subjects for each of their students, while assisting students to learn appropriate daily living and self-care skills, as well as providing job training to their students within their individual job interest areas. They may also provide range of motion and toileting

needs for students, train paraeducators to help a student learn how to eat or learn new job skills, and so forth. Thus, as Washburn-Moses (2005) stated, "special education teachers are often overburdened with multiple and sometimes competing responsibilities" (p. 151). Since teaching at the secondary level can be more complicated than an elementary position might be (Ginger, 2006), it is important to examine teachers' personal perspectives on their job aspects at the secondary level (Bouck, 2005). This study will compare the attitudes of secondary and elementary teachers of students with significant disabilities.

Age and amount of experience have often been linked to attrition within the special education attrition literature (Billingsley, 2004b). Because of this, the second and third hypothesis for this study will look specifically at the amount of experience among teachers surveyed. Although past research has found that younger teachers are more likely to leave the field earlier within their careers, teachers who enter special education often begin teaching at different ages and stages of their careers. Billingsley (2004b) also states that because of the variability of when teachers enter the field of special education, age should be a controlled variable when conducting research into teacher attitudes and attrition.

Others have also found that less trained teachers are often more likely to leave the field earlier in their careers. It may be assumed that special educators who remain in the field may gain more training and experience the longer they are in the field, but they may be more likely to burn-out the longer they are teaching, as they may be more likely to experience continual stress while on the job if they do not leave the field within the first few years of teaching. This study will examine this assumption by comparing the length

of time teachers' report they have been teaching to their attitudes toward aspects of their jobs. Two specific scenarios will be examined to answer these hypotheses; the first will look at how long the special educators have been teaching any subject or area, in or outside of special education. The other hypothesis will compare specifically how long teachers report they have been teacher students with significant disabilities compared to their attitudes toward their job.

The purpose of this research project is to examine special education teacher's attitudes about aspects of their jobs as teachers of students with significant disabilities. The research questions include the following:

1. Do the attitudes of teachers of students with significant disabilities about aspects of their jobs become less positive the older the students?
2. Do the attitudes about their jobs become less positive the longer teachers have been teaching?
3. Do the attitudes about aspects of their jobs become less positive the longer teachers of students with significant disabilities have been teaching students with significant disabilities?

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

The following chapter examines research about teacher attrition in special education. The review emphasizes current trends in teacher attrition for educators who work with students with significant disabilities. It defines teacher attrition as it relates to this group of educators. The chapter reviews literature about students with significant disabilities and their educational needs, looking especially at student and teacher needs related to secondary special education and the length of time which educators remain in the field.

Attrition Rates of Teachers Working with Students with Significant Disabilities

Teacher attrition has been a focus of research for many years; with specific groups of teachers whom display increased attrition rates. Special educators are one group of educators that has historically displayed high levels of teacher attrition (Ingersoll, 2001a). Billingsley (2004b) summarized attrition as "leaving the profession of education" (p. 39), transferring to another teaching position [in a same or similar field], or changing to a position in a different field [i.e. transferring from special education to general education]. Researchers have found that almost 30% of special educators leave the field within their first 3 years of teaching (Whitaker, 2000; Boe & Cook, 2006). This is twice the attrition rate of general education teachers. Unfortunately, little research has been done specifically examining why teachers of students with significant disabilities may be leaving the field.

Over the past fifteen years, research has been conducted to discover rates, reasons, and suggestions for decreasing attrition among special education teachers

(Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997; Washburn-Moses, 2005; Bouck, 2004; Bouck, 2005). Some examples of factors associated with why special educators leave the field include: (a) workloads that are too large (Carlson et al., 2002), (b) paperwork that extends beyond required special education paperwork (Coleman, 2001), (c) isolation and lack of inclusion in the workplace (Ingersoll, 2001b), (d) lack of time to collaborate (Coleman, 2001) and, (e) lack of administrative support (Billingsley, 2004b). Unfortunately, most special education teacher attrition research does not disaggregate by the specific work conditions within a specified field of special education (Carlson et al., 2002; Billingsley, 2004b; Coleman, 2001; Gehrke & Murri, 2006; SECTQ, 2004; Carter & Hughes, 2006).

The group of educators who teach students with significant disabilities has been described numerous ways within the research about attrition of special education teachers. Few studies disaggregate special education teacher attrition data based on the differing groups of special educators. The few studies that have disaggregated findings have defined each group of teachers in different ways. For example, a report from The American Association for Employment in Education (AAEE, 2008) groups special educators into at least ten different categories. Of these categories, teachers who serve primarily students with significant disabilities could include those categorized as teaching students with mental retardation, mild/moderate disabilities, multicategorical, and severe/profound disabilities. AAEE reports that of these four groups, all fall within the top ten national groups of educators with considerable shortages. Three of these groups also fall within the top five groups of education displaying considerable shortages. Previous research shows similar trends and findings (AAEE, 2006; Muller & Markowitz, 2003).

Possible differences in attrition within special education may stem from the different types of students special education teachers may teach (Carter & Hughes, 2006). In order to fully understand these differences, researchers must look at the thirteen disability classifications included Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004 (Wrightslaw, 2009). The continuum of services that districts may utilize, as well as systematic trends within school districts for organizing the educational services for students with disabilities should also be carefully considered. For example, most special education teachers are trained and certified to work with students with specific disabilities, yet there may be cross-over within the classifications of the students they eventually teach in the public schools.

In many states teachers who are certified to work with groups of students with specific learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, and some communication disabilities (i.e., students who are considered as having high-incidence disabilities) have traditionally worked in resource classrooms. However, within this group of teachers there is variability among the students they teach. High incidence educators may teach students in a resource or pull out setting, while others co-teach in a general education setting (Swanson, 2008). Other high incidence teachers may serve students with low-incidence disabilities (e.g., students with physical or intellectual disabilities) because they may be the only special education teacher in the building (Albrecht, Johns, Mounsteven, & Orlorunda, 2009).

This study focuses primarily on special educators who work with students with low-incidence disabilities. Most specifically, this study is examining teachers who work with students who meet the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) definition: having an IQ 70 or lower and displaying adaptive

behavior skills at least two deviations below the mean (AAIDD, 2010). But, many students with such lower-incidence disabilities have varying physical, sensory, and intellectual educational needs. As such, teachers may work with a range of students in this group, including those who fall within the thirteen disability classifications found within IDEA 2004 (Wrightslaw, 2009). For example, a student with autism may functionally display adaptive behavior skills much lower than two deviations below the mean. A student with an intellectual impairment may also have a hearing impairment or a communication disorder. Thus, some teachers, especially in rural and urban areas (Swanson, 2008) may primarily educate students with a high incidence disability, but may also teach some students with significant (low-incidence) disabilities.

The population of students with significant disabilities includes about 1% of the overall population of students in the United States. All of these students will likely require extensive supports throughout their education (Goessling, 1994). Thus, it is important that this group of students with disabilities have trained and highly qualified teachers available to provide consistent educational interventions. Students with significant disabilities also have consistently maintained low post-school outcomes related to employment, post-secondary education, independent living, and other important areas of life, which displays another reason such student's need special educators who stay in the field and are successful on the job (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005).

The job of the teachers who work with this population of students could be considered complicated. Aspects of the job may influence many decisions and behaviors displayed by educators related to attrition and professional burn-out. Studying the

influence and effect of work conditions on teachers, especially within the area of special education, is important because, as Gehrke & Murri (2006) stated, "workplace conditions and the integration of new special education teachers into that workplace are areas in which change in current practice can occur" (p. 180). Thus, research into work conditions, especially considering grade levels the teachers work with, could have an impact on teacher's jobs in the future. Another variable that may affect special educators who work with students with significant disabilities, is the length of time they have been teaching. As "teacher working conditions are student learning conditions" (SECTQ, 2004, p.1), gathering teachers attitudes about their work conditions can offer researchers insight into teacher attrition. There are many variables that can impact attrition rates. There are also many issues that effect whether teachers burnout while on the job for teachers of students with significant disabilities. Literature about burnout will be explored as it relates to special education. This review will also explore the possible job aspects these teachers may encounter, and discuss the student population they serve compared to the variables examined in this study.

Burnout in Special Education

Although little research has explored specifically the burnout of special education teachers while on the job, a few studies have identified different forms of burnout, most of which are related to complex occupations with significant stressors over a long period of time (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). Wisniewski & Gargiulo theorized burnout as consistent, complex, and continual stressors resulting in strained consequences to an employee. Some of the consequences of burnout include teacher's health and behavior while working, while others can include "emotional exhaustion, a reduction in personal

accomplishment, a sense of professional failure, and a tendency to depersonalize the recipient services" (p. 328).

Some teachers seem more likely to burn-out as they stay in the field of special education for an extended amount of time. Unfortunately, Wisniewski and Gargiulo (1997) reported that burnout can result in negative environments that may produce negative outcomes for students:

> Inside the classroom, teachers teaching under stressful conditions respond more negatively, are less task-oriented, deliver less positive reinforcement, are less focused on instructional tasks, and are less able to concentrate on instructional interactions. The immediate effect of stress is to limit both good teaching and professional interactions. Stressed teachers were rated as less effective in managing classroom disciplinary problems, and are more likely to use aversives to modify student behavior. The use of aversives may further intensify a cycle of maladaptive behaviors, and lead to teacher withdrawal. Consequently, the effect of stress is to create a learning environment that lacks cohesion and is more disorganized. Finally, these educators were also viewed as less sensitive to the social, physical, and emotional needs of their students. When stress reached the burnout level, educators directed their energies to basic survival: getting through the day became the first priority (p.339-340).

Early attrition from a teaching job may be a symptom of burnout, but burnout can also occur among teachers who remain on the job. Teachers may figuratively quit while on the job, minimizing how much energy they put into their daily and regular duties, as well as displaying less positive interactions with students. Wisniewski and Gargiulo (1997) and

Embich (2001) discussed that researchers have to find ways for educators to rate their levels of possible stress, stressors, emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization within their jobs in order to discover more accurate rates of teacher burnout while on the job. Consequentially, it is important for researchers to explore the attitudes of teachers toward aspects of their jobs compared to how long teachers have been in the field. Such comparisons may reveal if teachers are likely to leave the field, or help identify teachers who have remained in the field of special education, but have attitudes displaying symptoms of burnout while on the job (Gehrke & Murri, 2006; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997).

Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities

Although a direct connection between student outcomes and rates of teacher attrition and burn out cannot be easily made, Cook and Boe (2007) do summarize the problem of teacher attrition and burnout for students with disabilities: "Unfortunately, these teacher shortages significantly limit the capacity of the field of special education to provide quality education and related services" (p. 217). The National Longitudinal Transition Study, Wave 2 (NLTS2) has researched the long-term transition outcomes for students with disabilities throughout the United States (Wagner, et al., 2005). Many of the findings for students with significant disabilities have indicated poorer outcomes than many of the other groups of students with disabilities. For example, students with significant disabilities are least likely to be engaged in school, work, or training for work after high school as compared to students with sensory impairments and emotional disabilities (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2009). Newman et al. (2009), reported that students with mental retardation (intellectual disabilities) and multiple

disabilities average 65-66% of students involved in the three areas of engagement (e.g. school, work, training) since high school.

Further, this population of young adults is reported to have the lowest rates of social outcomes such as seeing friends informally on a weekly basis (33%), belonging to an organized community group (28%), taking extracurricular lessons or classes (28%), or taking part in volunteer service (28%) as compared to groups of students with learning disabilities and sensory impairments (Newman et al., 2009). Within the area of independent living (e.g. financial abilities), students with significant disabilities also are reported to have had lower outcomes than many other disability groups along indicators such as having a bank account (26-41%) or credit card (9%) (Newman et al., 2009). According to Wagner et al., (2006), students with significant disabilities also had very low rates of living on their own or driving.

Although not yet reported in any research, some of the poor outcomes could be a result of attrition and burnout among teachers of students with significant disabilities. As Billingsley (2004b) stated, "the shortage problem has serious and far-reaching implications for students with disabilities" (p. 39). Some of the implications discussed by Billingsley (2004b) included poor educational experiences and lower academic and social achievement, which may lead to the lowered outcomes reported for students with significant disabilities (Newman et al., 2009). Thus, teachers of students with significant disabilities can be important components of a student's education. If teachers leave their jobs quickly or burnout while on the job, their effectiveness as educators can be limited, which may impact student's long-term educational outcomes. To further explore why special education teachers of this population have high rates of attrition and burnout,

literature discussing job aspects of teaching students with significant disabilities will be reviewed.

Job Aspects Associated with Attrition and Burnout

Within the literature associated with attrition and burnout, job aspects and work conditions are terms often used interchangeably (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Billingsley, 2004b). Billingsley (2004b) summarized some job aspects as salary, school climate, administrative support, colleague support, professional development, teacher roles, and role problems. Wisniewski & Gargiulo (1997) discussed job aspects related to burnout to be those most specific to stress and strain on the job. They organized these conditions into four domains that included "organizational, interpersonal interactions, training, and instructional assignments and arrangements" (p. 330). They defined two important job aspects:

1. role conflict: occurs when the organization provides relevant information about a teacher's roles and responsibilities that conflicts with the realities of daily professional life.
2. role ambiguity: occurs when an educator has insufficient information to carry out his or her professional responsibilities adequately (p. 330).

Although past research has discovered different job aspects related to special education teacher attrition and burnout, further research is important to conduct into teacher's attitudes toward job aspects because of the educational cost of teacher attrition and burnout. Not only is there a possible cost to student's and their future outcomes, but a great financial cost to schools, districts, and thus, tax payers and local, state, and national governments (Carroll, 2007). As Carroll stated:

> Until we recognize that we have a retention problem we will continue to engage in a costly annual recruitment and hiring cycle, pouring more and more teachers into our nation's classrooms only to lose them at a faster and faster rate. This will continue to drain our public tax dollars, it will undermined teacher quality, and it will most certainly hinder our ability to close student achievement gaps (p.1).

Researchers examining teachers who work with students with significant disabilities and the high attrition rate of this group of teachers, estimate that the national and local costs for replacing these special educators are likely quite high (AAEE, 2006; AAEE, 2008). As Boe (2006) emphasized, the demand for special educators throughout the nation consists of both quantity and quality. There is the need for more teachers to replace those who leave, and money to pay for the financial cost of attrition (i.e. quantity), and a demand for quality teachers who are certified and capable of educating students so that their long-term outcomes improve consistently after they leave public education.

As previously discussed, the aspects of the job of a teacher of students with significant disabilities vary widely, and can be very complicated depending upon the students they serve. With a focus on inclusive practices, other educators with whom special educators may directly work may not know or recognize such best practices: "the gap between training and supports needed was quite large" (Carter & Hughes, 2006, p. 183). Thus, special educators may work with a wide variety of students who possess a wide range of needs, while implementing best practices, as well as working with other professionals. Carter and Hughes (2006) stated: "supports that stakeholders report receiving do not appear to align with those they report actually needing" (p. 183). Considering the complexity of the job this population of teachers must successfully

balance, it is appropriate that research examines the work conditions of teachers of students with significant disabilities.

Two school cultures. Special educators have to work in a job environment that straddles different school cultures: special education and general education (Goessling, 1994; Goessling, 1998; Olivier & Williams, 2005). In the past, especially for teachers of students with significant disabilities, special educators were never a part of the general education culture (Goessling, 1994). Now, because of movements toward more integrated education, special education teachers and students with more significant disabilities often are on the fringes of general education culture (Goessling, 1998). For example, Goessling (1998) stated that "in many schools, the culture of severe disabilities was invisible or nonexistent. Schools and society considered those teachers 'saints' and 'models of patience'" (p. 239). Unfortunately, such illusions about this group of educators may still exist within the school culture, making it even more difficult for special educators to stride both worlds: "it represents a continuing struggle by those on the outside who are attempting to get into the general education community and be full participants" (p. 238).

A critical job aspect impacted by the differences between the two cultures of special and general education is collaboration (Slavin, 1984; Goessling, 1994). Another aspect of a special educator's job that is different than many general educator's involves supervising paraeducators (Ingersoll, 2004; Cook & Boe, 2007; Office of Special Education Programs, 2004; Slavin, 1984; Billingsly, 2004b). Other job aspects related to the two cultures include inclusion (Billingsly, 2004b; Goessling, 1994; Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002) and the varied levels of support from administrators and general educators for inclusion.

Finally, bias (AFT, 2006; Monteith, 2000; Black, 2001; Billingsly, 2004b; SECTQ, 2004; Rowan, et al., 2002) is a job aspect special education teachers may deal with related to people's possible attitudes toward students with disabilities from both cultural groups in general and special education.

As Olivier and Williams (2005) discussed, teachers of students with significant disabilities face many "unique challenges that go far beyond the normal requirements of teaching" (p. 20). They work with students with significant disabilities related to learning, physical, and social needs. Olivier and Williams concluded that special education is "challenging by its very nature" (p. 23). They found that the teachers of students with significant disabilities whom they interviewed worked with students with a large range of differing intellectual abilities and that these students communicated in many different and unique ways with which educators needed to become familiar. They also found that disciplining students was more complicated, and that being a special educator "involved additional work and responsibility" (p. 24). One the one hand, special education caused teachers stress and had a stigma attached to it, and on the other hand, teachers often found special education "highly fulfilling and rewarding" (p. 25).

Although the job of a special educator working with students with significant disabilities may include challenges other teachers often experience barriers that are more unique. This occurs, as Trammell (2009) discussed, because "as students with disabilities break through initial access barriers, they often discover that a complex layer of social barriers still remain beneath the surface, potentially interfering with their success" (p. 106). So, the job of being a special educator of students with significant disabilities may be a very different position than most other special educators. A large part of the

educator's job is to not only fulfill the needs of the students with significant disabilities, but also assist in providing access for students to general education. This means special education teachers need to know about both worlds, even though "through training and experience they have been socialized into special education" (Goessling, 1994, p. 4). It is important to study this particular group of special educators as they are the educators responsible for bringing together two very different worlds, as they attempt to educate students with significant disabilities successfully, and assist in providing access to both worlds for students with significant disabilities.

Students with significant disabilities. The population of students considered as having significant disabilities can range within the literature (Bouck, 2004). For example, students having significant disabilities can be considered as students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities, and students with physical and intellectual disabilities, as well as students with severe sensory impairments and intellectual delays. Teachers of students of this population are expected to be prepared to teach many different academic levels, while accommodating and modifying appropriately for student's physical, sensory, intellectual, and other needs (Goessling, 1994). A teacher of students with significant disabilities could likely be expected to teach any student with a combination of multiple disabilities and abilities, and "apply their knowledge and skills with a variety of students across settings and situations" (Ryndak, et al., 2001, p. 97).

This study will complete research specifically with teachers working with this population of students, as the population is defined previously by AAIDD (2010):

> "One criterion to measure intellectual functioning is an IQ test. Generally, an IQ test score of around 70 or as high as 75 indicates a limitation in intellectual

> functioning. Standardized tests can also determine limitations in adaptive behavior which comprises three skill types: conceptual skills, social skills, and practical skills" (para.3).

Their definition consists of students with an IQ of 70 or lower, adaptive behavior skills ranging at least two deviations below the mean, and a classification for special education services under IDEA 2004 within one of the following areas: Intellectual Disability (MR), Autism, Multiple Disabilities, Other Health Impairment, Deaf-blindness or one of the other sensory impairment classifications, and Traumatic Brain Injury. The term significant disabilities will be utilized throughout this study to describe this population of students and their teachers.

Secondary Special Education

Each grade level in the education of a student has specific knowledge, developmental expectations, and responsibilities for teachers. Although all grade levels can be complicated to teach, especially when working with students with significant disabilities, teaching students at the secondary level may be even more arduous as "secondary special education teachers may be responsible for teaching an even wider variety of skills then their elementary counterparts" (Washburn-Moses, 2005, p. 151). Secondary special educators may be expected to teach a wide range of vocational skills to meet the needs of the many level of students. Teachers must also assist students in learning an increasingly sophisticated curriculum, as well as accessing general education curriculum "It is no longer enough for students with disabilities to be present in a general education classroom; they must be provided with the supports and supplementary aides

necessary to enhance their participation and progress in the curriculum" (Pugach & Warger, 2001, p. 213).

They also must reinforce, maintain, improve, and generalize basic skills such as in math and reading, independent living and social skills, and any other needs this group of students may have as they move from adolescence to adulthood (Washburn-Moses, 2005; Conderman & Katsiyannis, 2002; Bouck, 2005; & Carter & Hughes, 2006). Researchers have found that attrition is higher for secondary level teachers of students with significant disabilities (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997; Washburn-Moses, 2005). A finding from a preliminary study found a significant relationship between one sub-scale of the survey, attitudes toward actions teachers have taken related to job design, and how old the students were (Pearson, 2010). This subscale asked questions related to actions they had to take within their job, specifically the job of supervising paraeducators. Statistical means were also large enough among the other two sub-scales (direct attitudes toward position and attitudes about experiences related to actions of others), to theorize that with a larger group of participants, findings may be significant for secondary level teachers of students with significant disabilities.

There are many possible reasons for the increased attrition for secondary teachers of students with significant disabilities. Some previously discussed factors include expectations, curriculum, and student needs. Another reason may be the culture of most secondary level schools throughout the United States. As Ginger (2006) stated:

> Secondary content teachers want to accommodate their special education students. But these teachers face many obstacles, frequently with little or no assistance… Among these obstacles: normal loads of 160 to 180 students; lack of notification

> of students with IEPs or 504 plans; shortage of inclusion teachers; only a single, broad introductory course in exceptional children… Inclusion must be more than a physical reassignment of students from one classroom to another; to succeed it must include a school-wide philosophical commitment (p. 1).

Much effort is needed to fully incorporate students with significant disabilities into public school. This is especially true at the secondary level, where physically, culturally, and philosophically public secondary education is more complicated than their younger grade counter-parts. As previously stated, past research on special educator attrition and burnout does not disaggregate findings specific to groups of students that special educators may teach (Bouck, 2004). Most attrition and burnout data also is not disaggregated by age or grade levels.

Length of Time Teaching

The number of years an educator has been teaching is often a significant factor related to teacher attrition and burnout. Cook and Boe (2007) reported that because of the high rate of teachers leaving special education "approximately 10% of special education positions were filled by uncertified personnel" (p. 218). Also, teachers who are not fully certified are more likely to leave the field sooner (Muller & Markowitz, 2003). Whitaker (2000) reported that approximately 30% of special educators leave after their second year of teaching: "alarming statistics indicate that the first few years of teaching are the most critical in determining whether or not the novice teacher will remain in the profession" (p. 546). Unfortunately, it is difficult to quantitatively gather teacher's attrition data until they have left the field, and is mainly done by gathering educator's "intention to leave their classrooms" (Gehrke & Murri, 2006, p. 180). Some studies that have gathered data

from novice special educators who intend to leave the field have found that novice teachers do "cite consistent factors within their workplace that create frustration and dissatisfaction and influence their career decisions" (p.180).

Although some teacher attrition research has found that new teachers leave the field of special education in large numbers, less research has focused on why educators stay in the field. Billingsley (2004a) stated, "a holistic view of special educators' work conditions is needed to sustain special educators' commitment to their work" (p. 371). Also, Wisniewski and Gargiulo (1997) discussed, research has found that teachers who stay longer in special education were more likely to report emotional exhaustion and a loss of commitment to the field. This trend appears to be at least partially related to the gap special educators progressively recognize between their knowledge of best practices and what they are able to actually do within the working environments they are consistently in: "teachers view themselves as powerless to effect even fundamental changes" (Billingsley, 2004a, p. 335; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). Thus, teachers may more likely report lower attitudes toward aspects of their jobs the longer they are in the field of special education, especially if they work with students with significant disabilities since attrition and burnout rates are higher with this population of teachers.

Purpose of Study

There are different factors influencing attrition and burnout within the field of special education. These factors affect teachers who work with specific groups of students with disabilities differently, resulting in certain groups of teachers having higher rates of attrition and burnout (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997; AAEE, 2006; AAEE, 2008). Teachers who work with students with significant disabilities may be one group

who displays higher rates of attrition and burnout. Thus, it is important to disaggregate data and findings related to attrition and burnout for teachers of students with significant disabilities.

Looking specifically at the group of special educators who work with students with significant disabilities and their job aspects or working conditions is important not only because of the higher rates of attrition and burnout consistent with this group of educators, but because of low outcomes often reported for the group of students they work with. For example, the NLTS2 has reported lower outcomes for students with significant disabilities than other groups of students with disabilities (Newman, et al., 2009).

Teachers of students with significant disabilities report having complicated jobs that are quite different from many other educators, especially at the secondary level (Washburn-Moses, 2005; Bouck, 2005). These teachers also have to stride two different cultures of special and general education, while trying to assist their students in successfully integrating into school and continuing the maintenance and generalization of other necessary skills (Goessling, 1994; Goessling, 1998; Olivier & Williams, 2005). This can be difficult as the culture of general education, especially at the secondary level, may not be conducive to increased inclusion of students with significant disabilities. Attrition and burnout also have reportedly different effects on teachers at different lengths of teaching, as younger teachers are more likely to leave the field of special education early on in their career, while older special educators are reported as being more likely to burnout while on the job.

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes of teachers of students with significant disabilities using the survey, *Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities about Aspects of Their Jobs.* The current study was designed to better understand educator's attitudes toward specific aspects of their jobs in order to further explain attrition and teacher burnout. The research questions for this study included:

4. Do the attitudes of teachers of students with significant disabilities about aspects of their jobs become less positive the older the students?
5. Do the attitudes about their jobs become less positive the longer teachers have been teaching?
6. Do the attitudes about aspects of their jobs become less positive the longer teachers of students with significant disabilities have been teaching students with significant disabilities?

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes of teachers of students with significant disabilities using the survey, *Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities about Aspects of Their Jobs.* The study examined the impact of demographic variables on special educator's attitudes toward aspects of their jobs. Specifically, the teachers of students with significant disabilities self-reported their attitudes toward aspects of their jobs using a Likert scale. Demographic information was collected of the grade range of students the educators teach, the length of time teachers have taught any students, and the length of time teachers have taught students with significant disabilities. Students with significant disabilities was defined as students with an IQ of 70 or lower, adaptive behavior skills ranging at least 2 deviations below the average/mean, and a classification for special education services under IDEA 2004 within one of the following areas: Intellectual Disability (MR), Autism, Multiple Disabilities, Other Health Impairment, Deaf-blindness or one of the other sensory impairment classifications, and Traumatic Brain Injury (AAEE, 2006).

Definitions of Variables

As there are three hypotheses, the variables will be defined as follows in Table 1.

Table 1: Hypotheses Variable Definitions

Hypothesis	Dependent Variables and Dependent Measures	Independent Variables
Hypothesis A: The attitudes of teachers of students with significant disabilities will be significantly lower the older the students are that the educators teach.	Attitudes of special educators of students with significant disabilities. 3 subdomain/dependent measures:	Four grade range levels of students: Elementary (ages 3-10), Middle/Junior High (ages 11-14), High school (ages 15-18), and Post-high (ages 19-22)

	a. Direct attitudes about position b. Attitudes about actions teachers have taken related to their job design c. Attitudes about experiences related to actions of others	
Hypotheses B: The attitudes of teachers of students with significant disabilities will be significantly lower the longer they have taught school (with any students).	Attitudes of special educators of students with significant disabilities. 3 domain/dependent measures: a. Direct attitudes about position b. Attitudes about actions teachers have taken related to their job design c. Attitudes about experiences related to actions of others	Length of time teachers have taught (any students)
Hypothesis C: The attitudes of teachers of students with significant disabilities will be significantly lower the longer they have taught students with significant disabilities.	Attitudes of special educators of students with significant disabilities. 3 domain/dependent measures: a. Direct attitudes about position b. Attitudes about actions teachers have taken related to their job design c. Attitudes about experiences related to actions of others	Length of time teachers have taught students with significant disabilities.

Participants

Participants for this study included teachers of students with significant disabilities from states within the United States. A western, midwestern, eastern, and

southern state were focused on to gather teacher contact information, based upon ease in gathering teacher e-mail addresses. Participants were also gathered via word of mouth processes, through use of on-line support groups for parents of students with significant disabilities and special education teachers, and with local special education teachers and their colleagues the researcher had interacted with in her past employment. The researcher completed all human subject requirements at the university where the study originated. The sampling plan involved utilizing public on-line records and information to gain teacher e-mail addresses (such as district lists, websites, published state directories). Word of mouth processes were also utilized by contacting special educators either through e-mail or on-line support group, and by asking their colleagues, or parents of students with significant disabilities to contact teachers and ask them to contact the researcher if interested in taking the survey. Once they contacted the researcher, the same invitation e-mail was sent to all possible participants with an on-line survey link included in the e-mail.

As this study targeted a very specialized group of educators who work with at least one student with significant disabilities, literature about methods for conducting research using the internet with people with disabilities and minority groups (Kohring, 1999; Yancey, Ortega, & Kumanyika, 2006; Friedman, 2009) was reviewed. Because of their specification of skills, knowledge, and abilities, special recruitments steps needed to be taken in order to contact these teachers: "the more specific the participant requirements, the longer it takes to recruit" (Henry, 2007). For this study, teacher participants were gathered via word of mouth, or "snowballing" processes (Shriyan, 2008), as well as by direct e-mailing techniques.

Utilizing on-line methods limits responders to those whom have e-mail accounts and know how to use websites, but as most teachers now have assigned e-mail addresses through their schools, on-line methods were an appropriate approach for this study (Yun & Trumbo, 2000). There are advantages and disadvantages to utilizing on-line surveys. For example, some advantages include a decreased cost for data collection compared to mailed surveys (Paolo, Bonaminio, Gibson, Partridge, & Kallail, 2000; Yun & Trumbo, 2000). Usually e-mail and website data collection processes have a faster rate of return, as respondents only have to click on a website to be directed to a survey, or fill out a survey and reply or forward back the data to the researcher (Paolo et al., 2000). Some disadvantages include not being able to know if an e-mail is not delivered. Yun and Trumbo (2000) reported that this occurs almost 28% of the time with e-mailed research. Another disadvantage involves sending numerous notifications or reminders via e-mail, as such practices can often be viewed as annoying or inappropriate by the e-mail recipients (Yun & Trumbo, 2000).

The researcher took necessary steps when identifying participants in order to utilize the advantages of on-line data collection, and mitigate disadvantages. For example, Yun and Trumbo (2000) suggested gathering participants in more than one way. Thus, direct e-mailing techniques were utilized by gathering e-mail addresses of special educators who likely worked with students with significant disabilities via district and school websites. These teachers were sent an e-mail introduction requesting their participation, with a direct link to the online survey. Along with such direct contacts, requests were also made within the e-mail for teachers to forward the survey to other

teachers they knew who worked with students with significant disabilities. Thus, a "snowballing" or word-of-mouth process was also utilized.

Direct e-mails were also sent to teachers who were verbally told about the study, through interactions with the researcher. These teachers were first sent an e-mail to ask if they would be willing to take the survey, and then the introduction e-mail was sent. All participants were asked to pass on the opportunity to take the survey to their teaching peers. Finally, two online support groups were accessed. One was for parents of students with significant disabilities, and the other was for special education teachers of students within this population. A posting within the groups was sent to members of the groups, providing the e-mail of the researcher. The posting requested that interested or willing teachers contact the researcher, and willing parents to contact their children's teachers to ask the teacher to take the survey. Thus, more than one mode was utilized to gather participants, which researchers believe may be useful in online research (Yun & Trumbo, 2000). Utilization of all these methods did increase the overall number of educators who took the survey, but also made it difficult to gather an actual return rate.

The sample of teachers of students with significant disabilities included four grade-level groups. Teachers could take the survey if they taught students aged three to twenty-two year old. They were then split by ages 3-10 (elementary), 11-14 (middle school), 15-18 (high school), and 19-22 (post-high). Attempts were made when creating the database of e-mails of special educators to sample teachers equally among all age ranges. Demographic information about the population with whom the teachers worked, the geographic area in which they worked, certification status, and whether or not they

taught at least one student with a significant disability was collected. Teachers who did not teach at least one student with a significant disability were not able to take the survey.

Instrument

Survey Development

The *Attitudes and Feelings of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities about Aspects of Their Jobs* was designed after the researcher conducted two pilot studies. The first pilot utilized both qualitative and quantitative data analyses to create the survey items as well as complete an item analysis for reliability. Survey items were created based upon the themes that emerged from the analysis of the experiences of the participants interviewed for the qualitative part of the initial pilot study. These themes were grounded theoretically within literature concerning attrition of special education teachers, and are outlined in Appendix A. Twenty participants who taught special education to students with mild disabilities were identified through a convenience sample. Reliability estimates of the items was obtained through this effort.

The revised survey was then pilot tested by 92 teachers of students with significant disabilities from a midwestern state. Significant results were found when comparing actions teachers reported related to their job with the grade level in which they taught. Findings displayed that high school special educators were more likely to have lower attitude ratings than those who taught at younger grades. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and independent *t* tests were employed to analyze the data ($p < .05$ level). These results were similar to past findings from attrition and burnout research, especially related to attrition and satisfaction rates of secondary level teachers working

with students with significant disabilities (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997; Wasburn-Moses, 2005; Bouck, 2004).

Data analysis using Cronbach Alpha for reliability testing included the following results:

1. Direct feelings about position: .821
2. Attitudes about actions teachers have taken related to job design: .874
3. Attitudes about experiences related to actions of others: .787

The survey had a return rate of 16% with a sample size of 92 out of 599 invitations possible participants. The demographic results included 98% of teachers who took the survey were Caucasian, 1% were African-American, and 1% were Asian. Further, 86% of the teachers who took the survey reported having full certification to teach students with significant disabilities. Considering that this population of special educators only represented secondary level teachers of students with significant disabilities, these demographic data appeared to be representative of teacher data reported by the state.

The resulting data from the pilot study were utilized to improve the validity for the survey. Specifically, the results of the pilot were used to improve content, criterion, and construct validity. For example, teachers who took the pilot were able to comment on whether they thought the items were appropriate. Many teachers commented about the pertinence of the items within the survey, thus this information was utilized to ensure content validity. Further, items were eliminated if item analysis results deemed it necessary. This strengthened the criterion validity so that the survey items and sub-scale configuration was measuring what they claimed to measure. Finally, literature was reviewed and theoretical premise for each sub-scale checked to make sure the survey

maintained content validity. The revised survey including the three subscales is included in Appendix B.

Data Collection

The survey was located on an a website (Survey Monkey: http://www.surveymonkey.com/). The e-mail invitation contained a direct link to the survey. Teachers who were directly contacted received three e-mails. The first was to request teachers take the survey. The second was sent at least twenty-four hours later as a reminder of the request. A third and final e-mail was sent approximately twenty-four to seventy-two hours after the second notification. Any returned or error notifications were noted, and any questions from the teachers were immediately answered via e-mail. The survey remained open for eight weeks, providing time for participants to take the survey at their convenience. Finally, the survey was designed to take a minimal amount of time to complete (approximately ten minutes), thus increasing the likelihood of more teachers completing it.

Data collection began on April 13, 2010 with direct e-mail attempts. E-mails were sent to more than 500 possible teachers of students with significant disabilities across the 4 states. Other word-of-mouth methods were also used, including approximately 30 teachers of students with significant disabilities who verbally stated interest in taking the survey that the researcher interacted with while working or at a national conference. Finally, approximately 30 teachers also contacted the researcher to take the survey after being contacted via parents of students with significant disabilities or through an on-line support group for special educators.

Eligibility to take the survey was based upon whether the teachers worked with at least one student who met the definition of having a significant disability (i.e. IQ of 70 or lower, adaptive behavior skills at least two deviations below the mean, etc.). The survey asked questions to ensure teacher's eligibility to take the survey, including asking the educators whether they were currently teaching at least 50% of the day (i.e. not in an administrative position), whether they taught at least one student who met the definition of having a significant disability, and whether teachers were willing to take the survey after reading the human subjects information. The survey was designed so if teachers answered no to any of these eligibility questions, they were not allowed to complete the rest of the survey. Participants for the study were actively pursued by the researcher for eight weeks.

Data Analysis

Once two hundred surveys were completed, the data were down-loaded from the on-line survey. These data were organized in an *Excel* file, and then uploaded into the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS). Three types of data were recorded into SPSS including: (a) eligibility data (b) demographic data, and (c) attitudinal data gathered via the Likert scale. Basic statistical frequencies were conducted for the demographic statistics once data were gathered. Bivariate statistical correlations were conducted for each hypothesis in order to test significance of each, based upon a .05 alpha level to determine significance (see Table 2).

Table 2: Data Analysis Table

Hypothesis	Type of Data	Data Analysis Method
Hypothesis A: The attitudes of teachers of students with significant disabilities will	Attitudinal rating (interval)	Bivariate *Pearson* correlation

be significantly lower the older the students are that the educators teach.		
Hypothesis B: The attitudes of teachers of students with significant disabilities will be significantly lower the longer they have taught school (with any students).	Attitudinal rating (interval)	Bivariate *Pearson* correlation
Hypothesis C: The attitudes of teachers of students with significant disabilities will be significantly lower the longer they have taught students with significant disabilities.	Attitudinal rating (interval)	Bivariate *Pearson* correlation

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

This chapter is divided into four sections: (a) summary of the response to the survey including results of the internal consistency analysis of the survey, (b) summary of the characteristics of the respondents, (c) discussion about the variable findings, and (d) summary of the data analysis. The first describes the response to the survey over an eight week period of active recruitment. The second section describes the characteristics of the respondents including descriptive data analysis. These data include means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages. The third section will discuss the independent variables. Information will include descriptive statistics of means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages. The fourth section discusses data analyses. This discussion will involve the results of the bivariate *Pearson* correlations for the three independent variables compared to teacher attitudinal ratings within the survey.

Survey Response

Invitations to take the *Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities about Aspects of Their Jobs* survey were e-mailed to teachers April 13, 2010. The final e-mailed invitation was sent on June 5, 2010. The survey remained open for another two weeks after the last invitation. The survey was closed on June 14, 2010. Thus, active participant recruitment occurred for 8 weeks. Unfortunately, an exact return rate could not be configured given the sampling approach used. It is estimated that almost 590 teachers were e-mailed with the survey request. Approximately 80 notifications stating that addresses were not valid were returned. E-mail invitations asked teachers to forward the survey link to other teachers whom they knew worked with students with

significant disabilities, and it is not known if any participants who completed the survey were forwarded the invitation from a teacher.

Recruitment of participants did include inviting approximately twenty teachers whom the researcher had interacted with professionally. These contacts were asked to take the survey and approximately 10 were also willing to send the request to participate to their colleagues. Approximately 30 teachers contacted the researcher from this group of referrals. Approximately 20 more were identified after being contacted by a parent who saw the post on an online support group, or who saw a post on an online support group for special education teachers. It is unknown how many of these teachers actually completed the survey. Two hundred and four participants attempted to take the survey. Twenty-four did not complete the survey after beginning it, resulting in 180 surveys with valid data.

Respondent Characteristics

Means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages were calculated for the respondent characteristics, and are found on Table 3. Table 4 includes the means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages for the two independent variables: (a) length of time teachers have taught and (b) length of time teachers have taught students with significant disabilities.

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Descriptive Variables	**N**	**Frequency**	**%**
Types of Students the Teachers Primarily Taught			
--Majority of students have significant disabilities		124	68.9%
--Primarily students with other disability		56	31.1%
Total	180		100%
Teacher's Certification Level			
--Fully certified		157	87.2%
--Certified other disability in special education		16	8.9%
--Emergency waiver		4	2.2%

--Certified general education		2	1.1%
--Not certified		1	.6%
Total	180		100%
Educational Setting for Majority of Teacher's Students			
--Self Contained Special Education Classroom		104	58.1%
--Mainstreamed		34	19%
--General Education at least 80%		28	15.6%
--General Education 100%		7	3.9%
--Community-based Class		4	2.2%
--Homebound		1	.6%
--Separate school/state school		1	.6%
--Hospital class		0	0%
--Residential Care and Treatment Facility		0	0%
--Missing		1	
Total	180		100%
Classification of Majority of Students the Teacher Teaches			
--Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability		62	34.8%
--Specific Learning Disability		36	20.2%
--Multiple Disabilities		30	16.9%
--Autism		24	13.5%
--Emotional Disability		7	3.9%
--Hearing Impairment		5	2.8%
--Communication Disorder		5	2.8%
--Visual Impairment/blindness		5	2.8%
--Other Health Impairment		3	1.7%
--Deafness		1	.6
--Deaf-blindness		0	0%
--Orthopedic Impairment		0	0%
--Traumatic Brain Injury		0	0%
--Missing		2	
Total	180		100%
Race/Ethnicity			
--Caucasian		164	92.1%
--Hispanic/Latino		6	3.4%
--African-American		3	1.7%
--Asian		2	1.1%
--Multi-racial		2	1.1%
--Native American		1	.6
--Polynesian-American		0	0%
--Other		0	0%
--Missing		2	
Total	180		100%
Geographical Area			
--Suburban		60	36.1%
--Urban		54	32.5%
--Rural		52	31.3%

--Missing	14	
Total	180	100%

Table 4: Demographic Information of Independent Variables

Independent Variables	**N**	**SD**	**Mean**	**Range**	**Missing**
Length of Time Teachers Have Taught	180	9.7	11.93	1-37	1
Length of Time Teachers Have Taught Students with Significant Disabilities	180	8.7	9.44	1-37	2
Oldest Age Teachers Taught	180	4.95	14.81	4-22	1

Types of Students Teachers Primarily Taught

Participants were asked to describe the group of students they worked with the majority of the time throughout the school year. They were asked to differentiate between whether they mainly worked with students with significant disabilities, or if they worked with students with other disabilities not considered to be significant disabilities, but had taught at least one student with a significant disability during the school year. Teachers were asked to differentiate between these groups so the researcher would know which group of students the teachers mainly taught. The majority of the teachers who responded to the survey (124, 68.9%) primarily taught students with significant disabilities. Teachers who taught mainly students with disabilities other than significant disabilities constituted 31.1% (56) of those who took the survey.

Teachers' Certification Level

Participants were asked to indicate their certification level. Respondents were given five options: (a) fully certified in special education to work with students with significant disabilities, (b) teaching under an emergency waiver, (c) not certified to teach students with significant disabilities but certified in another area of special education, (d) not certified to teach in special education but certified to teach students in general education, and (e) not certified. One hundred and fifty-seven (87.2%) of the teachers who

took the survey were fully certified to teach students with significant disabilities, 16% (8.9%) were certified in another area of special education, 2.2% (4) were on an emergency waiver, 1.1% (2) were certified in general education, not special education, with .6% (1) not certified.

Educational Setting for Majority of Teachers' Students

Teachers were asked to report the location in which their students with significant disabilities spent the majority of their day. Respondents were able to choose from 9 options: (a) general education 100% of the school day, (b) general education at least 80% of the time, (c) mainstreamed in general education less than 80% of the school day, (d) self-contained classroom, receiving services in a special education classroom for more than 50% of the school day, (e) community-based class, in special education classes for at least 50% of the day, and on a job site for 50% of the day, (f) homebound, (g) hospital class (class housed in a hospital, not a state school), (h) separate school or state school for students with significant disabilities, or (i) residential care and treatment facility. The majority (104, 58.1%) of respondents reported that their students were placed in self-contained special education classrooms. Nineteen percent (34) reported that their students were mainstreamed, and 15.6% (28) reported that their student's placements were in general education at least 80% of the day. Almost four percent (3.9%, 7) of participants taught students with significant disabilities whose special education placements were in general education 100% of the day and 2.2 % (4) had students placed in community-based classes. Finally .6% (1) had students in a homebound setting, .6% (1) taught students in a separate school, and 0% had students placed in a residential care and treatment facility, or a hospital class.

Classification of Majority of Students the Teacher Teaches

Demographic information was gathered about the IDEA 2004 classification for students with disabilities. The IDEA 2004 classification options included autism, deafness, hearing impairment, multiple disabilities, other health impairment, communication impairment, visual impairment including blindness, deaf-blindness, emotional disability, mental retardation/intellectual disability, orthopedic impairment, emotional disability, specific learning disability, and traumatic brain injury. Percentages for the different classifications included 34.8% (62) taught students primarily with mental retardation/intellectual disabilities, 20.2% (36) taught students primarily classified as having a specific learning disability, and 16.9% (30) teaching students classified with multiple disabilities. Twenty-four teachers (13.5%) taught students classified as having autism, 3.9% (7) taught students primarily classified as having an emotional disability. Five of the participants (2.8%) taught students with hearing impairments, 2.8% (5) taught students classified with a communication disorder, and 2.8% (5) taught students classified as having a visual impairment/blindness. Also, 1.7% (3) taught students classified as having other health impairments and .6% (1) taught students classified as having deafness. Finally, 0% of respondents taught students classified with deaf-blindness and 0% taught students with primarily orthopedic impairments or traumatic brain injuries.

Race/Ethnicity of Teachers

The majority of the participants (92.1%, 164) stated that they were Caucasian. Six participants (3.4%) were Hispanic/Latino, 1.7% (3) were African-American, 1.1% (2)

were Asian or Multi-racial, and .6 (1 participant) was Native American. No respondents answered that they were Polynesian-American, or other race/ethnicity.

Geographic Area

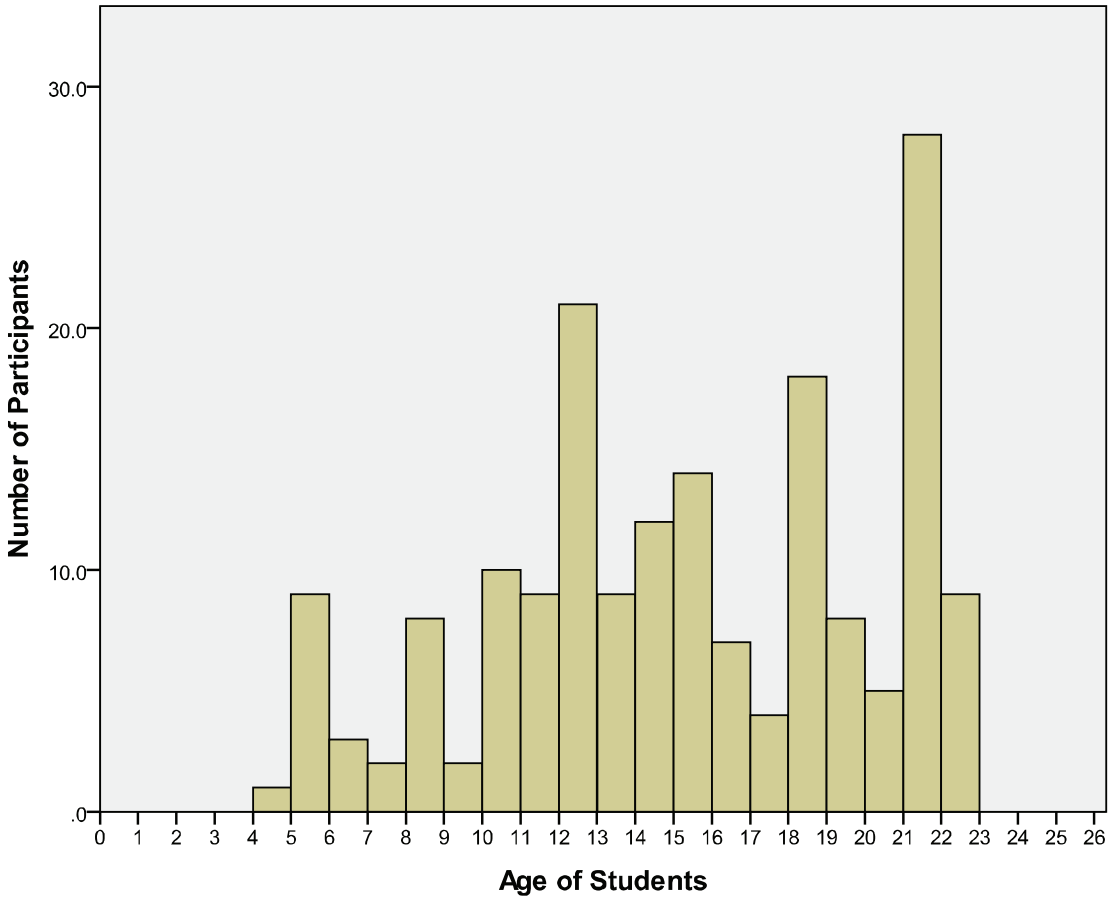
The last demographic question was what geographic area the respondents taught in. Respondents were given the options of choosing between teaching in an urban, rural, or suburban area. Sixty participants (36.1%) taught in suburban areas, with 32.5% (54) of the respondents teaching in an urban area and 31.3% (52) in a rural area.

Independent Variables

The three independent variables include: (a) ages the teachers' taught, (b) length of time teachers have taught any students or subjects, and (c) length of time teachers have taught students with significant disabilities.

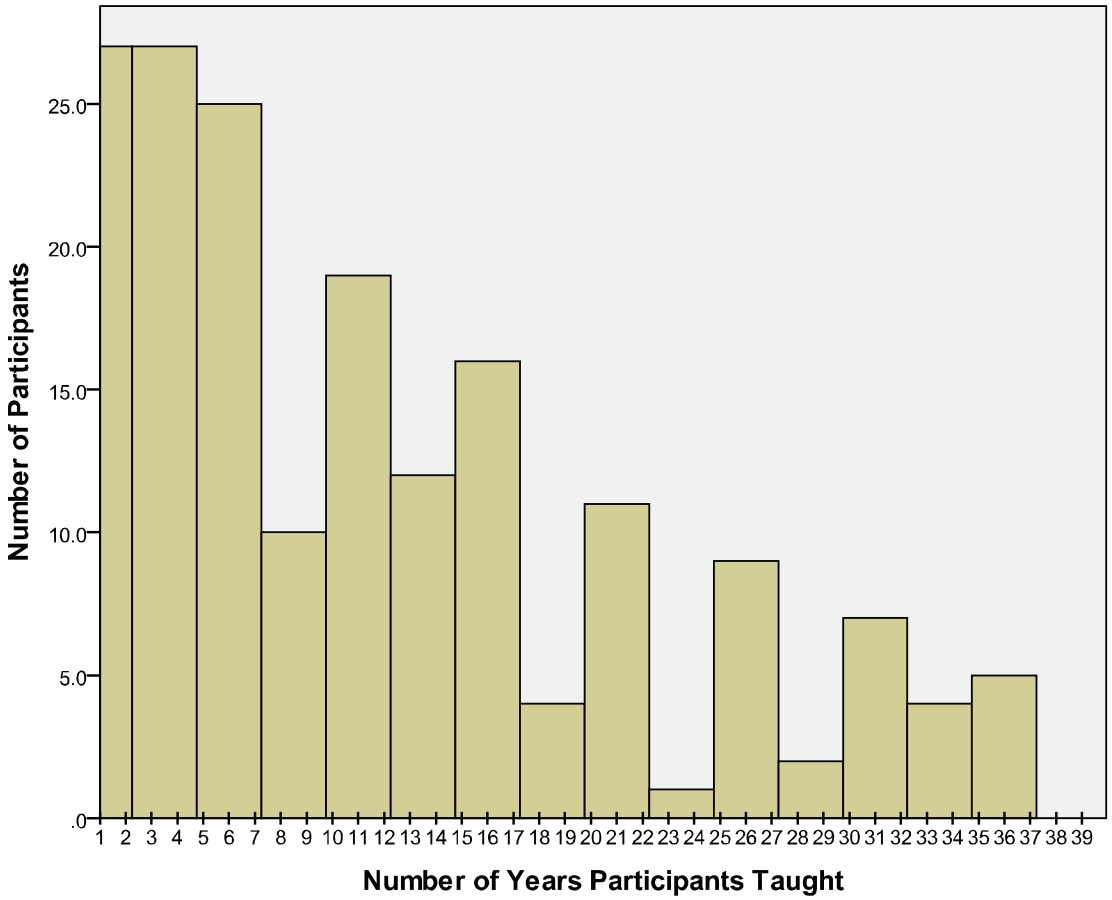
Ages the teachers taught. Respondents were asked to report the ages of the students they taught. The research question focused on whether the participant's attitudes were lower the older the students were that they taught. In order to best analyze the ages of students participants taught, a variable was created identifying the age of the oldest student taught. The mean, standard deviation, and range for the oldest ages of the students each participant taught are reported in Table 3, and the frequency of oldest ages taught are displayed in Figure 1. Also, the mean age of all of the ages respondents reported teaching was 14.81, with a standard deviation of 4.95 and a mode of 21.00.

Figure 1: Oldest Age of Students Teachers Taught



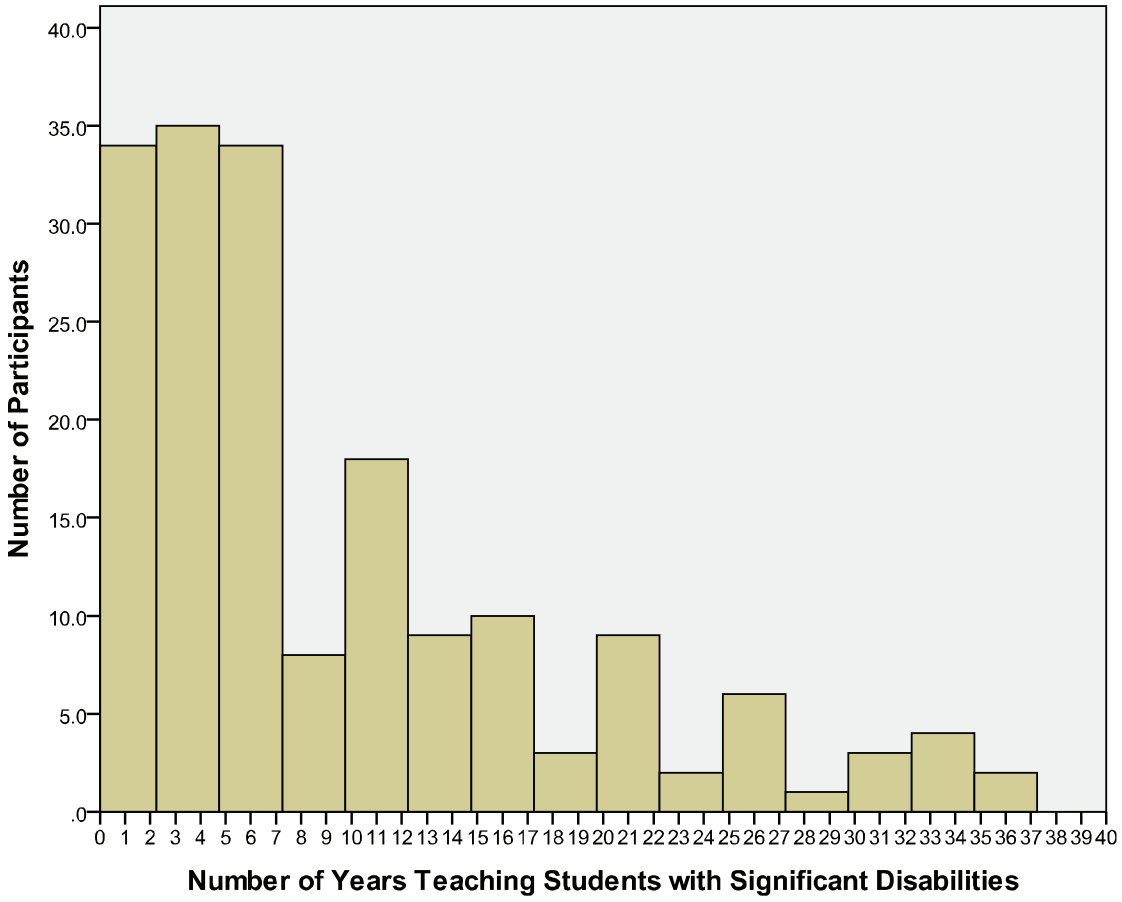
Length of time teachers taught any students or subject. Data were collected regarding the length of time teachers have taught, defined as having taught any subject and any students (i.e. with or without disabilities). All data are displayed in Figure 2. The mean amount of years teachers taught any students was 11.93 years with a standard deviation of 9.7 and a median of 10.00. The four largest groups of years the participants had taught were 7% (15) participants had taught 3 years, 7% (14) had taught for 1 year, 6.5% (13) had taught for 2 years, and 6% (12) had taught for 10 years.

Figure 2: Length of Time Teachers Taught Any Students



Length of time teaching students with significant disabilities. Data were collected asking the teacher to type in the number of years they had taught students with significant disabilities. All data are displayed in Figure 3. The mean number of years teachers had taught students with significant disabilities was 9.39 years with a standard deviation of 8.7 and a median of 6.00. The four largest groups of years participants had taught were 10% (21) of the participants had taught students with significant disabilities for 3 years, 8% had taught for 1 year, and 8% for 2 years, and 8% had taught for 5 years.

Figure 3: Length of Time Teachers Taught Students with Significant Disabilities



Survey Results

This section is a summary of the survey results, reported for each subdomain of the *Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities about Aspects of Their Jobs* survey. Each subdomain utilized a 5-point Likert scale including the options: 1=strongly disagree, 2=moderately disagree, 3=no opinion, 4=moderately agree, and 5=strongly agree. Means, standard deviations, and reliability scores for the three subdomains are reported in Table 5. The following sections describe each subdomain, with reliability analysis results included in the descriptions. Table 6 reports all data for each item in the survey.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Survey Subdomains

Variable	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Cronbach alpha
Subdomain 1: *Direct attitudes about position*	3.43	.77	1.71	3.91	.87
Subdomain 2: *Attitudes about actions teachers have taken related to their job design*	3.14	.04	2.94	3.47	.85
Subdomain3: *Attitudes about experiences related to actions of others*	3.64	.19	3.04	4.24	.78

Note. Items rage from 1 to 5, 1=negative; 5=positive agreement.

Subdomain 1: Direct attitudes about position. This subdomain contained questions about varied job aspects a special educator could encounter because of their position in a school. Reliability analyses were conducted for each subdomain, resulting in a Cronbach Alpha of .87 for Subdomain 1. The analyses included comparing items to examine if eliminating any survey items from the subdomain could change the outcomes. Only one survey item could have been deleted, but the change in the Cronbach Alpha would only be minimal if such elimination occurred. Across all 14 items, special educators rated their level of agreement as slightly above no opinion with a range of 2.83-3.90 (mean=3.4, SD=.77). Overall, teachers rated questions focused on school administrative support more positively (moderately agree) than questions about other job aspects, such as whether their students were considered when systematic decisions were made in their schools.

Subdomain 2: Attitudes about actions teachers have taken related to their job design. Items for this dependent variable asked the participants to rate whether they agreed or disagreed with actions related to working with paraeducators. These items focused on actions taken related to managing, working with, training, and supporting

paraeducators. The reliability analysis for this subdomain resulted in a Cronbach Alpha of .85, and the item comparison analysis displayed that no elimination of survey items was necessary. The mean across all 5 items was 3.13 with a standard deviation of 1.16 and a range of 1.0 to 5.0.

Subdomain 3: Attitudes about experiences related to actions of others. The 9 questions in this subdomain asked teachers to rate their attitudes about actions others could take that impacted aspects of their jobs. These questions were related to negative or positive experiences that teachers could have had while teaching in special education that could have occurred while interacting with others. Most of the questions in Subdomain 3 asked about stress teachers may have experienced related to working with a team of educators and service providers and including students in general education. Thus, if teachers rated their attitude as strongly agree or moderately agree with the items, the researcher may assume that the participants have had stressful experiences when working with others. The reliability analysis for Subdomain 3 resulted in a Cronbach Alpha of .78. Similar to Subdomain 1, there was only 1 survey item that could have minimally changed the Cronbach Alpha if deleted, thus the researcher decided to maintain the subdomain without changes. The overall mean for Subdomain 3 was 3.63, with a range from 3.04 to 4.24.

Table 6: Survey Mean Scores and Percentages by Subdomain

Question number:	**Subdomain 1: Direct attitudes about position**	**Mean 3.43**	**SD .77**
1	I feel supported by the administrators I regularly work with.	3.91	1.16
2	I have felt frustrated with the amount of administrative support I have received related to working with paraeducators.	2.79	1.33
3	I feel others in my school (i.e. administrators, regular educators) understand my role as a special educator.	3.10	1.35

4	I feel that my school administrators have realistic expectations of me in my current position.	3.77	1.20
5	I feel that my district administrators have realistic expectations of me in my current position.	3.64	1.23
6	I feel that administrators support the inclusion of my students in general education.	3.89	1.13
7	I feel that the needs of my students are considered when systematic decisions are made in the school.	2.83	1.34
8	I feel that teaching students with disabilities has a stigma associated with it in my school/district.	2.56	1.29
9	I have felt that my student's civil rights have been violated at some point in my job.	2.49	1.30
10	I feel there is a gap between best practices (i.e. practices I would like to implement) and the current practices I am allowed to use within my school.	2.97	1.35
11	I feel supported by general education teachers in my school.	3.59	1.18
12	I believe that communication with other teachers in my school is the most difficult task in my job.	2.73	1.34
13	I feel my students are as included in my school as they can be.	3.39	1.33
14.	I have felt that all of my students are always treated with dignity and respect (e.g. rather than pitied or patronized) by all others (i.e. teachers, staff, administrators within the school).	3.37	1.28
Question number:	**Subdomain 2: Attitudes about actions teachers have taken related to their job design**	**Mean 3.13**	**SD 1.16**
1	When trying to gain the appropriate support I need in my classroom I have replaced paraeducators, been assigned unqualified paraeducators, or have been assigned paraeducators who have failed in other settings within the school.	2.9	1.47
2	In order to gain appropriate support for my classroom, I have had to manage many paraeducator absences, repetitively train paraeducators, discipline paraeducators for unprofessional behavior, and/or fix a job that was done inappropriately by a paraeducator.	3.07	1.47
3	To provide appropriate support for my students, I have had to manage student behaviors caused or set off by a paraeducator's behavior.	2.93	1.40
4	I have had to change student schedules because of unannounced paraeducator schedule changes or absences.	2.91	1.52
5	I have had to manage paraeducators who have made educational decisions they are not legally responsible to make	2.54	1.40
Question	**Subdomain 3: Attitudes about experiences related**	**Mean**	**SD**

number:	to actions of others	3.63	.83
1	I have seen discriminatory behavior from adults (e.g. co-workers, faculty, staff, administrators, etc.) toward my students (i.e. a teacher has excluded a student from their classroom).	2.71	1.41
2	I have personally experienced discriminatory behavior from adults (e.g. co-workers, faculty, staff, administrators, etc.) toward myself (i.e. I have been excluded from a meeting).	2.19	1.33
3	I have received verbal abuse/slander due to my position as a teacher of students with disabilities.	1.75	1.17
4	Members of my student's IEP teams have gone against the decisions made on IEPs including refusing to follow through with promised services.	2.07	1.35
5	My paraeducators are taken from their duties in my classroom to fulfill other duties in the school.	2.48	1.49
6	I have had an administrator alter special education services (those required on IEPs) without following appropriate legal requirements.	1.82	1.30
7	I have had an administrator (either school or district) make budgetary cuts that have significantly affected my paraeducator's salaries and jobs.	2.89	1.49
8	My classroom is inappropriate for the needs of my students (i.e. too physically small for the student's needs, placed in the back of the school, placed in a portable, too hot, too cold, etc.)	2.45	1.50
9	My students have never missed out on instruction in general education due to a lack of appropriate accommodations, modifications, or differentiation of instruction.	3.04	1.39

Data Analysis of Research Questions

The three research questions for this study included:

1. Do the attitudes of teachers of students with significant disabilities about aspects of their jobs become less positive the older the students?

2. Do the attitudes about their jobs become less positive the longer teachers have been teaching?

3. Do the attitudes about aspects of their jobs become less positive the longer teachers of students with significant disabilities have been teaching students with significant disabilities?

Each independent variable, as defined in Table 2, was compared to the dependent variable of attitudes of special educators of students with significant disabilities, as rated utilizing the Likert scale from the *Attitudes and Feelings of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities about Aspects of Their Jobs* survey. The survey was divided into three subdomains, or dependent measures, including: (a) direct attitudes about position (b) attitudes about actions teachers have taken related to their job design, and (c) attitudes about experiences related to actions of others. Data analysis for all three research questions used bivariate *Pearson* correlation coefficients with a *p* value of less than .05 required for significance.

Research Question 1: Do the attitudes of teachers of students with significant disabilities about aspects of their jobs become less positive the older the students?

To analyze the ages of the students participants taught, a variable was created identifying the age of the oldest student each respondent reported teaching. The variable of oldest age was compared utilizing bivariate *Pearson* correlation coefficients to each of the three dependent measures (subdomains of survey). A *p* value of less than .05 was required for significance. The results of the correlation analysis presented in Table 7 indicated that no significant findings were found when comparing the oldest ages of the students participants taught to each of the 3 subdomains. Without further analysis, these findings would lead to rejecting the research question that participant's attitudes were more likely to be negative the older the students.

Table 7: *Pearson* Correlation Coefficients

	S1	S2	S3	LT	LS	OA	EL	MS	HS	PH
Subdomain 1: Direct attitudes about position (S1)	1.0	.36**	.62**	.22**	.26**	-.10	.03	.01	.08	.12
Subdomain 2: Attitudes about actions teachers have taken related to their job design (S2)		1.0	.44**	.12	.11	.02	.003	-.19	.25	.07
Subdomain 3: Attitudes about experiences related to actions of others (S3)			1.0	.07	.13	.07	-.1	.07	.33*	.32*
How Long Teachers Taught (LT)				1.0	.85**	.02	-.07	.11	.01	-.05
How Long Teachers Taught Students with Significant Disabilities (LS)					1.0	.12	-.15*	.05	-.08	-.04

*p< 0.05 level (2-tailed), **p<0.01 level (2-tailed)

Note. OA=Oldest Age of Students Participants Taught, EL=Elementary Age Group of Students Participants Taught, MS=Middle School Age Group of Students Participants Taught, HS=High School Age Group of Students Participants Taught, Post-high School Age Group of Students Participants Taught.

Research Question 2: Do the attitudes about their jobs become less positive the longer teachers have been teaching?

The researcher conducted *Pearson* correlation coefficients comparing the length of time each respondent indicated they had taught with each of the three subdomains on the survey. The results of the correlation analysis presented in Tables 7 show the correlation was statistically significant when comparing how long teachers had taught to *Subdomain 1: Direct attitudes about position*, with a *Pearson* correlation of .22 and a *p* value of .003. Unfortunately, as the analyses were conducted using a bivariate correlation, positive significant findings do not support the research question, that teachers attitudes would be less positive the longer they had taught.

Research Question 3: Do the attitudes about aspects of their jobs become less positive the longer teachers of students with significant disabilities have been teaching students with significant disabilities?

Similar to question 2, the researcher conducted *Pearson* correlation coefficients comparing the length of time each respondent indicated they had taught students with significant disabilities with each of the three subdomains on the survey. The results of the correlational analysis presented in Table 7 indicated a significant correlation when comparing how long teachers had taught students with significant disabilities to *Subdomain 1: Direct attitudes about position,* with a *Pearson* correlation of .26 and a *p* value of .000. Unfortunately, although a significant finding, as bivariate correlations were utilized for these data analyses, this positive significant finding does not support the research question, that teacher's attitudes will be less positive the longer they have taught students with significant disabilities.

Summary

In summary, results of this study indicated that the largest group of teachers who took the survey were teachers who worked specifically with students considered to have significant disabilities. The majority of teachers who participated in the study were fully certified to teach students with significant disabilities, and mainly taught students in self-contained special education classrooms. Most of the participants who took the survey have students classified as having mental retardation/intellectual disabilities, although a moderate amount of teachers worked with students classified as having autism, multiple disabilities, and learning disabilities. Most teachers who took the survey were Caucasian, and taught in geographical areas equally split between urban, rural, and suburban areas. A larger number of the teachers who took the survey had taught students between 1 and 10 years, and had taught students with significant disabilities between 1 and 15 years, although the participant who had taught the longest had taught students with significant disabilities for 37 years. The mean oldest age of students taught was 14 years old.

There were no significant findings with the initial data analyses the researcher conducted between the age of the participant's oldest students and any subdomains of the survey. The length of time teachers taught both students in general and students with significant disabilities was significantly correlated with *Subdomain 1: Direct attitudes about position* for both independent variables. Unfortunately, though both of these correlation analyses resulted in significant findings, both are positive findings, and only negative correlation findings would support the research questions that teacher's attitudes about aspects of their jobs a less positive the longer they have taught any group of students, and students specifically with significant disabilities.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

This chapter first summarizes the research results. Next, limitations of the study are presented. Finally future directions for research are discussed. The purpose of this study was to examine special education teacher's attitudes about aspects of their jobs as teachers of students with significant disabilities. Teacher's attitudes were gathered utilizing the *Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities about Aspects of Their Jobs* survey. Given that past special education attrition and burnout research has aggregated special educator's demographic data together, the purpose of this study was to disaggregate attitudinal data to focus specifically on teachers who work with students defined as having significant disabilities.

Summary of Results

Independent Variables

Ages of Students Participant's Taught. Teachers of students with significant disabilities often teach more than one grade at the same time (Washburn-Moses, 2005). Depending upon the level and types of disabilities, teachers may teach students whose ages span ages from 3 to 22, and may teach more than one age/grade level. Data were gathered for this variable by asking teachers to identify the ages of the students they teach. A variable was created identifying the oldest age of students each participant reported teaching. After correlation comparisons, no significant findings were indicated between the independent variable of oldest age participants taught, and the three subdomains within the survey.

The basic research question of "Do the attitudes of teachers of students with significant disabilities about aspects of their jobs become less positive the older the students?" was considered by conducting post hoc analyses examining grade level groupings. Conducting these further analyses was deemed appropriate because overlap between grade level groups was discovered. For example, some teachers only taught ages 15 through 18, which are often considered high school level groups. But, some teachers also reported teaching ages 13 to 18. Thus, while both groups of teachers taught students whose oldest age was 18, some within this group may have had different attitudes as reported in the survey because they only taught high school aged students.

More teachers taught middle school (Total=126) and high school (Total=89) grade level groups. As previously discussed, few studies about teacher attrition and burnout have specifically looked at the ages and grade levels teachers teach. Those that have, found a higher likelihood that secondary level teachers of students with significant disabilities may be more likely to leave the field of special education earlier or become burned out than elementary level teachers (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997; Washburn-Moses, 2003; Embich, 2001). Post hoc comparisons of the four grade level groups found that two groups (high school and post high) correlated with the participant's attitudes about actions of others (r=.33, p=< .04 for the high school group and r=.32, p=< .02 for the post high group).

Length of time teaching. Respondents reported a mean of 11 years of teaching with a range from 1 year to 37 years. The mean is slightly lower than national research. Carlson et al., (2002) reported that "in 2000, the average special education teacher had 14.3 years of teaching experience, compared to 15.5 years for general education teachers"

(p. 2). These authors noted that these data varied on average years of teaching experience dependent upon geographical area, age level the teacher taught, and classification of students.

Length of time teaching students with significant disabilities. The average time participants in this study had taught at least one student with significant disabilities was 9 years. This group of participants appears to have taught an average length of time that was less than other studies about teacher attrition (Carlson et al., 2002).

Dependent Variables

Subdomain 1: Direct attitudes about position. The independent variables of length of time teachers taught any students and length of time teachers taught students with significant disabilities were positively correlated to this subdomain. This section of the survey focused on teachers direct attitudes about their special education positions. Thus, how long teachers had taught either students with or without disabilities was significantly correlated with their attitudes about the job aspects asked about within this survey, meaning that the longer teachers had taught the more likely they were to rate their attitudes more positively. Past research about attrition found that younger teachers have higher rates of attrition (Billingsley, 2004a), therefore one explanation is that the teachers who remained on the job, such as those in the current study, rated their attitudes more positively toward aspects of their jobs.

Subdomain 2: Attitudes about actions teachers have taken related to their job design. This subdomain was narrowed during pilot studies to 5 questions. While the pilot study revealed significance when comparing this subdomain to the attitudes of teachers working with high school and post high school aged students, no significant correlations

occurred for this study. The make-up of the questions in this subdomain may have impacted the results. This subdomain contained action related questions related to supervising paraeducators. The Office of Special Education Programs (2004) reported that the second most common type of support given to students with disabilities was teacher aides or instructional assistants (e.g. paraeducators). This was especially true in separate classes provided for students with disabilities, as the report stated that 53.9% of students in separate special education classrooms received this modification. Thus, the job aspects related to paraeducators are likely to be important to special education teachers of students with significant disabilities who teach in separate special education classes. Unfortunately, this is not supported within the results of this study, even though more teachers who participated (52%) reported teaching in a self-contained (e.g. separate) special education classroom.

Subdomain 3: Attitudes about experiences related to actions of others. There were no significant findings in the analyses between the three independent variables and Subdomain 3. Post hoc analyses did indicate that both the high school and post high school groups were moderately positively correlated with Subdomain 3. These findings may indicate that the participants who taught students of older ages and grades may have been more likely to have experienced less stress related to the actions of others, thus having less negative attitudes toward the experiences asked about within the questions.

In summary, the overall findings of the three research questions were that none of the three research questions were confirmed. But positively correlations were found for the research questions “Do the attitudes about their jobs become less positive the longer teachers have been teaching?” and “Do the attitudes about their jobs become less positive

the longer teachers have been working with students with significant disabilities?" when compared to *Subdomain 1: Direct attitudes about position.* This subdomain asked varied questions about aspects of the job of a special educator. Also, post hoc analyses found the high school and post high school group of student ages the participants taught were significantly correlated with Subdomain 3, which asked participants to rate their attitude about experiences related to the actions of others and aspects of their jobs as teachers of students with significant disabilities. Thus, post hoc analyses found positive correlations for the research question "Do the attitudes of teachers of students with significant disabilities about aspects of their jobs become less positive the older the students?"

Limitations

Limitations for this study involve four issues. First, while significant findings were discovered post hoc, none supported the research questions posed for this specific study. Second, the data collection relied solely on teacher self-reporting. Third, difficulties in defining and identifying teachers who work with students with significant disabilities continue to limit the ability of the researcher to gather expansive data about teacher's attitudes toward aspects of their jobs. Finally, as Washburn-Moses (2005) stated, "survey research is limited in that it provides a broad picture of the phenomenon being studied" (p. 157). One of the purposes of the survey used for this study was to discover more specific attitudinal data about job aspects for teachers of students with significant disabilities. This is difficult to do as all aspects of these teachers jobs cannot be included within such a survey, and the data collected through the survey can only be compared to limited independent variables. Thus, this research is limited in scope.

Significant findings did occur in this study between Subdomain 1 and how long the educators had taught both students with and without disabilities. Further analyses also indicated moderately positive significant findings between Subdomain 3 and the high school and post high school age groups of students the participants taught. Unfortunately, none of these findings supported the three research questions for this study. This is a limitation, specifically related to answering the research questions. The significant findings indicated that teacher's attitudes were more positive the longer they taught, and the older their students, rather than more negative. Past attrition research has found that special educators are more likely to leave within their first few years of teaching (Billingsley, 2004a), so it does seem logical that since the average length of time participants for this study had taught ranged between 9 and 12 years, that this group of teachers would be more likely to display more positive attitudes toward aspects of their jobs. But, as the findings do not support the research questions for this study, further analysis should occur by altering future research questions in order to research about what makes such positive differences with educators of students with significant disabilities and their attitudinal ratings about aspects of their jobs.

Data were collected for this study utilizing an attitudinal survey. Pilot studies occurred to increase internal validity and external reliability, and reliability rates for the Subdomains were all above a Cronbach alpha of .7, however self-reporting of attitudes has some limitations. For example, responses may not reflect the experiences of teachers regarding certain job aspects. For example, some teachers who took the survey did not work in a general education setting, therefore their experiences with general educators may have been limited, and their ratings on items about interactions with general

educators may not be accurate. Further, the generalizability of these findings to all teachers of students with significant disabilities is limited, as participants were sampled using a convenience sample. As the survey was not distributed to a random, representative population, the generalizability of the findings are limited.

Defining and identifying specific groups of special educators who work with students with significant disabilities, and then locating them for inclusion in research is a difficulty and limitation for this research study. As Goessling (1998) stated "the definition of a severe disability varies according to state regulations, federal guidelines, and medical interpretations" (p. 238). Thus, identifying the teachers who work with the variety of students who make up the national group of students with significant disabilities is also difficult, especially as more students with a variety of significant disabilities are included in general education classes or taught by educators certified areas other than significant disabilities (Kleinert, Miracle, & Sheppard-Jones, 2007). Although defined specifically for this study, it is difficult to identify all of the teachers who may work with students with significant disabilities, as each state utilizes different methods of special education services, and title educators differently.

Implications and Future Research

Some of the findings of this study are supported by past research related to teacher attrition, especially for teachers of students with significant disabilities. Although there has been little research that has focused primarily on this population of special educators, the studies that have disaggregated results for different groups of special educators have reported that this population of educators continue to be among the top three groups of special educators with considerable shortages (AAEE, 2006; AAEE,

2008). Wisniewski and Gargiulo (1997) also report that teachers of students with mental retardation/ developmental disabilities at the secondary level have higher rates of teacher attrition than most other groups of special educators. Thus, it seems logical that some significant findings occurred when asking this population of teachers to rate their attitudes toward aspects of their jobs, as past research has indicated that special educators' who remain in the field beyond their beginning years of teaching, are more likely to stay in the field (Billingsley, 2004a). However, further research and application of the current research is needed in order to better understand this population of educator's attitudes toward their jobs, and applications of such research to the design of their work conditions.

Although research has been conducted to identify reasons for high teacher attrition in special education, little change has occurred in schools to actually impact teacher's work conditions: "the documentation of this situation, however, has not prompted fundamental changes within the profession" (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997, p. 326). It is pertinent to focus not only on identifying and replicating findings about possible reasons for teacher attrition, but to discover reasons for attrition within the differing populations of special educators; and then create and validate interventions based upon these antecedents. For example, a recent study by Albrecht et al., (2009) examined working conditions as a risk factor for teachers of students with emotional disabilities. They focused on this population of educators because of the high rates of teacher attrition, especially within the first five years of working with students with emotional disabilities. These researchers stated that: "the problem with the shortage of teachers of students with EBD has been recognized and discussed for many years, yet

little has changed to retain teachers in this area of special education" (p. 1016). Their findings were supported by other researchers as a problem within research of attrition in special education:

> "these survey and interview studies provide a basic understanding of factors that influence career decisions but do little by way of depicting the lives of special educators or the critical transition points that lead to withdrawal and eventually attrition" (Albrecht et al., 2009, p.52)

A pertinent application would be to utilize the findings from emergent research to create change within the work conditions for teachers of students with significant disabilities. Further, such changes should be examined to discover if the interventions impact the likelihood that teachers remain in the field. Interviewing and comparing teachers with more positive attitudes from those with more negative attitudes would also be beneficial. Differences between the groups of educators related to their experiences may also better inform further interventions.

For example, one of the questions on the survey that participants rated lower asked teachers about whether they felt their students were considered when decisions were made within their schools. More participants rated that they moderately or strongly disagreed that their student's needs were considered. If this survey was utilized by a school district and they found a similar finding throughout their district, further study could occur to examine what systematic decisions made by a district or schools are not considering the needs of students with significant disabilities. Interventions could then be created based specifically on what is occurring in that district or school, and the survey

could be utilized after the interventions have been incorporated into the school or district to see if the special educator's attitudes had become more positive.

Significant findings were also found post hoc, when examining Subdomain 3 with the grade level groups for the participants'. Subdomain 3 asked about experiences of stress teachers may have had related to aspects of their jobs. For example, participants were asked if they had ever experienced discrimination as a teacher of students with significant disabilities from other adults with whom they worked, or if they had observed their students experiencing discrimination from other adults within the school. To apply such findings, questions from the survey could be utilized as previously described, by a district or group of schools to discover teacher's attitudes toward such stressful experiences. As secondary level teachers of students with significant disabilities may be more likely to leave their careers earlier (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997), it may be pertinent to look specifically at the attitudinal ratings of secondary level teachers early in their careers. Districts may then focus interventions to support new teachers. As Washburn-Moses (2005) stated, "Policymakers and school administrators need to consider these realities when planning for the future of special education programming" (p. 156) when discussing secondary level special educators and their jobs as instructors.

Conclusion

The results of this multi-state study provided some insight into teachers who work with students with significant disabilities and their attitudes toward aspects of their jobs. Positive significant findings did occur with correlations between the length of time teachers taught, the age of the students the teachers taught, and *Subdomain 1: Direct attitudes about position* and *Subdomain 3: Attitudes about experiences related to actions*

of others of the survey. The applications of this study could include increasing the utilization of the survey used in the study to assist those in districts or special education cooperatives to examine the attitudes of special educators who work with this population of students, and perhaps, intervene. The survey could also be used by special educators to assist them in identifying their own attitudes about aspects of their jobs. Such information could assist in increasing the information researchers and educators have about how teachers feel about their jobs. Such information may assist bridging the gap between research in teacher attrition and burnout, and the practices that continue to dictate the work conditions and job design the teachers work within (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997), especially for teachers of students with significant disabilities.

REFERENCES

Albrecht, S., Johns, B., Mounsteven, J., & Orlorunda, O., (2009). Working conditions as risk or resiliency factors for teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. *Psychology in the Schools, 46*(10), 1006-1022.

Alliance for Excellent Education, (2004). *Tapping the potential: Retaining and developing high-quality new teachers.* Retrieved from http://www.all4ed.org/files/archive/publications/TappingThePotential/TappingThePotential.pdf

American Association for Employment in Education (2006). *Educator supply and demand research: Relative demand comparisons 1996-2006.* Retrieved from http://become1.us/supplydemand_14.pdf

American Association for Employment in Education (2008). *Educator supply and demand in the United States: 2008 [Executive summary].* Retrieved from http://www.aaee.org/cwt/external/wcpages/files/2008execsummaryindpages.pdf

American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD), (2010). Retrieved from http://www.aamr.org/content_104.cfm?navID=21

American Federation of Teachers (AFT) (2006). *Building Minds, Minding Buildings: Turning Crumbling Schools into Environments for Learning.* Retrieved from http://www.aft.org/topics/building-conditions/downloads/minding-bldgs.pdf

Billingsley, B. (2004a). Promoting teacher quality and retention in special education. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 37*(5), 370-376.

Billingsley, B. (2004b). Special education teacher retention and attrition: A critical analysis of the research literature. *The Journal of Special Education, 31*(1), 39-56.

Black, S. (2001). Morale matters. *American School Board Journal 188*(1), 40-43.

Boe, E. (2006). Long-term trends in the national demand, supply, and shortage of special education teachers. *The Journal of Special Education 40*(3), 138-150.

Boe, E. & Cook, L. (2006). The chronic and increasing shortage of fully certified teachers in special and general education. *Exceptional Children, 72*(4), 443-460.

Bouck, E. (2004). Exploring secondary special education for mild mental impairment. *Remedial and Special Education, 25*(6), 367-382.

Bouck, E. (2005). Secondary special educators: Perspectives of preservice preparation and satisfaction. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 28*(2), 32-46.

Brownell, M., Smith, S., McNellis, J., & Miller, D. (1997). Attrition in special education: Why teachers leave the classroom and where they go. *Exceptionality, 7*.

Carlson, E., Brauen, M., Klein, S., Schroll, K., & Westat, S. (2002). *SPeNSE: Study of personnel needs in special education, key findings.* Retrieved from http://ferdig.coe.ufl.edu/spense/KeyFindings.pdf

Carroll, T. (2007). *Policy Brief: The High Cost of Teacher Turnover.* Retrieved from National Commission on Teaching and America's Future website: http://www.nctaf.org/resources/research_and_reports/nctaf_research_reports/documents/NCTAFCostofTeacherTurnover.pdf

Carter, E. & Hughes, C. (2006). Including high school students with severe disabilities in general education classes: Perspectives of general and special educators, paraprofessionals, and administrators. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 31*(2), 174-185.

Coleman, M. (2001). *Conditions of teaching children with exceptional learning needs: The bright futures report.* (CEC Report EDO-EC-01-8). Retrieved November 11, 2009 from Wilson Omni-file database, *ERIC Digest*.

Conderman, G. & Katsiyannis, A. (2002). Instructional issues and practices in secondary special education. *Remedial and Special Education, 23*(3), 169-179.

Cook, L. & Boe, E. (2007). National trends in the sources of supply of teachers in special and general education. *Teacher Education and Special Education. 30*(4), 217-232.

DiPaola, M. & Walther-Thomas, C. (2003). *Principals and Special Education: The Critical Role of School Leaders.* University of Florida, Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education. Retrieved from http://www.copsse.org.

Embich, J. (2001). The relationship of secondary special education teachers' roles and factors that lead to professional burnout. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 24*(1), 58-69.

Friedman, E. (2009). *Supporting diversity in research participation: A framework for Action.* Retrieved from the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) website: http://www.cirm.ca.gov/files/PDFs/Publications/Diversity_Report.pdf

Gehrke, R. & Murri, N. (2006). Beginning special educators' intent to stay in special education: Why they like it here. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 29*(3), 179-190.

Gersten, R., Keating, T., Yavonoff, P., & Harniss, M. (2001). Working in special education: Factors that enhance special educators' intent to stay. *Exceptional Children, 67*(4), 549-567.

Ginger, J. (2006). From the trenches: Secondary content teachers and IEP, inclusion students. *Forum on public policy: Journal of the Oxford Round Table.* Retrieved from http://www.forumonpublicpolicy.com/ archive06/ginger.pdf

Goessling, D. (1994, June). *Teachers of students with severe disabilities: Experiencing cultural struggle in inclusive schools.* Presented at the American Association on Mental Retardation 118th Annual Meeting in Boston, MA.

Goessling, D. (1998). Inclusion and the challenge of assimilation for teachers of students with severe disabilities. *JASH, 23*(3), 238-251.

Henry, S. (2007). *Just Ask: Integrating Accessibility Throughout Design.* Retrieved from http://www.uiaccess.com/accessucd/ut_plan.html#recruiting

Ingersoll, R. (2001a). *Teacher Turnover, Teacher Shortages, and the Organization of Schools.* University of Washington, Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy. Retrieved from http://depts.washington.edu/ctpmail/PDFs/Turnover-Ing-01-2001.pdf

Ingersoll, R. (2001b). The realities of out-of-field teaching. *Educational Leadership, 58*(8), 42-45.

Ingersoll, R. (2004). *Why Do High-Poverty Schools Have Difficulty Staffing Their classrooms with Qualified Teachers?* Washington DC, Center for American Progress. Retrieved from http://www.americanprogress.org/kf/ingersoll-final.pdf

Kleinert, H., Miracle, S., & Sheppard-Jones, K. (2007). Including students with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities in school extracurricular and community recreation activities. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 45*(1), 46-55.

Kohring, A. (1999). *Recruitment issues and strategies for adults who are not currently participating in literacy and adult basic education (ABE) programs.* University of Tennessee Center for Literacy Studies. Retrieved from U.S. Department of Education Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC).

Muller, E. & Markowitz, J. (2003). *Supply and demand of special education professionals project forum synthesis brief: Synthesis Brief.* Alexandria, VA, National Association of State Directors of Special Education. Retrieved from http://www.nasdse.org/forum.htm

Monteith, D. (2000). Professional development for administrators in special education: Evaluation of a program for underrepresented personnel. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 23*(4), 281-289.

Newman, L., Wagner, M., Cameto, R., & Knokey, A., (2009). *The Post-High School Outcomes of Youth with Disabilities up to 4 Years After High School: A Report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2)* (NCSER 2009-3017). Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

Office of Special Education Programs (2004). *Twenty-sixth annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/osep/2004/26th-vol-1.pdf

Olivier, M. & Williams, E. (2005). Teaching the mentally handicapped child: Challenges teachers are facing. *The International Journal of Special Education, 20*(2), 19-31.

Paolo, A., Bonaminio, G., Gibson, C., Partridge, T., & Kallail, K. (2000). Response rate comparisons of e-mail- and mail-distributed student evaluations. *Teaching and Learning in Medicine, 12*(2), 81-84.

Pearson, M., (2010, April). *Attitudes and Feelings of Secondary Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities toward Aspects and Roles of their Jobs.* Poster session presented at the meeting of Teacher Education Division Kaleidoscope, Council for Exceptional Children Conference, Nashville, TN.

Pugach, M. & Warger, C. (2001). Curriculum matters: Raising expectations for students with disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education, 22*(4), 194-197.

Rowan, B., Correnti, R., & Miller, R. (2002). What large-scale, survey research tells us about teacher effects on student achievement: Insights from the *Prospects* study of elementary schools. *Teachers College Record, 104*(8), 1525-1567.

Ryndak, D., Clark, D., Conroy, M., & Stuart, C. (2001). Preparing teachers to meet the needs of students with severe disabilities: Program configuration and expertise. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 26*(2), 96-105. Retrieved November 11, 2009 from Wilson Omni-file database.

Shriyan, V. (2008). *Snowballing sampling using social networks to research non heterosexual women.* Retrieved from http://www.slideshare.net/warlock/snowball-sampling-using-social-networks-to-research-non-heterosexual-women

Slavin, R. (1984). Component building: A strategy for research-based instructional improvement. *The Elementary School Journal 84*(3), 255-269.

Swanson, C. (2008). *Special Education in America: The state of students with disabilities in the nation's high schools.* Bethesda, MD, Education Research Center. Retrieved from http://www.edweek.org/media/eperc_special educationinamerica.pdf

Southeast Center for Teaching Quality (SECTQ), (2004). Teacher working conditions are student learning conditions. *Teaching Quality in the Southeast: Best Practices and Policies, 3*(9), 1-3. Retrieved from http://www.teachingquality.org.

Thornton, B., Peltier, G., & Medina, R. (2007). Reducing the special education teacher shortage. *The Clearing House, 80*(3), 233-238.

Trammell, J. (2009). Postsecondary students and disability stigma: Development of the postsecondary student survey of disability-related stigma (PSSDS). *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 22*(2), 105-115.

Wagner, M., Newman, L., Cameto, R., Garza, N., and Levine, P. (2005). *After high school: A first look at the postschool experiences of youth with disabilities. A report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2)* Menlo Park, CA: SRI International. Available at www.nlts2.org/reports/2005_04/ nlts2_report_2005_04_complete.pdf.

Washburn-Moses, L. (2005). Roles and responsibilities of secondary special education teachers in an age of reform. *Remedial and Special Education, 26*(3), 151-158.

Whitaker, S. (2000). Mentoring beginning special education teachers and the relationship to attrition. *Exceptional Children, 66*(4), 546-566.

Wisniewski, L. & Gargiulo, R. (1997). Occupational stress and burnout among special educators: A review of the literature. *Journal of Special Education, 31*(3), 325-346.

Wrightslaw. (2009). *IDEA 2004 Statute and Regulations.* Retrieved May 19, 2009 from http://www.wrightslaw.com/idea/law.htm.

Yancey, A., Ortega, A., & Kumanyika, S. (2006). Effective recruitment and retention of minority research participants. *Annual Review of Public Health, 27,* 1-28. Retrieved from http://www.stesapes.med.ulg.ac.be/Documents_electroniques/MET/MET-DON/ELE%20MET-DON%207474.pdf

Yun, G. & Trumbo, C. (2000). Comparitive response to a survey executed by post, e-mail, and web form. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 6*(1), 1-15.

APPENDIX LIST

Appendix A: Final Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities about Aspects of Their Jobs Survey

Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities about Aspects of Their Jobs

(Subdomains)

Subdomain 1: Direct attitudes about position

1. I feel supported by the administrators I regularly work with.
2. I have felt frustrated with the amount of administrative support I have received related to working with paraeducators.
3. I feel others in my school (i.e. administrators, regular educators) understand my role as a special educator.
4. I feel that my school administrators have realistic expectations of me in my current position.
5. I feel that my district administrators have realistic expectations of me in my current position.
6. I feel that administrators support the inclusion of my students in general education.
7. I feel that the needs of my students are considered when systematic decisions are made in the school.
8. I feel that teaching students with disabilities has a stigma associated with it in my school/district.
9. I have felt that my student's civil rights have been violated at some point in my job.
10. I feel there is a gap between best practices (i.e. practices I would like to implement) and the current practices I am allowed to use within my school.

11. I feel supported by general education teachers in my school.
12. I believe that communication with other teachers in my school is the most difficult task in my job.
13. I feel my students are as included in my school as they can be.
14. I have felt that all of my students are always treated with dignity and respect (e.g. rather than pitied or patronized) by all others (i.e. teachers, staff, administrators within the school).

Subdomain 2: Attitudes about actions teachers have taken related to their job design

1. When trying to gain the appropriate support I need in my classroom I have replaced paraeducators, been assigned unqualified paraeducators, or have been assigned paraeducators who have failed in other settings within the school.
2. In order to gain appropriate support for my classroom, I have had to manage many paraeducator absences, repetitively train paraeducators, discipline paraeducators for unprofessional behavior, and/or fix a job that was done inappropriately by a paraeducator.
3. To provide appropriate support for my students, I have had to manage student behaviors caused or set off by a paraeducator's behavior.
4. I have had to change student schedules because of unannounced paraeducator schedule changes or absences.
5. I have had to manage paraeducators who have made educational decisions they are not legally responsible to make.

Subdomain 3: Attitudes about experiences related to actions of others

1. I have seen discriminatory behavior from adults (e.g. co-workers, faculty, staff, administrators, etc.) toward my students (i.e. a teacher has excluded a student from their classroom).
2. I have personally experienced discriminatory behavior from adults (e.g. co-workers, faculty, staff, administrators, etc.) toward myself (i.e. I have been excluded from a meeting).
3. I have received verbal abuse/slander due to my position as a teacher of students with disabilities.
4. Members of my student's IEP teams have gone against the decisions made on IEPs including refusing to follow through with promised services.
5. My paraeducators are taken from their duties in my classroom to fulfill other duties in the school.
6. I have had an administrator alter special education services (those required on IEPs) without following appropriate legal requirements.
7. I have had an administrator (either school or district) make budgetary cuts that have significantly affected my paraeducator's salaries and jobs.
8. My classroom is inappropriate for the needs of my students (i.e. too physically small for the student's needs, placed in the back of the school, placed in a portable, too hot, too cold, etc.)
9. My students have never missed out on instruction in general education due to a lack of appropriate accommodations, modifications, or differentiation of instruction.

Demographic:

1. 1. Throughout the school year, have you:

    A. Taught a class, or have a case load of students with moderate to profound significant disabilities (e.g. IQ of 70 or lower, adaptive behavior skills ranging at least two percentage points below the average mean, and likely have a classification for special education services under IDEA 2004 within one of the following areas: Intellectual Disability (MR), Autism, multiple disabilities, other health impairment, Deaf-blindness or one of the other sensory impairment classifications, Traumatic Brain Injury).
    B. At least one student in a class or on your caseload with moderate to profound disabilities (e.g. IQ of 70 or lower, adaptive behavior skills ranging at least two percentage points below the average mean, and likely have a classification for special education services under IDEA 2004 within one of the following areas: Intellectual Disability (MR), Autism, multiple disabilities, other health impairment, Deaf-blindness or one of the other sensory impairment classifications, Traumatic Brain Injury), even though the student may not be one of your regular special education students.
    C. None of the above apply/ I do not teach any students with moderate to profound disabilities.

2. Are you currently teaching (defined as in the classroom at least .50 of the day and not serving in an administrative role other than department head)?

    A. Yes
    B. No

3. What age range of students do you teach?
    (Age options 4-22)

4. Are you currently certified in your state to teach students with moderate to profound disabilities?

    A. Yes, fully certified
    B. No, not certified; teaching with an emergency waiver
    C. No, not certified to teach students with moderate to profound disabilities, but certified in another area
    D. No, not fully certified at all in my state.

5. What type of school/classroom do you teach in?

    A. General education 100% of the time
    B. In General education at least 80% of the time
    C. Mainstreamed (Students attend some general education, but are in general education less than 80% of the school day)

D. Self-contained classroom (receive special education services for at least 50% of the school day)
E. Vocational Adjustment Class (outside of General Education and regular special education classes for at least 50% of the day, and on a job site for 50% of the day)
F. Homebound
G. Hospital Class (Class housed in a hospital, but NOT a state school)
H. Segregated school or state school for persons with significant disabilities
I. Residential Care and Treatment Facility that is NOT a hospital

5. How long have you been teaching?

(Text box—enter number)

6. How long have you been teaching students with significant disabilities (use definition from above)?

(Text box—enter numbers)

7. What is the classification of the largest amount of the students you teach on your caseload or in the class you teach?

1. Autism
2. Deafness
3. Hearing Impairment
4. Multiple Disabilities
5. Other Health Impaired
6. Speech/Language Impairment
7. Visual impairment including blindness
8. Deaf-Blindness
9. Emotional Disability
10. Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability
11. Orthopedic Impairment
12. Specific Learning Disability
13. Traumatic Brain Injury

8. These questions are being asked to gather demographic information only. All information will be kept strictly confidential:

A. African-American
B. Asian
C. Caucasian
D. Native American
E. Hispanic/Latino
F. Polynesian-American
G. Other (fill in blank)

Appendix B: Recruitment E-mail

Hello Special Educators!!!

My name is Mary Pearson, M.Ed. I am a PhD student at the University of Kansas. I am currently gathering data for my dissertation, and need your help.

Please consider taking this survey! It is a survey for special education teachers who:

1. Teach at least 1 student with a moderate to profound/significant disability for at least 1 period a day
2. Teach all grades Pre-K-22

The survey should not take more than 10 minutes, and will help give information that can be utilized in the future to improve aspects of special educator's jobs.

If you are willing to take the survey, please click on the following link.

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/T9VLDYV

If you are a department head, or have a colleague who teaches students with significant disabilities: If you also teach students from this population, feel free to take the survey and then forward this e-mail to your colleagues who also teach these students. If you do not teach this population of students, but have colleagues who do, please feel free to forward this to them.

Thank you so much for your help!!!

Mary Pearson, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
University of Kansas Special Education Department
785-330-3187

Appendix C: Postings for On-line Support Groups

(Teacher Support Group)
Hi! I am a special education teacher. I'm finishing up my dissertation, trying to gather data from teachers of students with significant disabilities--basically, any students with an IQ of 70 or below and/or adaptive behavior skills 2 deviations below the mean (classifications like intellectual disability (MR), autism, deaf-blindness, multiple disabilities, TBI, etc.). Even if you are not a certified teacher of this population of students, but work with a couple of students who do fit this description (as a special education teacher certified in a different area) you can take the survey.

The survey takes about 10 minutes, and is on-line. It asks teachers to rate their attitudes/feelings about different aspects of their jobs. It takes very little time. If you're interested in helping, please respond to this post, and I'll get in contact with you.

Thank you!

(Parent Support Group: Please note that only a member of the group—my sister—could post on the group)

Hi! My sister is finishing her PhD--and is trying to gather data for her dissertation. She needs teachers who work with students with significant/severe disabilities to take a survey about attitudes toward aspects of their jobs. It is a 10 minute long survey, and is completely confidential.

As it is coming to the end of the school year, fewer teachers are taking her survey--and she needs more to take it. If you would be willing to ask your student's teacher if she/he would be willing to take the survey, and then please send her (Mary Pearson) the teacher's e-mail address, she will e-mail them the link to take the survey.

Her e-mail address is mmpson@ku.edu

Appendix D: Initial Recruitment Letter for Teachers the Researcher Interacted with Professionally

Hello all,

Please forgive me for writing, but I'm wondering if any of you can help me. I am currently gathering data for my dissertation. I have a survey for teachers who work with students with significant (severe/functional) disabilities (they can have autism as well). The teachers do not have to be certified to teach such students--but just need to teach at least 1 student throughout the day who falls within the IDEA 2004 definition of severe/functional/significant.

I have been gathering data from teachers from different states, but as the school year is ending soon, my data gathering is starting to slow down, and I still need more teachers to take my survey.

Would any of you be willing to take my survey? It is an on-line survey--only takes about 10 minutes to take, and is completely confidential. It asks teachers to rate attitudes about different aspects of their jobs.

If any of you would be willing to take my survey, please e-mail me back and I'll send you the link.

Also, if any of you know other teachers who work with this population of students--even if they just teach one student who fits within this population--and would be willing to take my survey, please let me know. If you want to send me their e-mail address, that would be great--or I can send you the link and you can forward it to them (just let me know how many teachers you sent it to so I can keep track for to report for my return rate).

Thank you so much!!! I really, really appreciate it!

Mary Pearson, M.Ed.
Graduate Teaching Assistant
University of Kansas Special Education Department
785-330-3187

Appendix E: On-line Survey (as it appeared on Survey Monkey), Including Participant Consent Form/Internet Information Statement

Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities

1. HSCL

*** 1. Internet Information Statement**

****Please read and then mark yes or no whether you agree to take the survey or not. Thank you!*****

The Department of Special Education at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

We are conducting this study to better understand Special Education Teacher's Attitudes Toward Aspects of Their Jobs, most specifically teachers who teach students with moderate to profound disabilities. This is a dissertation study, which is being conducted to gain information about the attitudes about job aspects of these teachers. The survey is expected to take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

The content of the survey is not expected to cause any more discomfort than you would experience in your everyday life. Although please be aware that some questions may be considered stressful if a teacher has negative memories about the job aspect one of the questions is asking about. This result is unexpected, but as previously stated, you are free to withdraw at any time if such stress occurs without any penalty.

Although participation may not benefit you directly, we believe that the information obtained from this study will help us gain a better understanding of special education teacher's attitudes toward aspects of their jobs, in hopes of utilizing these findings to create ways to improve job aspects for this group of teachers. Your participation is solicited, although strictly voluntary. Your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings. It is possible, however, with internet communications, that through intent or accident someone other than the intended recipient may see your response. Please note, though, that a private survey program will be utilized (private account on Survey Monkey) to gather data produced

from the survey.

If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, please feel free to contact me via e-mail. Completion of the survey indicates your willingness to participate in this project and that you are at least age eighteen. If you have any additional questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call (785) 864-7429 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence KS 66045-7563, email: jbutin@ku.edu. Approved by the Human Subjects Committee University of Kansas, Lawrence Campus (HSCL). Approval expires one year from 4/2/2011. HSCL #18035.

Sincerely,
Mary Pearson
Principal Investigator
Department of Special Education
JR Pearson Hall
University of Kansas
Lawrence KS 66045
785-330-3187
mmpson@ku.edu

Mary Morningstar, PhD.
Principle Investigator
1122 W. Campus Rd.
Joseph R. Pearson Hall, Room 540
University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS 66045-3101
Phone:(785) 864-0682
E-mail: mmorningstar@ku.edu

After reading the Human Subject's information, do you agree to take this survey?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities

2. Eligibility1

*** 1. This survey is designed to gather information from teachers who serve students primarily consisting of moderate to profound disabilities (**Survey will use term significant disabilities to represent this group of students). This group of students are those students with an IQ of 70 or lower, adaptive behavior skills ranging at least 2 deviations below the average/mean, and a classification for special education services under IDEA 2004 within one of the following areas: Intellectual Disability (MR), Autism, Multiple Disabilities, Other Health Impairment, Deaf-blindness or one of the other sensory impairment classifications, and Traumatic Brain Injury.**

Question 1: Throughout this current school year have you:

◯ A. Taught a class/have a case load of students primarily consisting of students with significant disabilities (e.g. IQ of 70 or lower, adaptive behavior skills ranging at least 2 standard deviations below the mean, and a classification within one of the areas outlined in the above paragraph)?

◯ B. Primarily teach students with other disabilities not considered as significant disabilities, BUT have taught at least 1 student this school year with significant disabilities.

◯ C. None of the above/I do not teach any students with significant disabilities as defined in the above paragraph.

Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities

3. Eligibility

*** 1. Are you currently teaching (defined as in the classroom at least .50 of the day and not serving in an administrative role other than department head)?**

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities

4. Demographicsageofstudents

*** 1. What age range of students do you teach? (check all that apply)**

- [ ] Age 4
- [ ] 5
- [ ] 6
- [ ] 7
- [ ] 8
- [ ] 9
- [ ] 10
- [ ] 11
- [ ] 12
- [ ] 13
- [ ] 14
- [ ] 15
- [ ] 16
- [ ] 17
- [ ] 18
- [ ] 19
- [ ] 20
- [ ] 21
- [ ] 22
- [ ] Other (please specify)

Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities

5. demographicscertification

*** 1. Are you currently certified in your state to teach students with significant disabilities?**

- ◯ A. Yes, fully certified
- ◯ B. No, not certified; teaching with an emergency waiver
- ◯ C. No, not certified to teach students with significant disabilities, but certified in another area in special education
- ◯ D. No, not certified to teach students with significant disabilities, but certified in another area in general education
- ◯ E. No, not fully certified in my state

Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities

6. Demographicstypeofclassroom

*** 1. The majority of your students who have significant disabilities receive the majority of their education in which of the following settings?**

- ◯ A. General education 100% of the time
- ◯ B. In General education at least 80% of the time
- ◯ C. Mainstreamed (students attend some general education, but are in general education less than 80% of the school day)
- ◯ D. Self-contained classroom (served in special education classroom for more than 50% of the school day)
- ◯ E. Community-based class (special education classes for at least 50% of the day, on on a job site for 50% of the day)
- ◯ F. Homebound
- ◯ G. Hospital class (class housed in a hospital, but NOT a state school)
- ◯ H. Separate school or state school for students with significant disabilities
- ◯ I. Residential Care and Treatment Facility (e.g. institution for individuals with disabilities)

7. Demographicshowlongteach

1. How long have you been teaching (any subject/students)? (Please type in the number of years you've taught in the text box.)

Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities

8. Demographicsteachsignificantdisabilites

1. How long have you been teaching students with significant disabilities (e.g. students with IQ of 70 or lower, adaptive behavior skills ranging at least 2 standard deviations below the mean, and a classification for special educatiton services under IDEA 2004 within one of the following areas: Intellectual Disabilities (MR), Autism, Multiple disabilities, Other health impairment, Deaf-blindness or one of the other sensory impairment classifications, and Traumatic Brain Injury)

9. classificationdemographic

*** 1. What is the disability classification for the majority of the students you teach (e.g. if you mainly teach students with intellectual disabilities, but have a few students you teach with other varying classifications, mark intellectual disabilities as this is the majority of your students. If you teach students mainly with learning disabilities, but do teach 1 or 2 students with intellectual disabilities throughout your day, mark learning disability)**

- ◯ 1. Autism
- ◯ 2. Deafness
- ◯ 3. Hearing Impairment
- ◯ 4. Multiple Disabilities
- ◯ 5. Other Health Impairment
- ◯ 6. Speech/Language (Communication) Impairment
- ◯ 7. Visual impairment including blindness
- ◯ 8. Deaf-blindness
- ◯ 9. Emotional Disability
- ◯ 10. Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability
- ◯ 11. Orthopedic Impairment
- ◯ 12. Specific Learning Disability
- ◯ 13. Traumatic Brain Injury

10. demographicrace

1. This question is being asked to gather demographic information only. All information will be kept strictly confidential:

What is your race/ethnicity?

- ◯ A. African-American
- ◯ B. Asian
- ◯ C. Caucasian
- ◯ D. Native American
- ◯ E. Hispanic/Latino
- ◯ F. Polynesian-American
- ◯ G. Multi-racial
- ◯ H. Other (fill in blank)

Other (please specify)

11. Survey

1. Please rate whether you agree or not with the following statements about being a special educator for students with significant disabilities. Please give only one answer per question/statement:

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	No opinion	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
A. I feel supported by the administrators I regularly work with.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. I have felt frustrated with the amount of administrative support I have received related to working with paraeducators.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. I feel others in my school (i.e. administrators, general educators) understand my role as a special educator.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. I feel that my school administrators have realistic expectations of me in my current position.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities

12. Survey2

1. Please rate whether you agree or not with the following statements about being a special educator for students with significant disabilities. Please give only one answer per question/statement:

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	No opinion	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
A. I feel that my district administrators have realistic expectations of me in my current position.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. I feel that administrators support the inclusion of my students in general education.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. I feel that the needs of my students are considered when systematic decisions are made in the school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities

13. Survey 3

1. Please rate whether you agree or not with the following statements about being a special educator for students with significant disabilities. Please give only one answer per question/statement:

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	No opinion	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
A. I feel that teaching students with disabilities has a stigma associated with it in my school/district.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. I have felt that my student's civil rights have been violated at some point in my job.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. I feel there is a gap between best practices (i.e. practices I would like to implement) and the current practices I am allowed to use within my school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. I feel supported by general education teachers in my school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities

14. Survey4

1. Please rate whether you agree or not with the following statements about being a special educator for students with significant disabilities. Please give only one answer per question/statement:

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	No opinion	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
A. I believe that communication with other teachers in my school is the most difficult task in my job.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. I feel my students are as included in my school as they can be.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. I have felt that all of my students are always treated with dignity and respect (e.g. rather than pitied or patronized) by all others (i.e. teachers, staff, administrators within the school).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities

15. Survey5

1. Please rate whether you agree or not with the following statements about being a special educator for students with significant disabilities. Please give only one answer per question/statement:

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	No opinion	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
A. When trying to gain the appropriate support I need in my classroom I have replaced paraeducators, been assigned unqualified paraeducators, or have been assigned paraeducators who have failed in other settings within the school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. In order to gain appropriate support for my classroom, I have had to manage many paraeducator absences, repetitively train paraeducators, discipline paraeducators for unprofessional behavior, and/or fix a job that was done inappropriately by a paraeducator.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. To provide appropriate support for my students, I have had to manage student behaviors caused or set off by a paraeducator's behavior.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities

16. Survey6

1. Please rate whether you agree or not with the following statements about being a special educator for students with significant disabilities. Please give only one answer per question/statement:

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	No opinion	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
A. I have had to change student schedules because of unannounced paraeducator schedule changes or absences.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. I have had to manage paraeducators who have made educational decisions they are not legally responsible to make.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities

17. Survey7

1. Please rate whether you agree or not with the following statements about being a special educator for students with significant disabilities. Please give only one answer per question/statement:

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	No opinion	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
A. I have seen discriminatory behavior from adults (e.g. co-workers, faculty, staff, administrators, etc.) toward my students (i.e. a teacher has excluded a student from their classroom).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. I have personally experienced discriminatory behavior from adults (e.g. co-workers, faculty, staff, administrators, etc.) toward myself (i.e. I have been excluded from a meeting).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. I have received verbal abuse/slander due to my position as a teacher of students with disabilities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities

18. Survey8

1. Please rate whether you agree or not with the following statements about being a special educator for students with significant disabilities. Please give only one answer per question/statement:

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	No opinion	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
A. Members of my student's IEP teams have gone against the decisions made on IEPs including refusing to follow through with promised services.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. My paraeducators are taken from their duties in my classroom to fulfill other duties in the school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. I have had an administrator alter special education services (those required on IEPs) without following appropriate legal requirements.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Attitudes of Teachers of Students with Significant Disabilities

19. Survey9

1. Please rate whether you agree or not with the following statements about being a special educator for students with significant disabilities. Please give only one answer per question/statement:

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	No opinion	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
A. I have had an administrator (either school or district) make budgetary cuts that have significantly affected my paraeducator's salaries and jobs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. My classroom is inappropriate for the needs of my students (i.e. too physically small for student's needs, placed in the back of the school, placed in a portable, too hot, too cold, etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. My students have never missed out on instruction in general education due to a lack of appropriate accommodations, modifications, or differentiation of instruction.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

20. Thank you!

The survey is now complete! Thank you so much for your time with this survey. It is very much appreciated!

To exit the survey, click on the X in the upper-right hand corner, or just change to a new webpage on your Internet viewer.

21. Thank you

Thank you for your time. If you have arrived on this page, unfortunately you do not qualify to complete this survey, but we appreciate your time. If you have any questions, feel free to e-mail us (e-mail addresses on first page of the survey)and we will address them as quickly as possible. Thank you!