

The Principal's Role in Addressing Concerns of Beginning Special Educators and
Enhancing Retention

A Capstone Project Presented to
The Faculty of the Curry School of Education and Human Development
University of Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

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December 2019

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December 2019

Executive Summary

Pamela D. Tucker, Advisor

Teacher attrition is a common problem of practice nationwide, particularly in the current era of teacher shortage. Between forty and fifty percent of new teachers leave the field within the first five years of their careers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Moreover, attrition rates of first year teachers have increased by about one-third over the past two decades (Ingersoll, 2012). According to the research, special education teachers tend to quit at greater rates than their general education counterparts “and are inclined to be more dissatisfied and burned out” (Strong, 2009, p. 31). “Four out of every ten special educators entering the field leave special education before their fifth year of teaching” (Griffin, Winn, Otis-Wilborn, & Kilgore, 2003, p. 6).

Pupils categorized as students with disabilities are among our population’s most vulnerable. It is critically important to recognize the negative impacts that high rates of special education teacher turnover can have on students with disabilities. Unless beginning special education teachers are retained and allowed the opportunity to gain instructional proficiency, students with disabilities will continue to be exposed to less than ideal educational experiences. Andrews and Quinn (2005) suggest that it takes three to five years for beginning teachers to become proficient, thus it is incumbent on school leaders to do everything possible to support and retain teachers to ensure students are taught by educators who have learned to teach well. Without retention of high quality teachers, it is difficult for schools to sustain improvement efforts, develop effective, collaborative teams, or to “integrate new skills into daily practice” (Billingsley, 2005, p. 28).

School principals are perfectly positioned to cultivate environments that support the needs of novice special educators as they strive to meet the complex and diverse needs of their students (Correa & Wagner, 2011). This study focused on a rural school division in central Virginia in order to examine special education teacher attrition within that specific context. The purpose of this capstone study was to (a) identify the specific concerns of beginning special educators in Greene County Schools, (b) examine special educators' perceptions of principal practices they identify as being supportive of their needs, and (c) identify leadership practices which influence special educators' retention.

A mixed-methods study design was utilized for this capstone project integrating a quantitative survey in the first phase of the study followed by in-depth, qualitative interviews in the second phase. This study seeks to contribute to the literature base on beginning teacher concerns, special education teacher attrition, and leadership practices supporting beginning special educators. Research by Billingsley (2005), the Developmental Conceptualization of Beginning Teacher Concerns (Fuller, 1969; Fuller & Brown, 1975), and the first three domains of Leithwood's Ontario Leadership Framework (2012) were central to the design of this study and especially to its conceptual framework. As researcher, I hypothesized that the root cause for special education teacher attrition in Greene County Public Schools was unaddressed or under-addressed concerns of beginning teachers. When principals understand the specific concerns of novice special educators and employ leadership practices that positively impact working conditions and address the concerns of special education teachers, retention and instructional proficiency become more likely.

Findings from this study indicate that beginning special education teachers and general education teachers have very similar concerns and levels of stress related to these concerns. The most critical areas differentiating the concerns of special educators from general educators related to IEP compliance and collaboration with general educators. This study revealed that there are in fact many principal practices that have been utilized in Greene County Schools that special educators report as being supportive of their role. These practices include the assignment of a mentor certified in special education, feedback related to instruction, support and modeling for student discipline and classroom management, provision of a supportive learning community for peer support, and active participation by leaders in IEP meetings. Although each of these practices were not consistent across all settings, overall, findings from this study indicate that teachers value the support provided by Greene County administrators. Most notably, special education teachers identify the critical importance of principals having knowledge about special education laws, policies, procedures, and students with disabilities. Furthermore, it was found that the primary reasons for special education teacher attrition relate to personal choices including family moves and salary rather than issues related to support and principal leadership as originally hypothesized by the researcher.

Based on these findings and the literature, four recommendations were made to the leadership team of Greene County Public Schools.

1. Provide professional development opportunities for principals in order to increase their knowledge and understanding of special education and students with disabilities.

2. Provide all educators in Greene County Public Schools with documentation and other forms of communication which explicitly identify expectations related to inclusion and collaboration.
3. Create a mentoring program that is specific to the needs of special educators.
4. Assess structures and systems in place for providing supports to special education teachers in all schools in Greene County to ensure consistency and maximization of resources that positively impact retention.

Key words: special education teacher attrition, beginning teacher concerns, principal leadership

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APPROVAL OF THE CAPSTONE PROJECT

This capstone project, The Principal's Role in Addressing Concerns of Beginning Special Educators and Enhancing Retention, has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the Curry School of Education and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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July 30, 2019
Date of Defense

Dedication

To Kevin and Dad

I dedicate this capstone project to two of the most impactful men in my life, my husband, Kevin Eggert, and my father, Jack Oliver. Kevin has been my rock and my motivation throughout every step of my doctoral journey. He managed my stressful moments with care and understanding and continuously encouraged me so that I could accomplish the most challenging academic task I have ever undertaken. You have been a constant source of strength and love for me and I am so thankful for having you in my life. This journey never would have started or finished without you by my side!

My dad is the foundation of every positive trait I have. He modeled what it means to have a strong work ethic, to be honest and trustworthy, to value others, and to be respectful and responsible. Above all, I learned that it takes grit to find success in this world and integrity to do what is right. My dad has been in my cheering section for every endeavor and I am proud to dedicate this project to him but more importantly, I am grateful for being this man's daughter. Thank you, dad. For I know that it is from you that my strength and independence was cultivated. (The only female among four brothers didn't hurt either!)

Thank you Kevin and Dad for always being there for me. Earning my doctorate has been an incredible experience and I could not be more thankful for having you each along for the ride. Nothing I accomplish is ever without each of you and I appreciate that more than you will ever know. I love you both so much!

Acknowledgements

Completing this capstone project and this doctoral journey would never have happened without the constant support, timely feedback, positivity, and guidance of my capstone chair, Dr. Pamela Tucker. My experiences at the University of Virginia from my Master's program to my doctorate began and ended with you. Throughout that time, you have been a source of motivation and a model of what I hope to be one day. You have made this adventure extraordinary for me and I will always love you for it! I also want to thank my co-chair, Dr. Sandra Mitchell and committee member, Dr. Dallas Hitt, for your time and encouragement. You helped me to expand upon my own thinking and in the process assisted me in enhancing my work. Your input has been invaluable to me.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to two additional faculty members from the UVA community. First, I want to thank Dr. Denny Berry. Dr. Berry was the first professor I encountered in classes along this doctoral journey. It was she who made me feel welcomed and especially made me believe that I belonged among the gifted collection of educators in cohort three. Secondly, I would be remiss if I did not explicitly thank Dr. Daniel Duke for his inspiration and involvement in my higher education. I believe that I never really learned to “think” until I landed in Dr. Duke's class. He challenged me in ways that stimulated growth and it was he who first planted the seed that led to my aspirations of earning a doctorate. Seven classes over the course of seven years have endeared Dr. Duke to me and I will never forget the lessons I have learned from him.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Andrea Whitmarsh and the Greene County Public School faculty and administrative staff for not only allowing me to conduct my study in Greene, but for supporting my professional growth along the way. I also need to extend a special thank you to Dr. Susan Smith. She was my colleague, a friend, a mentor, and finally my third-party researcher for this capstone project. I couldn't have done my study without you! Finally, I would like to say thank you to all of my cohort buddies for your camaraderie, inspiration, collaboration, and support. I value all that I have learned with and from you and will always cherish the memories we made together. Thank you Staci, Jennifer, Mark, Chris, Christina, Craig, Sue, Nick, Pamela, Crystal, and Jamie. I appreciate and respect each and every one of you!

Table of Contents

	Page
Dedication.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	x
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Context.....	3
Problem of Practice.....	4
Significance, Rationale, and Purpose of Study	6
Proficiency Requires Retention	7
Financial Effects	8
Accountability and Legal Responsibilities	9
Conceptual Framework.....	10
Research Questions.....	13
Definitions of Key Terms	14
Limitations and Delimitations.....	15
Limitations.....	16
Delimitations.....	16
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature	18
Concerns of Teachers.....	20
A Developmental Conceptualization of Teacher Concerns	21
Research on the Development of Preservice and Beginning Teachers.....	25
Summary of Teachers' Concerns.....	28
Teacher Attrition.....	29
Reasons for Attrition.....	29
Special Education Teacher Attrition.....	31
Special Education Teacher Shortages and Types of Attrition	33
Factors that influence attrition	34
Summary of Special Education and General Education Teacher Attrition.....	36
School Leadership and Teacher Retention.....	37
Induction for Beginning Teachers	38
Program variations and leadership decision-making	39
Alignment of perceived needs and supports	41
The Principal, School Culture, and Induction for Beginning Special Education Teachers	42
The Specific Case for SET Retention	44
Leadership Practices	46
The Ontario Leadership Framework.....	47
Summary of School Leadership and SET Retention	50
Chapter 3: Methodology	52
Study Design.....	52

Setting, Participants, and Time Frame	53
Research Questions.....	54
Data Collection and Analysis	56
Researcher Bias, Assumptions, and Validity	60
Chapter 4: Findings	64
Research Question One: What Do SETs in GCPS Identify as Concerns and How Do These Concerns Compare to GETs?	65
Summary of Findings from Teacher Concerns and Stress Inventory	80
Interview Data Related to Research Question One.....	82
Summary of Findings for Research Question One	91
Research Question Two: To What Extent Do SETs in GCPS Feel Supported by Their Principals?.....	92
Summary of Findings for Research Question Two.....	103
Research Question Three: What Leadership Practices Influence Teachers' Decisions to Remain in Their Current School, GCPS, or the Profession?	105
Summary of Findings for Research Question Three.....	108
Chapter Summary	109
Chapter 5: Discussion	111
Theme One: Specific Task Concerns of SETs.....	112
Theme Two: Facilitating SETs' Developmental Progression of Teaching Concerns	114
Theme Three: Supportive Practices of GCPS Administrators.....	117
Theme Four: The Administrator's Knowledge of Special Education.....	122
Limitations.....	124
Implications for Research	125
Recommendations.....	127
Recommendation 1	128
Recommendation 2	130
Recommendation 3	132
Recommendation 4	133
Summary	134
Chapter 6: Action Communications	136
References.....	153
Appendices.....	165

List of Tables

	Page
Table 1 SOL Passing Percentage for All Students & Students with Disabilities in GCPS	.5
Table 2 Three-Phase Developmental Model of Teacher Concerns	24
Table 3 Fuller’s Modified Developmental Model of Teacher’s Concerns	25
Table 4 Methodology of Research Question One	58
Table 5 Methodology of Research Question Two	60
Table 6 Methodology of Research Question Three	61
Table 7 Summary of Data Samples	65
Table 8 Demographic Data Related to the Teacher Concerns & Stress Inventory.....	67
Table 9 Years of Teaching Experience of Survey Respondents.....	67
Table 10 Top Three Pedagogical Concerns by Mean	70
Table 11 Level of Stress for Top Three Pedagogical Concerns	71
Table 12 Pedagogical Attributes and Concern Phase	71
Table 13 Top Three Organization & Management Concerns by Mean.....	72
Table 14 Level of Stress for Top Organization & Management Concerns	73
Table 15 Organization & Mangement Attributes and Concern Phase.....	74
Table 16 Top Collaboration Concerns by Mean.....	75
Table 17 Level of Stress for Top Collaboration Concerns	76
Table 18 Top Discipline & Motivation Concerns by Mean	77
Table 19 Level of Stress for Top Discipline & Motivation Concerns	77
Table 20 Discipline & Motivation Attributes and Concern Phase	78
Table 21 Support Attributes and Concern Phase	79
Table 22 Top Support Concerns by Mean	80
Table 23 Level of Stress for Top Support Concerns.....	81
Table 24 Summary of Combined Means by Category.....	81
Table 25 Frequency of Top Concerns Identified by Current & Former GCPS SETs	86
Table 26 Frequency of Task Concerns Identified by Current & Former GCPS SETs	89
Table 27 Frequency of Impact Concerns Identified by Current & Former GCPS SETs...	91
Table 28 Current SETs Intention for Retention	106
Table 29 Former SETs Identified Reasons for Departure & Suggestions for Improvement	108

List of Figures

	Page
Figure 1 Conceptual Framework	12
Figure 2 Theory of Teacher Development.....	39
Figure 3 Crosswalk of Teacher Concerns and Leadership Practices	49
Figure 4 Summary of SET Concerns & Supportive Principal Practices	104

Chapter One: Introduction

My first year teaching was much tougher than I expected. I had no curriculum, no support, no experienced special education teacher in the building, and no real experience at the district level...I would arrive before the sun came up and leave after dark. By November I called my mom one night just bawling on the phone to tell her I wanted to work at Belk or Winn-Dixie – I didn't care. I was not going back to teach! (Jessica, from Whitaker, 2000, p. 28)

Education is known as the “occupation which cannibalizes its young” (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, p. 682). Unlike many other professions that offer apprenticeships or other types of training programs following collegiate studies, most novice teachers begin their professional careers with full job responsibilities and immediately transition from being “a student of teaching to being a teacher of students” (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011, p. 203). For some teaching fields, like special education, the transition can be particularly challenging. In addition to their teaching duties, special education teachers “must modify the curriculum for students with widely varying needs and disabilities, devise individual education programs (IEPs), employ assistive technology, and comply with federal special education laws” (Youngs, Jones, & Low, 2011, p. 1507).

In a 2011 study, Youngs, Jones, and Low identified considerable differences between the expectations placed on beginning special education teachers (SETs) and general education teachers (GETs). Special education teachers are “often responsible for teaching multiple subjects across multiple grade levels” (Youngs, Jones, & Low, 2011, p. 1509), have limited opportunities for collaboration with peers, and “have little access to

professional resources...to meet the needs of their diverse students” (Youngs, Jones, & Low, 2011, p. 1512). As such, novice special education teachers often experience feelings of stress, burnout, self-doubt, and isolation (Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996) and “are at greater risk of leaving the field than their general education counterparts” (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1993, p. 372). According to Butler (2008), “special education teachers are two-and-a-half times more likely to leave their jobs than teachers in other disciplines” (p. 23).

Beginning special education teacher retention is not an isolated problem of practice. The 2009 Listing of Teacher Shortage Areas published by the US Department of Education “acknowledges teacher shortage issues in all states” (Watlington, Shockley, Guglielmino, & Felsher, 2010, p. 24) with the field of special education topping the list. Special educators are both hard to find and difficult to keep, particularly in their first five years on the job (Billingsley, 2005, p. 61). Leadership however can make a significant difference. “Principal leadership is a critical component of creating environments that support new teachers to meet the complex and diverse needs of their students, this is especially the case for new special education teachers” (Correa & Wagner, 2011, p. 17).

Support from administrators has been cited as one of the most important factors in both special education teacher and general education teacher retention (Correa & Wagner, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2003). “The research conducted on novice SETs and administrators suggests that active engagement by the principal in induction and mentoring programs in conjunction with quality interactions regarding day-to-day policies, procedures, and instructional practice are integral to cultivating beginning SETs and keeping them in the field” (Correa & Wagner, 2011, p. 23). Therefore, it is

incumbent on school leaders to focus their efforts on the recruitment and retention of highly qualified and effective special educators (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2014, p. 306). Doing so requires an understanding of the needs of beginning special education teachers and the specific context in which SETs work. For the purpose of this capstone study, the context is one of the smallest, rural school districts in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Context

Greene County Public Schools (GCPS) is a small district composed of six schools in rural, central Virginia. Located just north of Charlottesville at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains, GCPS is comprised of three elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, and one technical education school. GCPS enrolls approximately 3,200 students with 13.6% of the population identified as students with disabilities. Across all schools, Greene employs 254 faculty members including 40 special education teachers. Of the special education teaching staff, 20 (53%) are identified as probationary teachers, which in GCPS, means they are in the first five years of their teaching careers within the division. Additionally, nine out of the 20 probationary special education teachers that Greene County currently employs have provisional or emergency certification and 11 out of the 20 are novice teachers (personal interview, K. Spencer, September 2018). For the 2017-2018 school year, GCPS reported a 16% attrition rate for all teachers and a 15% turnover rate for special education teachers (personal interview, K. Spencer, September 2018). Although the special education attrition rate is consistent with national averages, the quality of instruction and growth of our students with disabilities comes into question when half of the special education teaching force in GCPS has less than five years of

experience and multiple teachers are underqualified based on emergency certifications and provisional licensure.

Problem of Practice

Pupils categorized as students with disabilities are among our population's most vulnerable. It is critically important to recognize the negative impacts that high rates of special education teacher turnover can have on students with disabilities. The educational experiences of many students from diverse backgrounds continue to reflect less than ideal opportunities to learn as they are exposed to novice or under-credentialed teachers (Cramer, Little, & McHatton, 2018, p. 494). As an often marginalized population, it is essential for these students to have access to "a full rigorous curriculum, exposure to knowledgeable, caring teachers, and resources to assure and enhance learning" (Cramer, Little, & McHatton, 2018, p. 496). Unless beginning special education teachers are retained and allowed the opportunity to gain proficiency, students with disabilities will continue to be exposed to less than ideal educational experiences, inequity, and social injustice.

Retention of special education teachers is a common problem of practice in most school divisions impacting instructional "program stability and quality" (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1993, p. 371) and GCPS is no exception to this issue. GCPS administrators frequently fill special education positions with inexperienced and often mediocre teachers, as evidenced by the number of probationary SETs on Plans of Improvement (POI) (personal interview, D. Brown, March, 2017). When districts expose students to a "continual parade of ineffective teachers" (Darling-Hammond, 2003, p. 9), students are subjected to multiple and often unqualified teachers that frequently leave before they

become skilled practitioners (Billingsley, 2005, p. 27). Thus, outcomes for students with disabilities in GCPS remain far below minimum state standards based on Standards of Learning assessment data. While more than half of the special educators in Greene have accrued less than five years of teaching experience, concurrently, students identified as Students with Disabilities (SWD) have regularly underperformed on standardized assessments as shown in Appendix L. In fact, outcomes for SWD can be characterized as stagnant as the gap between them and other categories of students becomes increasingly larger (Virginia Department of Education, School Quality Report, October, 2018).

Table 1

SOL Passing Percentage for All Students & Students with Disabilities in GCPS 2017-2018

Content Assessment	All Students in GCPS	Students with Disabilities in GCPS	Minimum State Benchmark
Reading	72%	29%	75%
Math	73%	31%	70%
History	77%	33%	70%
Science	78%	38%	70%
Writing	72%	24%	75%
Average	74%	31%	72%

Note. Accreditation data based on VDOE School Quality Report for 2017-2018 school year

Special education teacher turnover is due to a number of factors including multifaceted role responsibilities, a lack of early career professional support, and a lack of professional development that supports instruction for the challenging learning needs of the students being served. The challenges of beginning special education teachers have been documented by researchers and are associated with high rates of attrition (Boe, Bobbit, Cook, Whitener, & Weber, 1997; Miller et al., 1999). While some factors such as “challenging student characteristics” are a given within special education, there are other root causes of teacher attrition among special educators that are actionable and could be

addressed by school administrators in order to positively impact retention (Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996).

Significance, Rationale, and Purpose of Study

A 2001 “analysis of the national Schools and Staffing Survey and Teacher Follow-up Survey found that more than a third of beginning teachers leave the profession during the first three years, and almost half leave after five years” (Kelley, 2004, p. 438). Among the reasons given by teachers for changing schools or leaving the profession altogether are: “inadequate salary and incentives, lack of or inadequate support from administration, lack of support from colleagues, lack of support from community and parents, stress, problems with subject-area assignment, lack of opportunity for professional development, violence and safety, and a lack of resources” (Strong, 2009, p. 27).

Concerns of general education teachers are applicable to special educators, however, there are additional concerns identified in the literature as well. Billingsley (2005) identifies four major categories of SET concerns: pedagogy, organization and management, collaboration, and support issues. Concerns specific to SETs that relate to pedagogy include “assisting students with complex needs” and “helping students with individual needs versus demands of the general curriculum” (p. 67). Another category of SET concerns relates to organization and management issues which includes role ambiguity and “managing paperwork” and “large caseloads of students” with IEPs. The third category relates to collaboration and includes such concerns as “general educators’ reluctance to collaborate, problems working with paraprofessionals, and lack of time to collaborate with GETs” (p. 67). The final classification of SET concerns according to

Billingsley (2005) is support issues which includes “feelings of isolation” and “lack of professional development” specifically focused on meeting the needs of students with disabilities (p. 67).

Without the appropriate supports by school leaders, beginning special educators often become “disillusioned, stressed, and burned out” which typically leads to attrition (Billingsley, 2005, p. 20). According to McLeskey, Tyler, and Flippin (2004) between seven and fifteen percent of special education teachers nationally leave each year. “If 10%” of SETs “leave each year, administrators will have to replace half of their special educators in just a five-year period” (Billingsley, 2005, p. 14). Excessive attrition rates such as these are costly to school districts financially and “interfere with the quality of services that students with disabilities receive” (Billingsley, 2005, pp. 26-27) while also negatively impacting workforce stability and quality (Hope, 1999).

Proficiency Requires Retention

Watlington, Shockley, Guglielmino, and Felsher (2010) state that “when high-quality teachers leave the classroom, the effect on both student performance and school and district fiscal operations is significant and deleterious” (p. 22). Although “difficult to quantify,” research by Milanowski and Odden (2007) and Cascio (1991) identify the term “productivity costs” in order to describe the loss of skill level when a replacement worker with less experience and skills supplants the productivity of the original worker (Watlington et al., 2010). In terms of educators, “these productivity costs are directly associated with student achievement” (Watlington et al., 2010, p. 26). The concept of productivity costs applied to high rates of teacher attrition supports the assertion that the

loss of high quality teachers reduces the opportunities for students to receive high quality instruction in the classroom (Watlington et al., 2010).

"High levels of attrition are costly, reduce teacher quality, divert attention from school improvement efforts, and interfere with the quality of services that students with disabilities receive" (Billingsley, 2005, pp. 26-27). High levels of teacher turnover, year after year, negatively impacts "program stability and quality" (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1993, p. 371) and is therefore harmful for districts, schools, and students (Burkhauser, 2017). Andrews and Quinn (2005) suggest that it takes three to five years for beginning teachers "to become proficient, thus beginning teachers must be retained to ensure a proficient teaching force" (p. 113). Without retention of high quality teachers, it is difficult for schools to sustain improvement efforts, develop effective, collaborative teams, or to "integrate new skills into daily practice" (Billingsley, 2005, p. 28).

Financial Effects

Besides "interfering with the quality of services that students with disabilities receive" (Billingsley, 2005, pp. 26-27), excessive attrition rates are costly to school districts financially. In terms of fiscal impacts of attrition, Benner (2000) indicates that districts spend thousands of dollars for every teacher that leaves. In 2006, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) conducted a study of five districts in order to identify the financial cost of teacher attrition. Costs ranged between \$10,000 and \$26,500 per teacher depending upon the location and demographics of the school (Watlington, Shockley, Guglielmino, & Felsher, 2010).

Watlington, Shockley, Guglielmino, and Felsher (2010) reviewed research related to the financial costs of teacher attrition. The authors found that prior to the development

of tools for measuring the financial costs of attrition such as the School Turnover Analysis (STA) and the Teacher Turnover Cost Calculator, it was difficult to identify true dollar amounts for teacher turnover. Watlington and colleagues identify the Cost of Teacher Turnover study (2006) by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) and the Southeast Florida study (2004-05) as the most relevant studies related to the costs of teacher turnover as they utilized the STA tool and calculated actual costs associated with attrition.

This study provides a broader look at the different types of costs, academic and fiscal, related to teacher attrition and retention. One of the more significant findings in the Cost of Teacher Turnover study (2006) was that high rates of teacher turnover occur more frequently in low-performing, high-needs schools and that schools classified in this way spend larger portions of their budgets on replacing teachers. The Southeast Florida study (2004-05) highlighted the importance of providing supports for new teachers such as the New Educator Support System (NESS). By utilizing comprehensive induction systems like NESS, schools and districts can reduce the costs spent on replacing teachers through retention.

Accountability and Legal Responsibilities

As the United States has progressed into the age of accountability and standardization brought about by federal legislation such as No Child Left Behind (2002) and national curriculum standards such as the Common Core, school districts have been pressured "to focus on beginning teachers' learning and the improvement of teaching quality" (Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008, p. 132) in order to address achievement gaps and improve student learning outcomes for all learners. "Special education has an

instructional mission and school systems have the legal responsibility to make sure that students with disabilities are provided what they need to learn” (Billingsley, 2005, p. 22). Federal legislation such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), originally enacted in 1975, requires schools to provide a *free and appropriate public education* (FAPE) to all students. More specifically, schools are required to provide “individual consideration” and “equity under the law” so that students with specific learning disabilities have access to the general education curriculum.

Legal requirements related to special education emphasizes the importance of maintaining “high-quality programming” (Billingsley, 2005, p. 23). As novice teachers are in effect, teachers in practice, “reducing the number of years students receive instruction from novices should help improve educational quality” (Darling-Hammond, 2003, p. 7). Given the current low levels of achievement by special education students in GCPS as previously shown in Table 1, and educators’ moral and legal obligations to provide a high quality education to these students, SET attrition is a critical problem of practice which needs to be addressed. The purpose of this capstone study then, is to (a) identify the specific concerns of beginning SETs in Greene County Schools, (b) examine SETs’ perceptions of principal practices they identify as being supportive of their needs, and (c) identify leadership practices which influence special educators’ retention.

Conceptual Framework

Teacher attrition, especially in areas such as special education, is a critical problem of practice nationwide, including rural locations such as Greene County Schools. As researcher, I hypothesize that the root cause for SET attrition in GCPS is unaddressed or under-addressed concerns of beginning teachers. Furthermore, if principals recognize

the concerns of beginning special education teachers, they are better able to implement practices to support these specific professional concerns. It is also critically important for building administrators to recognize the added concerns that special education teachers face due to the extra responsibilities their roles entail. When principals understand the specific concerns of novice special educators and employ leadership practices that positively impact working conditions and address the concerns of SETs, retention and proficiency become more likely. This theory in conjunction with research by Fuller (1969, 1975), Billingsley (2005), and Leithwood's Ontario Leadership Framework (2012) create the conceptual framework for this capstone project as shown in Figure 1.

Fuller (1969) posits that all novice teachers begin their professional careers in a "survival stage" in which their primary concerns relate to self. These concerns include "anxiety about their adequacy, class control, and the evaluative opinions" (Yan Fung Mok, 2005, p. 55) of colleagues and administrators. At the second stage or the "adjustment stage," concerns shift to teaching tasks which may include the management of students, time, and resources (Yan Fung Mok, 2005, p. 55). It is not until the "mature stage" that teachers' concerns shift to that of students' needs and achievement. Specific concerns at the mature stage identified by Fuller (1969) include "concerns about abilities to understand pupils' capacities, to specify objectives for them, to assess their gain," and to reflect upon their own "contributions" to students' successes or lack thereof. (p. 221)

A connection can also be drawn between Fuller's conceptualization of teachers' concerns and principal leadership. Leithwood's (2012) Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF), can be used as a framework for identifying leadership practices that address the concerns of beginning special educators. In the context of this capstone project, the first

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework

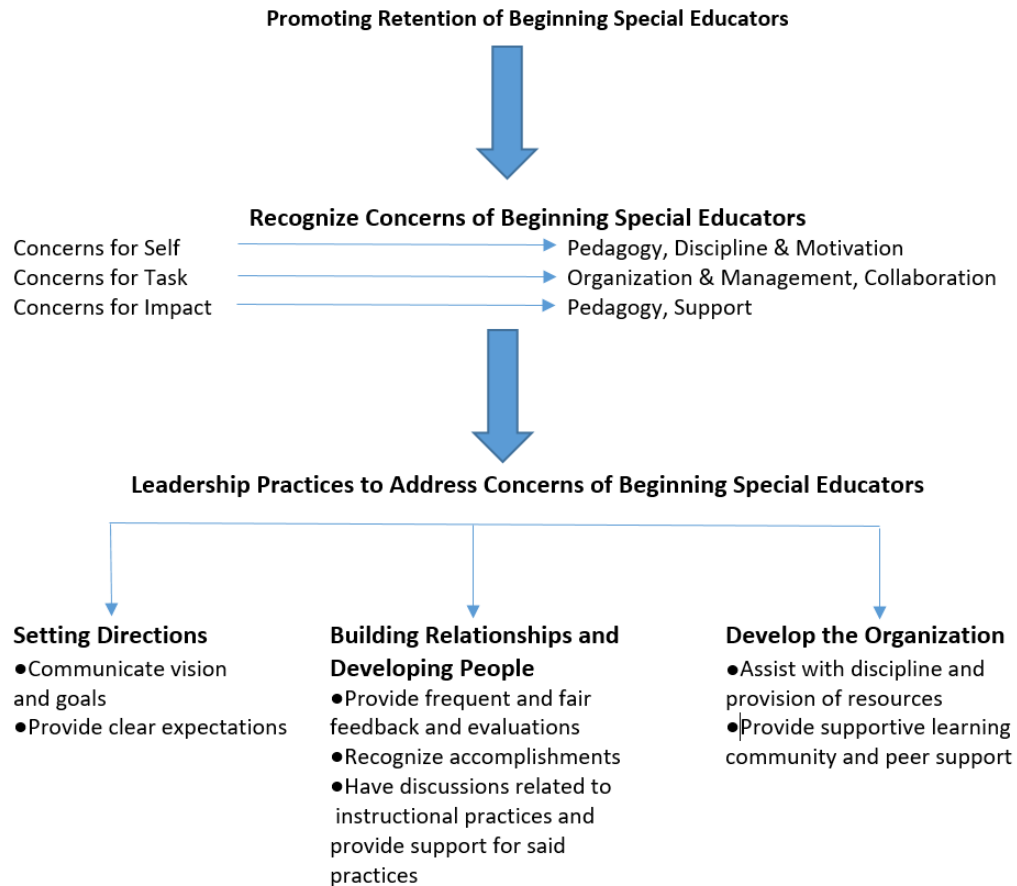


Figure 1. This figure illustrates the conceptual framework for this capstone project. It represents the integration of Fuller’s Developmental Conceptualization of Teacher Concerns (1969, 1975), research by Billingsley (2005) on SET concerns, and Leithwood’s Ontario Leadership Framework (2012). By understanding beginning SET concerns and aligning leadership practices to the needs of SETs, leaders are able to positively promote SET retention.

three domains (setting directions, building relationships and developing people, and developing the organization to support desired practices) will serve as a lens for leadership practices which may address the developmental concerns of teachers.

I theorize that when novice teachers are unable to transition from the survival stage and concerns for self they will likely experience high levels of stress and low levels of job satisfaction and commitment resulting in the increased likelihood of departure

from the school or field. Meanwhile, principals are capable of creating school environments that positively affect teacher satisfaction, commitment, and retention. By creating more supportive conditions principals are able to influence novice teachers' progression from the survival stage into the later stages of teacher concerns. The combination of Fuller's model and Leithwood's OLF provides an applicable framework for the development of this study's research questions and design, and allowed the researcher to analyze special education teacher attrition in GCPS. Additionally, by understanding Fuller's conceptualization and SETs' perceptions of administrator supports, recommendations for leadership practices can be made that may contribute to improved SET retention.

Research Questions

In an effort to better understand special education teachers' concerns in Greene County Public Schools and to identify leadership practices which address these concerns, the following research questions and sub-questions guide my study design:

- **Research Question 1:** What do special education teachers (SETs) in GCPS identify as concerns and how do these compare to general education teachers' (GETs) concerns?
- **Research Question 2:** To what extent do SETs in GCPS feel supported by their principals?
 - a) What specific principal practices do SETs identify as supportive?
 - b) What concerns do SETs identify as being met by their principal's practices?

- **Research Question 3:** What leadership practices influence teachers' decisions to remain in their current school, GCPS, or the profession?

Definitions of Key Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms and definitions are utilized:

1. *Attrition* refers to the voluntary movement of teachers out of the profession or out of the school district (Strong, 2009, p. 21).
2. *Retention* is the “antonym of attrition” (Strong, 2009, p. 20). This term relates to the human resource goal of maintaining effective teachers within the school system.
3. *Beginning or Novice Teacher* refers to an early career teacher serving in their first five years within the profession.
4. *Probationary Teacher* is defined in this study as a teacher new to Greene County Schools but not necessarily a teacher without any prior professional experience. Newly hired teachers in GCPS are considered probationary for five years if they have never achieved tenure status in the Commonwealth of Virginia. If continuing contract status has been gained in Virginia prior to employment in Greene, probationary status continues for two years.
5. *Induction* refers to programs or activities specifically designed to provide supports to beginning and probationary teachers.
6. *IEP* is an acronym for Individual Education Program. Special education is specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. Specially designed instruction means adapting the content,

methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of the student that result from the child's disability; and to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards that apply to all children. An IEP is a written plan aligned to state standards aimed at advancing the student to a proficient level on the state standards (Virginia Department of Education, IEP and Instruction, para. 1).

Limitations and Delimitations

This capstone project has been designed in order to examine a specific problem of practice within Greene County Public Schools. While teacher attrition is a nationwide concern in public education, this capstone seeks to focus on SET attrition within the specific rural context of GCPS. Pupils categorized as students with disabilities are among our population's most vulnerable. It is critically important to recognize the negative impacts that high rates of special education teacher turnover can have on students with disabilities. Students with disabilities deserve and are legally required to receive program stability and quality in order to make gains and achieve positive student outcomes. As students with disabilities continue to be exposed to numerous teachers with limited proficiency, it becomes paramount for school administrators to provide support to novice teachers to improve proficiency and positively influence retention. As special educators are retained, they gain experience and should therefore be enabled to improve upon the quality of services being provided to students with disabilities. This study is designed to identify the professional concerns of beginning special educators in Greene County Public Schools in addition to identifying specific leadership practices which may affect beginning special education teachers' decisions to remain within the

school division and within the field of special education. As such, the following limitations and delimitations to the study's design have been identified.

Limitations

- Studying a restricted population in a single, small, rural community may limit the generalizability of the findings to other school divisions, particularly those in urban and suburban locations.
- The inconsistency with which GCPS conducted, recorded, and organized exit interviews limited the researcher's ability to draw comparisons between reported reasons for attrition among GETs and SETs in Greene County. This lack of data also minimized the comparisons which could be made between national attrition data and that of Greene County Schools.
- This study is designed based upon teacher perceptions and self-reports which are typically less reliable than other qualitative or quantitative methods.

Delimitations

- Although the goal of addressing teacher concerns is to improve retention, data will not be collected on retention of actual individuals and is beyond the scope of this study.
- The researcher will rely on self-reports of leadership practices and she will not verify actual leadership practices and supports related to induction of beginning and probationary teachers.

Although the rural environment of GCPS has been identified as a limitation related to the generalizability of findings, this fact is also a delimitation in that the researcher's purpose is to examine this specific context. Examining the beginning special

education teachers who teach or have taught in GCPS is critical to determining what their specific concerns are and how the leaders in their schools may be able to support them in this rural setting. A review of the literature related to teacher concerns, principal leadership, job satisfaction, and retention follows.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The problem of practice in this study is that Greene County Public Schools, like many schools across the nation, struggles to retain beginning special education teachers. As such, I seek to examine the relationship among beginning special educators' concerns, school leadership practices, and teacher attrition. Therefore, this review will draw upon literature related to the following areas: (a) theoretical concepts related to teacher concerns; (b) teacher attrition and its impact on schools and student outcomes; (c) additional concerns and factors related to attrition of beginning special education teachers; and (d) the leadership role in the attrition of special education teachers.

The strategies utilized to locate relevant research related to my topic began with an ERIC search utilizing the search terms "special education," new or beginning or induction, teacher or teachers, and administrator or principal. This search produced 732 related articles, books, and reports. I then filtered my search by selecting dates from 2005 to present in order to locate the most recent work related to my topic. This reduced the search results to 284 items. I then began to scan through the resources and identified those that were most relevant based on abstracts, discussion and findings of peer reviewed articles as well as table of contents and executive summaries of published reports. Additionally, a separate search was conducted using the administration and supervision research guide through the University of Virginia Curry library website for peer reviewed articles related to my conceptual framework. Teacher concerns and those which referenced Fuller (1969) specifically as well as Leithwood, and The Ontario

Leadership Framework (2012) were utilized as keyword searches. Additional resources were located and utilized based on the frequency in which they were referenced in any of the above identified works. Specific to Leithwood, references were utilized based on those listed in a dissertation by Melissa Anderson Morgan (2014) as she had utilized Leithwood's work in a similar manner for her conceptual framework. Eighty-nine articles, dissertations, books, and other research material were reviewed and included within the review of the literature.

The first section of this review of the literature will describe theoretical concepts of teachers' concerns. I will begin with a detailed explanation of Fuller's (1969) developmental conceptualization of teachers' concerns, the conceptual framework for this study. Other theories which utilized Fuller's work as a foundation will be discussed as well, including Kagan (1992), Pigge and Marso (1997), and Yan Fung Mok (2005).

The second section of this review will summarize the literature related to teacher attrition as a whole within the field of education (Ingersoll, 2012; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Strong 2009). Specific data related to the attrition of teachers will be shared along with a description of the consequences related to high rates of teacher attrition including effects on instructional programming and student achievement. Moreover, specific attrition data and challenges related to the context of special education teachers will be discussed. I seek to identify factors which differentiate beginning special education teachers from their general education counterparts. Contextual factors related to the following areas of concerns for special educators will be discussed: (a) pedagogical concerns; (b) organization and management issues; (c) collaboration concerns; and (d) support issues (Billingsley, 2005; Billingsley & Tomchin, 1992; Billingsley, 2004). I

will draw upon the research in order to articulate the connection between these concern categories and the high rates of beginning special education teacher attrition.

Finally, the third section of the literature review will identify the leadership role of the principal as it relates to special education. This section will begin with a review of the research related to the critical role of school leaders in relation to the induction of novice educators. Furthermore, a description of Leithwood's Ontario Leadership Framework (2012) will be used to examine leadership practices related to teacher retention. In particular, the first three domains (setting directions, building relationships and developing people, and developing the organization to support desired practices) will be described and related to the needs of beginning SETs. By utilizing three domains of the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) in conjunction with Fuller's conceptualization of teachers' concerns, specific practices will be identified which relate to induction supports (Fletcher, Strong, & Villar, 2008; Kelley, 2004; Odden, 2011), inclusion and collaboration, and professional development for special educators (Billingsley, 2005).

Concerns of Teachers

All teachers, whether they are general or special education teachers, have concerns about their professional functioning and sense of effectiveness which may impact job satisfaction and commitment. The nature of these concerns can range from classroom discipline and management to subject competence to implementation of instructional strategies and beyond. Areas of concerns tend to be self-identified weaknesses in need of problem-solving, improvement, or change (Yan Fung Mok, 2005) but also include the need for professional, social, and emotional support.

A Developmental Conceptualization of Teacher Concerns

In 1963, Frances Fuller began to conduct studies and review the literature with regard to the professional concerns of preservice and beginning teachers “in the hope of discovering what teachers are concerned about and whether their concerns can be conceptualized in some useful way” (Fuller, 1969, p. 208). The findings of her seminal work resulted in the developmental conceptualization of teacher concerns. A google scholar search for Fuller’s 1969 conceptualization currently yields 2,730 citations. Her work is known widely among researchers and scholars interested in studying teacher development, causes for attrition, induction supports for novices, and other aspects of support for beginning teachers. Her conceptualization has been utilized as a foundation for further study by many and is still relevant today (Kagan, 1992; Pigge & Marso, 1997; & Yan Fung Mok, 2005).

Fuller’s initial study (1969) involved twenty-one student teachers (one group of 6, one group of 8, one group of 7 student teachers) meeting for counseling sessions with 1-2 psychologists over the course of three different semesters. During the counseling sessions, student teachers were free to discuss any professional concerns they had without the presence of their supervisor. Sessions were recorded, transcribed, and categorized. The results of the study demonstrated a dichotomous relationship between early and late concerns of student teachers. “Concern with the parameters of the new school situation and with discipline were the most frequently mentioned topics during the early weeks of student teaching. Concern with pupils and pupil learning was more frequent during the later weeks” (Fuller, p. 211). Fuller identified one category of teacher concerns as concerns for “self.” These concerns included those related to “self-protection and self-

adequacy with class control, subject matter adequacy, finding a place in the power structure of the school, and understanding expectations of supervisors, principals, and parents” (p. 211).

A follow-up study was then performed by Fuller (1969) which involved twenty-nine student teachers. These students responded in writing every two weeks to the sentence stem: “What you are concerned about now?” (p. 214). This portion of the study resulted in all student teachers being “concerned with self-adequacy and/or class control. None was concerned with what pupils were learning” (p. 214). Fuller then examined data and conclusions drawn from prior studies (Philips, 1932; Travers, 1952; Gabriel, 1957; Thompson, 1963; & York, 1967, 1968). Summarized conclusions from all of the studies included:

1. Consistent findings were found with regard to teacher concerns “despite the fact that diverse populations were surveyed over a period of 36 years” (p. 215).
2. Beginning teachers do not demonstrate concern for instructional design, methods of presenting subject matter, assessment of pupil learning, or with tailoring content to individual pupils (p. 216).
3. Results for beginning teachers and pre-service teachers were similar in that primary concerns related to self (Fuller, 1969, pp. 215-216).

Fuller (1969) then examined work by Gabriel (1957) and Jackson (1968) in order to evaluate concerns of experienced teachers and to draw comparisons between the types of professional concerns experienced by both seasoned and beginning educators. “Experienced teachers were more often concerned with slow progress of pupils” (p. 216). Fuller posited that concerns of teachers can change over time and that teachers

maintaining early concerns may leave the profession (p. 218). In other words, teachers that continued to experience concerns for self that did not progress to concerns for pupils, often left the teaching profession due to stress and lack of success on the job.

Based on previous studies and her own work, Fuller (1969) identified the developmental conceptualization of teachers' concerns. Her conceptualization begins with "the pre-teaching phase" or "non-concern phase." This stage of teaching includes enrollment in preparation programs prior to contact with students or student teaching. "Teaching-related concerns" reported by those in preparation programs were "usually amorphous and vague: anticipation or apprehension," as these beginners "did not know what to be concerned about" (p. 219). "The early teaching phase," which consists of student teaching and beginning in-service teaching, focuses on concerns for "self." Concerns of teachers in the early phase center on adequacy with regard to class control, ability to understand subject matter, and the evaluative opinions of others, particularly evaluating supervisors (pp. 220-221).

Concerns of teachers in the late teaching phase situated around the success of pupils rather than on the teacher. These "mature concerns" of experienced teachers included: focus on students' academic growth and teacher reflection on their impact on student performance, the ability to understand pupils' capacities, specifying objectives for students, student assessment, and evaluating oneself in terms of pupil gain (Fuller, 1969, p. 221). Fuller's initial three-phase developmental model of teacher concerns is illustrated in Table 2. The table summarizes each of the three phases and the concerns associated with each phase based upon Fuller's findings.

Years later, Fuller’s model was modified (Fuller & Brown, 1975) to include a fourth stage. In this updated model, teacher concerns transition from the “pre-teaching stage” to a “survival stage” to “teaching tasks” to the final “impact stage.” According to Kagan (1992), the survival stage is “characterized by class control, mastery of

Table 2

Three-Phase Developmental Model of Teacher Concerns

Pre-Teaching Phase	Early Teaching Phase	Late Teaching Phase
<i>Non-concern</i>	<i>Concerns for Self</i>	<i>Concerns for Pupils</i>
Anticipation	Adequacy of self as teacher	Student progress
Apprehension	Adequacy of subject matter knowledge	Ability to understand pupil’s academic, behavioral, & social needs
	Class control/Discipline	Impact of teacher on student learning/growth
	Evaluative opinions of others	

content, and the teacher’s own adequacy in fulfilling his or her role” (p. 160). Concerns in the third stage relate to the performance of teaching tasks such as managing “students, time, and resources” (Yan Fung Mok, 2005, p. 55). Concerns related to the mature stage include teachers’ impact and abilities “to relate to students as individuals” (Kagan, 1992, p. 160) including their “academic and social well-being” (Yan Fung Mok, 2005, p. 55).

Table 3 summarizes the modifications to Fuller’s original conceptualization.

In summation, the developmental conceptualization of teacher development (Fuller, 1969; Fuller & Brown, 1975) posits that novices in the teaching profession pass “through phases which are sequential and accumulative” (Pigge & Marso, 1997, p. 225). During preservice, prospective teachers are “characterized as not concerned about teaching, but being concerned about their own progress as students” (Pigge & Marso, 1997, p. 225) As student teachers and beginning in-service teachers gain experience, they

begin to transition through phases of concern from concerns for self, to concerns of task performance, to concerns of impact on students. According to Fuller, concerns about students cannot be addressed by teachers until immediate concerns for self and task are addressed (Pigge & Marso, 1997). Furthermore, teachers' progression through the concern stages can be successfully facilitated by contextual factors such as the "teaching assignment (the nature of the content and pupils to be taught) and colleagues (their willingness to provide support and assistance)" (Kagan, 1992, p. 153) while teachers who remain in the survival stage are more likely to leave the profession.

Table 3

Fuller's Modified Developmental Model of Teachers' Concerns

Pre-Teaching Stage	Survival Stage	Teaching Tasks Stage	Impact Stage
<i>Non-concern</i>	<i>Concerns for self</i>	<i>Concerns for tasks</i>	<i>Concerns for students</i>
Anticipation	Adequacy of self as teacher	Management of students	Student progress
Apprehension	Adequacy of subject matter knowledge	Management of time	Ability to understand pupils' academic, behavioral, & social needs
	Class control/discipline	Management of resources	Impact of teacher on student learning/growth
	Evaluative opinions of others		

Research on the Development of Preservice and Beginning Teachers

Kagan (1992) sought to examine the literature related to the professional growth of preservice and beginning teachers. One of her stated objectives was to "construct a model of professional growth for novice and beginning teachers" (p. 129). As a result of her review of the literature, she "confirms, explicates, and integrates Fuller's (Fuller & Brown, 1975) developmental model of teacher concerns" (p. 129). Through her review

of forty empirical studies, Kagan identifies and confirms similar themes and findings related to Fuller's work. Some of these findings include:

- The novice's image of self as teacher plays a crucial role in their professional development (i.e. Aitken & Mildon, 1991; Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Gore & Zeichner, 1991; Shapiro 1991). It is only after "novices resolve their images of self as teacher that they begin to turn their focus outward and concentrate on what pupils are learning from academic tasks" (Kagan, 1992, p. 147).
- Realities of classroom teaching combined with inadequate procedural knowledge causes novice teachers to focus on authority and class control. Lesson plans are formulated based on discouraging misbehavior rather than promoting student learning (ie. Glassberg & Sprinthall, 1980; Hoy, 1967, 1968, 1969; Hoy & Rees, 1977; Jones, 1982).
- Early stages of classroom practice are spent acquiring procedural knowledge and routines that integrate instruction and management. Over time, "novices move from an initial stage where performance is laboriously self-conscious to more automated, unconscious performance" (Kagan, 1992, p. 155).

Pigge and Marso (1997) conducted a seven-year longitudinal multi-factor assessment of teaching concerns in order to examine teacher attributes which may impact progression through Fuller's self, task, and impact concerns of teachers. A sample of teachers (N = 60) and their concerns were examined over the course of four different career points which included the beginning of their teacher preparation program, near the end of student teaching, three years after graduation, and five years after graduation. Personal (gender, family birth order, parental educational level, etc.) and academic

(Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, American College Test, etc.) data was recorded for all participants and concerns were evaluated utilizing the Teacher Concerns Questionnaire (George, 1978).

Findings from this study concluded that as teachers “progressed through four career stages” they experienced an increase in “concerns about the actual tasks of teaching after the teachers experienced the complexity of the classroom teaching-learning process as hypothesized by Fuller” (Pigge & Marso, 1997, pp. 231-232). Pigge and Marso also confirmed that as teachers gained successful experience self-survival concerns were reduced and task concerns increased. A key difference identified by Pigge and Marso compared to Fuller though, was that “teachers’ impact concerns remained stable and higher than the task and self concerns across the four career stages” (p. 232). It was also found that more capable teachers “experience higher levels of concerns about their impact on pupils” which may extend well beyond their fifth year of teaching while less capable teachers may experience a more “limited period of concerns development” (p. 233). In other words, teachers’ concerns for students were present regardless of career stage. Furthermore, less effective teachers tend to experience less growth and typically remain in lower stages of concern.

Yan Fung Mok (2005) conducted a quantitative study in Hong Kong to determine whether teachers have concerns throughout their teaching careers but found that they are not “necessarily hierarchical in order” (p. 57). Mok’s study focused on teacher concerns fluctuating through a teacher’s life and career and that concerns could transition in either direction rather than the uni-directional development posited by Fuller. Through analyses of survey responses based on thirty-three teacher concerns divided among three concern

stages, data suggests that managing student discipline and establishing harmonious relationships with students are priority concerns for teachers at all three stages.

Furthermore, Mok “indicates that teachers with fifteen or more years of experience are less concerned about all categories of teaching concerns” (p. 69). However, it is important to note that Mok’s study was based on survey data with only a 24.1% response rate (206) out of 856 distributed questionnaires which may have reduced the validity of his findings and these findings may not be generalizable to the American context.

Summary of Teachers’ Concerns

All teachers, whether they are general or special education teachers, have concerns. “The question of what concerns teachers and why is an important one for school administrators” (Yan Fung Mok, 2005, p. 53) as teacher development and persistence to remain in the profession appear to be related to beginning teachers’ ability to address their perceived concerns. As beginning teachers adapt to the realities of the classroom, it is critical for schools and school leaders to provide the supports necessary for novices to progress from a greater emphasis on concerns for self to concerns for students. Without such growth, attainment of positive student outcomes becomes less likely and beginning teachers may become disillusioned and uncommitted to teaching. As will be shown in the next section, teacher attrition is a considerable problem in education, and attrition among beginning teachers and special education teachers is the highest among all educators. Addressing teachers’ concerns is one way to positively influence teacher retention.

Teacher Attrition

Voluntary teacher attrition or exit attrition involves the movement of qualified teachers out of schools or out of the profession altogether. Teaching has been “characterized as an occupation with high levels of attrition especially among beginners” (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, p. 682). According to a 2017 study by Burkhauser and the RAND Corporation, sixteen percent of public school teachers leave their schools annually (p. 126). Although some turnover is to be expected, attrition rates among educators are considered high compared to other professions, particularly among novices (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Ingersoll & Perda, 2010).

According to Ingersoll & Strong (2011), between forty and fifty percent of new teachers leave the field within the first five years of their careers (p. 202). “Moreover, attrition rates of first-year teachers have increased by about one-third in the past two decades” (Ingersoll, 2012, p. 49). Through an analysis of the national Schools and Staffing Survey and Teacher Follow-Up Survey in 2001, Ingersoll found that more than a third of beginning teachers leave the profession during their first three years. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) describe this mass exodus of teachers as the result of a “revolving door” that involves “large numbers of teachers leaving their jobs long before retirement” (p. 682).

Reasons for Attrition

In order for school leaders to address teacher attrition, they must gain a better understanding as to why so many new teachers leave the field. “Teaching is complex work” (Ingersoll, 2012, p. 47) and “pre-employment teacher preparation is rarely sufficient to provide all the knowledge and skill necessary for successful teaching.

Moreover, a significant portion of this knowledge can be acquired only on the job” (Ingersoll, 2012, p.47). Beginning teachers are in effect, teachers in practice as they attempt to utilize “pedagogical theory gleaned from teacher education programs” while experiencing the realities of “managing the learning of their students on a day-to-day basis” (Moir & Gless, 2001, p. 109).

Educators are often left to perform their work in isolation from their colleagues. “This isolation can be especially difficult for newcomers who are frequently left to succeed or fail on their own within the confines of their classrooms; often likened to a ‘lost at sea’ or ‘sink or swim’ experience” (Ingersoll, 2012, p. 47). Among the reasons given by teachers for changing schools or leaving the profession altogether are: “inadequate salary and incentives, lack of or inadequate support from administration, lack of support from colleagues, lack of support from community and parents, stress, problems with subject-area assignment, lack of opportunity for professional development, violence and safety, and a lack of resources” among many others (Strong, 2009, p. 27).

Mont and Rees (1996) utilized data from the New York State’s Education Department’s Personnel Master File in order to examine teacher specific working conditions which they believed impacted teacher retention among math and science educators. Teachers in these disciplines were specifically selected due to the anticipated shortage of qualified teachers in these areas. Through their study of 525 high school teachers, they were able to correlate specific indicators to teacher movement. Student ability was found to impact teacher retention in that “higher levels of student ability lessened the possibility of a teacher leaving” (p. 157). A contributing factor correlated to attrition according to Mont and Rees (1996), was the amount of instructional time a

teacher spent outside of his or her certification area. These two factors, student ability and class assignment outside of a teacher's certification area, were found to be more statistically significant in relation to job separation than other working conditions such as class sizes and number of classes taught. While the Mont and Rees study is now dated, the early identification of teacher shortages in specific disciplines is still relevant today as is the need for school leaders and policy makers to identify and address factors contributing to teacher retention and attrition.

Special Education Teacher Attrition

Although beginning general education and special education teachers share a number of common concerns and challenges upon entering the field, special educators "have additional obligations that can differ from those of general educators" (Youngs, Jones, & Low, 2011, p. 1507). "Special education teachers have to be able to work with students with a range of disabilities, from severe to mild" (Andrews & Brown, 2015, p. 126), they must create, manage, and implement IEPs, modify curriculum while meeting state standards, comply with federal legislation, and collaborate with general education teachers in inclusion settings. It is these differences which often lead to increased stress, burnout, job dissatisfaction, and attrition (Andrews & Brown, 2015). Wisniewski and Gargiulo (1997) contend that when SETs experience unresolved professional stress such as difficulty meeting standards while also meeting students' needs, excess paperwork, unpleasant interactions with colleagues, and inadequate professional growth opportunities, teachers will choose to leave the field. High turnover rates have caused special education teaching positions to be filled by teachers who are not fully certified,

“resulting in special education students and families having less than ideal experiences in the classroom” (Andrews & Brown, 2015, p. 126).

Billingsley (2005) asserts that “special educators’ reasons for leaving are rarely due to a single work problem; rather, they leave because of multiple, interacting problems” (p. 20). Based on her work within the field of special education research, Billingsley identified the following as the major factors contributing to SET attrition:

- high caseloads;
- excessive paperwork;
- inadequate planning time (individual and with colleagues);
- inadequate leadership support;
- teacher isolation;
- insufficient focus on student learning; and
- lack of instructional and technological resources (Billingsley, 2005, p. 21).

Nance and Calabrese (2009) conducted a qualitative multiple-case study in order to identify and describe reasons current and former tenured special education teachers leave the field. They specifically focused on “the influence of increased legal requirements on attrition and retention. By utilizing focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and other relevant documents, four “salient findings were derived from data analysis” (p. 435). First, current SETs had a strong desire to be heard by their administrators and have their needs met. Primary areas of concern included “para-educator shortages, student behavioral support, teacher and student materials, and teaching assignments” (p. 435). The second finding was that current SETs are overwhelmed by their workload and state assessments (p. 436). The third finding related to the frequently changing legal requirements impacting teachers’ daily functioning while the fourth finding involved SETs’ frustrations with paperwork and administrative tasks which reduce time with students and instructional planning sessions with peers.

As the Nance and Calabrese (2009) study was conducted within a specialized education agency in a Midwestern state in the US, its findings may not be generalizable to all settings. It does, however, highlight the additional roles and responsibilities SETs have related to legal requirements compared to that of GETs. Within the literature review of this study, the researchers eloquently utilize organizational culture and organizational learning as theoretical perspectives by which to frame their study. The authors articulate the connections between the perceptions of teachers within an organization related to stress and working conditions and the impact those factors have on educators' dissatisfaction and commitment to the organization. This study contributes to the literature related to SET retention and attrition and draws school leaders' and policymakers' attention to the effects of increasing and frequently changing legal requirements on special educators in addition to workload demands, paraprofessional support, and administrative tasks.

Special Education Teacher Shortages and Types of Attrition

“Four out of every ten special educators entering the field leave special education before their fifth year of teaching” (Griffin, Winn, Otis-Wilborn, & Kilgore, 2003, p. 6). Special education teachers tend to quit at greater rates than their general education counterparts “and are inclined to be more dissatisfied and burned out” (Strong, 2009, p. 31). Nation-wide, Boe et al. (1998) identifies a teacher shortage in special education more than thirteen percent annually. Of the total teaching population in the United States, approximately ten percent of teachers are special educators (Emery & Vandenberg, 2010). About ten percent of currently employed special educators are not fully certified and the use of non-credentialed special education teachers is noted in forty-

seven states in the U.S. (Emery & Vandenberg, 2010). Urban, rural, and high-poverty schools continue to experience teacher shortages with many indicating an immediate need for special educators (Billingsley, 2005). Areas of special education certification in greatest demand include “emotional/behavioral disorders, multi-categorical, severe/profound disabilities, learning disabilities, mild/moderate disabilities, mental retardation, visually impaired, hearing impaired, and dual certified (general/special)” (American Association for Employment in Education [AAEE], 2000, p. 3). Attrition is thought to be a major source of shortages in the special education field (Boe, Cook, Bobbit, & Weber, 1995).

Exit attrition, teachers leaving the education field, and transfer attrition, SETs transferring to general education, are common types of attrition among special educators (Billingsley, 2004). SETs are ten times more likely to transfer to general education positions than the reverse (Boe, Bobbit, Cook, & Barkanic, 1998). Attrition, especially exit attrition, “represents a reduction in the teaching force, requiring a compensating inflow of replacement teachers” (Boe, Bobbit, & Cook, 1997, p. 377). Billingsley (2005) states that “a higher percentage of special educators leave than any group of general educators including math and science teachers and replacing these teachers is disruptive for schools and a challenging problem in the era of teacher shortage” (p. xx). According to Darling-Hammond and Sclan (1996), “the consequences of [teacher] shortage includes inadequate educational experiences for students, reduced student achievement levels, and insufficient competence of graduates in the workplace” (Billingsley, 2004, p. 39).

Factors that influence attrition. Factors that affect teacher attrition in special education can be classified into two groups, teacher characteristics and working

conditions. Teacher characteristics include such identifiers as age, gender, certification, and experience. “Special education teachers who quit tend to be younger and inexperienced, uncertified, have higher than average test scores, and are influenced by personal factors such as children or family moves” (Strong, 2009, p. 31). Research indicates that SETs who remain in their positions tend to do so based on factors related to working conditions such as “positive school climate, good support systems, opportunities for professional development, and reasonable role demands” (Strong, 2009, p. 31). Without such conditions in place, Strong (2009) asserts that teachers will have increased stress and low levels of satisfaction and commitment, “and ultimately, they quit” (p. 31).

Billingsley (2004) posits that “one of the most important challenges in the field of special education is developing a qualified workforce and creating work environments that sustain special educators’ involvement and commitment” (p. 39). In her review of the literature from 1992 to 2002, Billingsley (2004) found that “work-related factors have been central in special education teacher attrition and retention” (p. 42). School climate, for example, factored into teachers’ decisions to remain or leave the field. When teachers held a positive view of school climate they were “more likely to stay or indicate intent to stay” (p. 45). The “absence of adequate support from administrators and colleagues” (p. 45) was a critical component of intent to leave. In fact, “in a national study, Boe, Barkanic et al. (1999) reported that teachers who stayed in their positions were almost four times more likely to strongly perceive administrators’ behavior as supportive and encouraging than leavers” (Billingsley, 2004, p. 45). Research also indicated that the “top-rated incentive” for SETs to remain in the field was having a supportive principal and that dissatisfaction with central office administrators is more frequently reported

(Billingsley et al., 1995; Schnorr, 1995). Other factors identified as working conditions which contribute to SET attrition or retention included collegial support, having a special education teacher mentor, professional development related to supporting the needs of SWD, role ambiguity, increasing inclusion services, high caseloads, and stress.

Billingsley's review of the research (2004) provides a comprehensive synthesis and analysis of relevant research in SET attrition and retention over a period of a decade. A particular strength of this piece is its articulation of methods used for research selection as well as "knowledge gaps in the research" (p. 52). Since most attrition research is not focused on special educators, Billingsley identifies the need for studies related to attrition which focus specifically on "beginning special education teachers' perspectives, their qualifications, and the work factors that influence their decisions to stay or leave" (p. 52).

Summary of Special Education and General Education Teacher Attrition

High rates of teacher attrition is a major problem of practice in the field of education. College preparation programs alone do not fully prepare beginning teachers for the realities of day-to-day classroom management and instruction. "Both general and special education teachers have their ideal views of the profession, including ample classroom facilities, available resources, and supportive administration; however, many factors can cause teachers to have less than ideal experiences in the field" (Andrews & Brown, 2015, p. 126). Teachers experiencing feelings of disillusionment and stress are likely to become uncommitted. With attrition rates of beginning teachers reaching thirty-five to fifty percent within the first five years of their careers (Moir & Gless, 2001), it is critical for school leaders to understand beginning teachers' concerns and to address their

developmental needs and provide the administrative support in order to retain teachers and allow them the time needed to become effective classroom practitioners.

With the additional responsibilities that special educators' positions entail, their attrition rates continue to be among the highest of all teaching positions (Billingsley, 2005). Administrators are obligated to create and sustain working conditions that provide support to all teachers, especially novices. Additionally, they must recognize the specific problems that special educators experience and establish systems of support for them which may positively influence their retention. As "numerous studies show that teachers who perceive their principals as supportive experience higher job satisfaction and greater commitment" (Billingsley, 2005, p. xxi), the next section of this chapter will explore literature related to school leadership and the role principals have in retaining special education teachers.

School Leadership and Teacher Retention

Leithwood (2012) defines leadership as "the exercise of influence on organizational members and diverse stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the organization's vision and goals" (p. 3). "School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning" (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008, p. 27). It is clear from the literature that school leadership plays a critical role in education as they have the ability to impact student outcomes (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999) and influence teacher capacity (Odden, 2011).

Lambeth (2012) argues that school administrators are key to facilitating mentoring and induction programs in an effort to retain and develop teachers. Moreover, Brock (1999) states that "the success of beginning teachers is critical to student success,

and the success of both is largely the responsibility of the principal” (p. 20). Brock (1999) also posits that administrators need to nurture and help their teachers develop and assist with the transition from teacher education programs into the culture of the school. Similarly, Tillman (2005) emphasizes the importance of school leaders in providing support to novice teachers in understanding school culture and assisting in their development as “reflective practitioners.” Hope (1999) asserts that regular contact is needed between school administrators and beginning teachers in order to clarify expectations and to assist in enculturating novice teachers into their new school and profession. One way to do this is with robust induction programs.

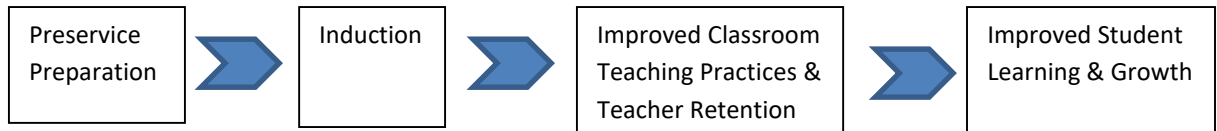
Induction for Beginning Teachers

Comprehensive induction programs were conceived in order to provide support for beginning teachers as they transition into their new roles as educators. Bartell (2005) describes induction as “part of the career-long teacher-development continuum” (p. 43) which assists beginning teachers in becoming effective practitioners. Similar to Bartell’s description of the teacher-development continuum, Ingersoll and Strong (2011) posit that the goal of induction programs is to “improve the performance and retention of beginning teachers, that is, to both enhance and prevent the loss of human capital, with the ultimate aim of improving the growth and learning of students” (p. 203). Ingersoll and Strong’s theory of teacher development (Figure 2) illustrates the role of teacher induction programs serving as a bridge between preservice preparation and improved teacher development.

The prevalence of induction and mentoring programs have continued to increase in recent years as school leaders and policymakers attempt to deal with issues related to

Figure 2

Theory of Teacher Development. Reprinted from Ingersoll & Strong, 2011, p. 203



the recruitment and retention of quality teachers. In a two-year study involving six schools in New Zealand, Langdon and Alansari (2012) stated, “Learning to teach and becoming a teacher are inextricably linked therefore, the induction process encompasses learning how to teach while teaching, the development of teacher identity, and facilitates the location of self as an active member of the teaching profession” (p. 1922). The quality of mentoring and induction programs that beginning teachers receive has a direct effect on the development and performance of the novice teacher (Athanases, Abrams, Jack, Johnson, Kwock, McCurdy, Riley, & Totaro, 2008).

Moir and Gless (2001) suggest that school leaders must “recognize the significance of new teacher induction” by aligning induction with their vision, “promoting the highest quality instruction possible,” creating new professional expectations, and ensuring that systems for supporting every teacher are in place. “Anything less,” Moir and Gless state, “runs the risk of creating an induction program that perpetuates the traditional ways of being in schools and inducts teachers into the norms of isolation, low expectations, and inefficacy” (p. 111).

Program variations and leadership decision-making. Induction programs vary greatly across contexts. Variations among programs include teachers identified for induction, the types and purposes of supports offered, and the intensity, frequency, and duration of support for each teacher. “What kinds of induction programs exist, and to

what extent they help, are clearly fundamental questions for the field and for policymakers faced with decisions about supporting such programs” (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, p. 683). The challenge for school leaders is to determine which elements of induction to utilize while balancing their effects and associated costs of providing such programs and supports.

Many school districts offer basic elements of induction supports for new teachers including assigning a mentor, offering pre-service orientation, and providing sporadic workshops or professional development sessions throughout the school year. Odden (2011) suggests that program components of induction should be based upon fundamental elements identified by Smith and Ingersoll (2004). According to Odden (2011), Smith and Ingersoll (2004) found that the programs with strong positive impacts, such as reduced teacher turnover, were those that provided new teachers with the following:

- common planning time with other teachers;
- collaboration with other teachers on instructional issues;
- a mentor with a license in the same field; and
- connections to an external network of teachers working on curriculum and instructional issues (p. 93).

Odden’s (2011) recommendations for induction practices are based primarily on his assertion that teaching effectiveness cannot be developed in isolation. He emphasizes that as new teachers enter a school system they immediately become part of a team and a support group. Through induction into a school system, new teachers gain access to materials, lesson plans, and informal guidance every week of the year. “They do not work in isolation, and they have colleagues immediately and periodically reviewing the impacts of their work on their students and providing extra help when needed” (Odden,

2011, p. 94). Additionally, Odden links ongoing professional development for all teachers along with that of induction programs asserting that “collective participation” in “continuous, on-going, long-term professional development” helps to build a “professional school community” (pp. 98-99). Odden (2011) purports that putting novice and veteran teachers together in collaborative teams and participating in on-going professional development “ensures that brand new teachers do not have to figure out how to be effective on their own” (p. 96).

Alignment of perceived needs and supports. Andrews and Brown (2015) conducted a study utilizing the Support for New Teachers Survey in order to identify induction supports provided to novice teachers and the values placed on each support. Disparities were discovered between data provided from teachers and that of administrators. These differences included not only the types of supports being offered and received, but also the value with which each party assigned to given supports. Novice teachers highly valued the assignment of a mentor, co-planning time, release time for peer observation, and frequent, non-evaluative feedback. The study emphasizes the importance of communication between beginning teachers and administrators to ensure that needs are being met with supports that are indeed valued. While this determination seems logical, a critique of the study is that of the 144 participants across eight school districts that were included within the study sample, a comparison of teacher and administrator data within each school did not take place. So it is plausible that there was greater alignment of perceived supports between teachers and administrators than the study seems to present. Nonetheless, the study effectively illustrates the concerns of beginning teachers and the positive effect that school leadership can have on retention.

The Principal, School Culture, and Induction for Beginning Special Education Teachers

Correa & Wagner (2011) state that principal support of new general and special education teachers is one of the primary factors that influences retention (p. 17).

Although “special education teachers benefit from the same types of support and induction that their general education colleagues receive, certain aspects of their experience require additional attention” (National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development, 2010, AII-11). Therefore, building administrators must consider the “unique obstacles” faced by special education teachers and ensure beginning SETs receive the additional supports “to help them address challenges specific to their roles and responsibilities” (National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development, 2010, TEII-2).

The principal’s role in induction for beginning special educators is complex. According to Billingsley (2004), SETs are at greater risk for feeling insignificant or alienated from other teachers. These types of feelings typically result from the fact that SETs are outnumbered by GETs and they commonly serve students across grade levels and content areas (Pugach, Blanton, Correa, McLeskey, & Langley, 2009, p. 27). It is up to the principal to ensure SETs are an “integral part of the school culture” (Pugach, Blanton, Correa, McLeskey, & Langley, 2009, p. 19) rather than left in isolation and in nebulous positions. Principals must serve as instructional leaders and support induction and mentoring activities (Pugach, Blanton, Correa, McLeskey, & Langley, 2009, p. 19). “Most importantly, they are responsible for creating a school culture that is collaborative”

and inclusive “and provides positive working conditions” (Pugach, Blanton, Correa, McLeskey, & Langley, 2009, p.18).

“For beginning teachers, the link between support and the desire to remain in the profession are important in understanding their retention” (Pugach, Blanton, Correa, McLeskey, & Langley, 2009, p.22). Singh and Billingsley (1998), conducted a “national study of 11,840 new and experienced GETs and SETs” and “found that principal leadership or support was the most important influence on teachers’ commitment to the teaching profession” (Pugach, Blanton, Correa, McLeskey, & Langley, 2009, p.22). While support needs vary from teacher to teacher and context to context, Singh and Billingsley (1998) identified the following key components of principal support:

- communicate a vision and goals for the school;
- provide clear expectations;
- provide frequent and fair feedback and evaluations;
- recognize accomplishments;
- have discussions related to instructional practices and provide support for said practices;
- assist with discipline and resources; and
- provide a supportive learning community for peer support.

The Singh and Billingsley (1998) study “emphasized the importance of the school culture on the success of induction programs and the retention of new teachers” (Pugach, Blanton, Correa, McLeskey, & Langley, 2009, p.23). Furthermore, this study found that the more positively teachers felt about the principal and school culture, the more likely they were to remain in their current teaching positions (p. 23). Given that this study utilized a large sample from across the nation yielding an 86.4% response rate, the results and conclusions drawn from the study would appear to be highly generalizable. One concern with regard to the sample is that over ninety percent of the sample utilized for

analysis represented white educators which could limit the utility of results for schools or districts with greater diversity among its faculty. This concern however, is not problematic for this study because the sample is actually strikingly similar to the demographics of the teaching population in GCPS. Therefore, the findings of the Singh and Billingsley (1998) study, despite the fact that this study was completed over twenty years ago, are especially noteworthy and applicable to this literature review.

The Specific Case for SET Retention

Although the components of principal support identified by Singh and Billingsley (1998) apply to both GETs and SETs, there are additional actions principals should consider that directly relate to special educators' induction. As beginning SETs must gain knowledge of policies and procedures within the building and school division related to the process and development of IEPs, management of caseloads of students with disabilities, and participate in and facilitate a variety of meetings related to their role as a special educator, there is a need and demand for "extensive fall orientations" (Pugach, Blanton, Correa, McLeskey, & Langley, 2009, p. 20). While the principal does not need to facilitate these orientation sessions directly, they must be certain that such sessions are experienced by beginning SETs. Such activities would provide support for beginning teacher concerns related to those categorized as "task" based on Fuller's (1969) conceptualization.

Principals must also be able to serve as instructional leaders for special educators, thus meeting teacher concerns related to their "impact on students" (Fuller, 1969). "If principals do not have sufficient instructional background in special education, they must rely on distributed leadership from veteran SETs or district-level staff to provide

instructional support and assist with evaluation of beginning SETs” (Pugach, Blanton, Correa, McLeskey, & Langley, 2009, p. 29). Beginning SETs often need support in identifying and implementing instructional strategies, behavior management techniques, or accommodations for the varying needs of the students they serve. If principals do not have the knowledge to provide support for beginning SETs, they must be able to identify other educators who can and will provide assistance to novice SETs. In addition to instructional knowledge, a supportive principal must have solid “understanding of special education regulations, legal policies, and administrative procedures” (Pugach, Blanton, Correa, McLeskey, & Langley, 2009, p. 29) in order to support beginning SETs’ task concerns.

The assignment of a mentor is particularly critical for novice SETs therefore principals must consider mentor/mentee pairings carefully. According to Whitaker (2000), “selecting a mentor who has a special education background is more important than selecting a mentor at the same school. Yet, her study revealed that thirty-three percent of beginning teachers were not paired with special education mentors” (Pugach, Blanton, Correa, McLeskey, & Langley, 2009, p. 30). Whitaker also suggests that co-mentoring models of induction may be beneficial so that the beginning SETs have multiple opportunities for collaboration and assistance with day-to-day activities (Pugach, Blanton, Correa, McLeskey, & Langley, 2009) which support concerns related to self, task, and student impact.

Finally, principals must have an understanding of the roles and responsibilities that special education teachers have. Careful considerations must be made with regard to SETs’ workload, schedule, and class assignments to address concerns related to the basic

tasks of the position. As beginning teachers and special education teachers are at greatest risk for experiencing stress and burnout, it is imperative for principals to provide working conditions which support teachers rather than disillusion them. Protecting beginning special education teachers from difficult situations including large IEP caseloads, assignment to students or classes outside of their certification area, and extensive non-teaching duties is critically important (National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development [TEII-2], (2010).

Leadership Practices

Tillman (2005) highlights the positive impacts of principals serving as transformational leaders can have in the development of novice teachers. She asserts that “when novice teachers are nurtured, encouraged, and expected to play a critical role in the social, emotional, and academic achievement of all children” (pp. 614-615) by transformational leaders, an environment is cultivated in which teachers and students are valued and in which they excel. School leadership therefore, plays a critical role in beginning teachers’ perceptions and their commitment to remain within the school or within the profession. “Schools with leaders who take the time to build relationships and have a positive and collaborative culture are more likely to retain effective teachers” (Martin, Buelow, & Hoffman, 2015, p. 9).

Regardless of the descriptor placed in front of the term leadership, Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) claim that “almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices” (p. 29). In a review of the research commissioned by The Wallace Foundation, Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) identify three sets of basic practices of successful leadership: setting

directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization (p. 8). “These practices can be thought of as the basics of successful leadership” (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, p. 8) and serve as a “framework for initial and continuing leadership development” (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008, p. 31).

According to Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), setting directions is aimed at developing “shared understandings about the organization and its activities and goals that can under gird a sense of purpose or vision” (p. 8). Setting directions often includes “articulating a vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, and creating high performance expectations” (p.8). Developing people relates to capacity building as well as motivating members of the organization. “Offering intellectual stimulation, providing individualized support and providing appropriate models of best practice” (p. 9) are often associated with developing people within the organization. Redesigning the organization refers to the conditions and culture within which members of the organization work. Leaders must attend to the structures of the organization in order to “facilitate the work of its members” and ensure structures support the work towards an “improvement agenda” (p. 9). These basic leadership practices are often evident in various leadership frameworks both inside and outside of the world of education (p. 8).

The Ontario Leadership Framework

Leithwood and Sun (2012) acknowledge that there are common practices found “in most leadership models and argue that research on leadership effects on educational outcomes should focus on these practices” (Menon, 2014, p. 515). The Ontario Leadership Framework (2012) (OLF), is one such model which incorporates practices

“derived from a large body of research about school-level leadership” (Leithwood, 2012, p. 3) and integrates research from both instructional and transformational leadership theories and models (p. 12). The OLF serves as a “tool for school leaders for self-reflection and self-assessment” (p. 3) and provides organized sets of practices for individuals and small groups to support “leadership development” (p.4).

The OLF is divided into five domains of practices which include: Setting Directions, Building Relationships and Developing People, Developing the Organization to Sustain Desired Practices, Improving the Instructional Program, and Securing Accountability. The first three domains “reflect social theory suggesting that the performance of organizational members is a function of their motivation, ability, and the setting in which they work. So key functions of leaders include assisting their teachers and other organizational colleagues to further develop their motivations and abilities to accomplish organizational goals, as well as to create and sustain supportive work settings” (p. 12). As such, the first three domains of the OLF will serve as the focus of study for this capstone project and literature review.

The OLF is an “integrated model” of leadership which “aims to capture the relatively direct efforts of successful leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their schools as well as efforts to create organizational conditions which enable and support those improvement efforts” (Leithwood, 2012, p. 12). These leadership practices also provide logical pathways in which school leaders can positively influence special education teacher retention since the practices address concerns that beginning SETs often have. By focusing on the first three domains of the OLF, school administrators may positively affect novice SETs in a manner that supports their growth

and transition through the developmental stages of teachers' concerns. Figure 3 illustrates the connections which can be made between the concerns of beginning teachers and leadership practices which may address those concerns.

Figure 3

Crosswalk of Teacher Concerns and Leadership Practices

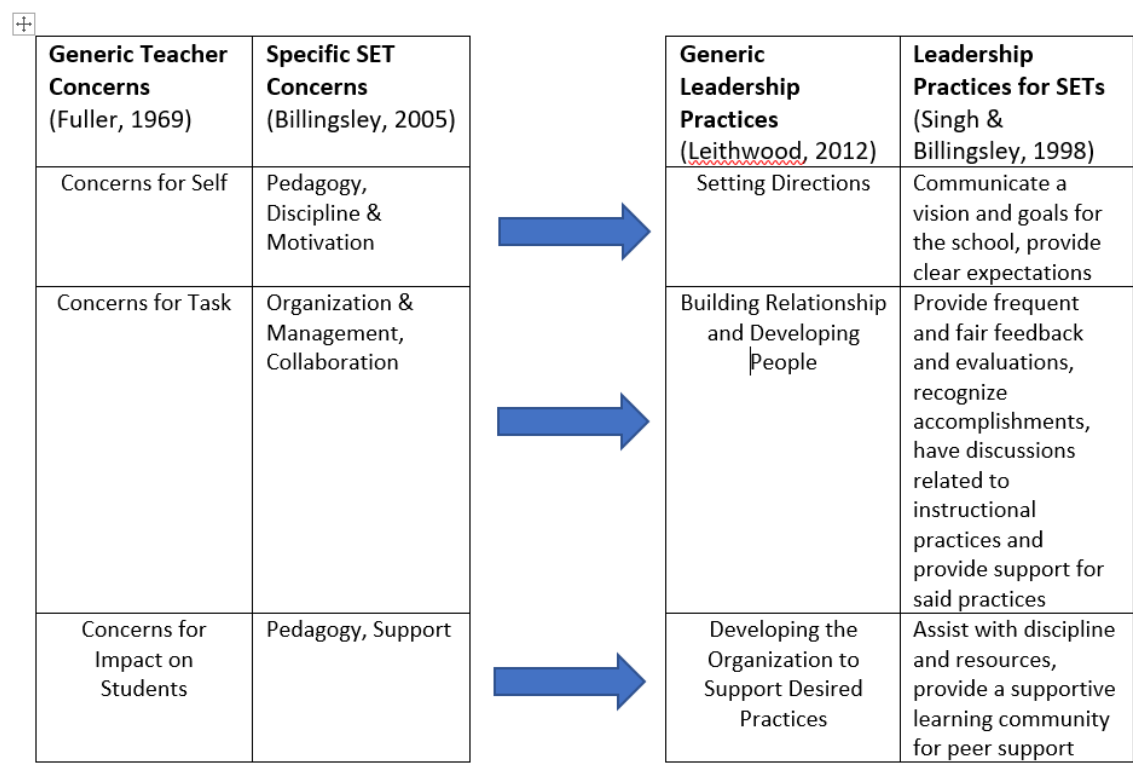


Figure 3. This figure represents the integration and proposed relationship among Teacher Concerns (Fuller, 1969; Fuller & Brown, 1975), Leadership Domains from the OLF (Leithwood, 2012), and the practices related to special education teacher retention (Billingsley, 1998).

As previously stated in Chapter 1, I theorize that when novice teachers are unable to transition from the survival stage and concerns for self they will likely experience high levels of stress and low levels of job satisfaction and commitment resulting in the increased likelihood of departure from the school or field. As researcher, I hypothesize that the root cause for SET attrition in GCPS is unaddressed or under-addressed concerns

of beginning teachers. Furthermore, if principals recognize the concerns of beginning special education teachers, they are better able to implement practices to support these specific concerns. It is also critically important for building administrators to recognize the added concerns that special education teachers face due to the extra responsibilities their roles entail. Principals are capable of creating school environments that positively affect teacher satisfaction, commitment, and retention. By providing high performance expectations and shared goals (Setting Directions), motivating team members and building capacity (Building Relationships and Developing People), and creating more supportive conditions and culture (Developing the Organization) principals are able to influence novice teachers' progression from the survival stage into the later stages of teacher concerns. Therefore, the integration of Fuller's model and Leithwood's OLF provides an applicable framework for the development of this study's research questions and design, and will allow the researcher to analyze SET attrition in GCPS. Additionally, by understanding Fuller's conceptualization and SETs' perceptions of administrator supports, recommendations for leadership practices can be made that may contribute to improved SET retention.

Summary of School Leadership and SET Retention

“Leadership serves as a catalyst for unleashing the potential capacities that exist within an organization” (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008, p. 29). As support from administrators is most often cited as reasons why special educators choose to either remain in education or to leave (Billingsley, 2005; Strong, 2009), it is clear that principals must be involved with beginning SETs in order to affect retention. According to Menon (2014), “transformational behaviors and practices,” such as those in the OLF,

“will result in perceived effectiveness and satisfaction on the part of the followers” and result in “positive assessment of the school leader, greater follower commitment, and greater effort” (pp. 509-510). The design for this capstone project examines the connections between the aforementioned supports and SET attrition. Therefore, the next chapter of this capstone will specifically address the methods which were utilized for this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

As a scholar practitioner, I am keenly interested in developing a study which could provide a better understanding and perspective on a problem of practice within my particular educational context. As stated previously in Chapter 1, Greene County Public Schools consistently struggles to retain high quality special education teachers. As a practicing building administrator in GCPS, a study designed specifically to examine the beginning special education teacher attrition problem in Greene County Schools is needed in order to examine this distinctive context. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to (a) identify the specific concerns of beginning SETs in Greene County Schools, (b) examine SETs' perceptions of principal practices they identify as being supportive of their needs, and (c) identify leadership practices which influence special educators' retention. Based upon the purposes of this capstone project, I implemented the following study design.

Study Design

According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), qualitative research is performed in order to “capture data on the perceptions of local participants” and “to describe the ways people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations” (p. 9). Although qualitative research allows for the examination of the nuances and details of perspectives and

opinions, quantitative research methods allow for “discrete quantification” (Butin, 2010, p. 76) of large data sets. By combining both qualitative and quantitative methods into my study design, I was better able to support analytic findings as well as “compensate for the weaknesses of one design over the other” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013, p. 43).

Mixed-methods research “integrates both qualitative and quantitative data and analyses for a more multidimensional approach to inquiry” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013, p. 8). Therefore, a mixed-methods study design was utilized for this capstone project. More specifically, a quantitative survey was utilized in the first phase of the study followed by in-depth, qualitative interviews in the second phase. The quantitative and qualitative methods used within the study were designed to be complementary in nature as the results of one were intended to elaborate or enhance the results of the other (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). The phases of study and the tools utilized within each phase are further described following the description of the setting, participants, time frame, and research questions (RQs).

Setting, Participants, and Time Frame

The setting of my capstone study was Greene County Public Schools. As a scholar-practitioner, I recognize the critical nature and impacts that high rates of SET attrition can have on a school. GCPS, like many other school divisions across the nation has been unable to consistently retain high-quality special education teachers and has struggled to make positives gains related to the academic performance of SWD. Therefore, I sought to examine this problem of practice in an effort to address the contributing factors within my school division. Additionally, this study will contribute to

the field of scholarship in educational leadership and in particular, educational leadership in rural schools.

The participants in my study included teachers at five out of the six schools in GCPS. As I am a building principal at William Monroe Middle School, this school was excluded from study. This left three elementary schools and two secondary schools for my study. All of the participants utilized in my study were full time teachers. I chose not to utilize any part time faculty as they have less opportunity for experiencing the culture of the school as well as fewer interactions with school leadership simply due to decreased time allotted on school grounds. The study also included teachers that are no longer employed by GCPS in order to identify reasons for their departure. Three teachers identified for participation in the study as former employees left GCPS while still classified as probationary special education teachers in years one through five. The time frame for this study was over the course of six months which included most of the 2018-2019 school year.

Research Questions

As described in Chapter 1, the following research questions and sub-questions served as a guide for my study design in an effort to better understand special education teachers' concerns in Greene County Public Schools and to identify leadership practices which address these concerns:

- **Research Question 1 (RQ1):** What do special education teachers (SETs) in GCPS identify as concerns and how do these compare to general education teachers' (GETs) concerns?

- **Research Question 2 (RQ2):** To what extent do SETs in GCPS feel supported by their principals?
 - a) What specific principal practices do SETs identify as supportive?
 - b) What concerns do SETs identify as being met by their principal's practices?
- **Research Question 3 (RQ3):** What leadership practices influence teachers' decisions to remain in their current school, GCPS, or the profession?

The first research question and phase I of my study was designed to uncover the concerns of both special and general education teachers in order to draw a comparison between both groups of professionals. As stated in Chapter 2, all teachers, whether they are general or special education teachers, have concerns. "The question of what concerns teachers and why is an important one for school administrators" (Yan Fung Mok, 2005, p. 53) as teacher development and persistence to remain in the profession appear to be related to beginning teachers' ability to address their perceived concerns. According to Fuller, concerns about students cannot be addressed by teachers until immediate concerns for self and task are addressed (Pigge & Marso, 1997). As beginning teachers adapt to the realities of the classroom, it is critical for schools and school leaders to provide the supports necessary for novices to progress from concerns for self to concerns for students. Without such growth, attainment of positive student outcomes becomes less likely and beginning teachers may become disillusioned and uncommitted to teaching.

Phase II of my research design incorporated semi-structured interviews with probes in order to address RQ2 and RQ3. RQ2 was designed to identify specific leadership practices that beginning special educators perceive as being supportive as well

as connecting those supports to specific concerns that those practices address. This sub-question is based on literature which states that support from administrators is most often cited as reasons why special educators choose to either remain in education or to leave (Billingsley, 2005; Strong, 2009). Additionally, “transformational [leadership] behaviors and practices,” such as those in the OLF, “will result in perceived effectiveness and satisfaction on the part of the followers” as well as “positive assessment of the school leader, greater follower commitment, and greater effort” (Menon, 2014, pp. 509-510) on the part of the teacher.

Research question three was designed specifically to determine beginning SETs’ perceptions about the influence leadership practices have on their decisions to remain in their school, GCPS, or the profession. The development of RQ3 was based on research which states that school leadership plays a critical role in beginning teachers’ perceptions and their commitment to remain within the school or within the profession. “Schools with leaders who take the time to build relationships and have a positive and collaborative culture are more likely to retain effective teachers” (Martin, Buelow, & Hoffman, 2015, p. 9). Thus, I wanted to be able to examine the specific leadership actions that beginning SETs in GCPS perceive as impactful upon their own retention as educators.

Data Collection and Analysis

Surveys have frequently been used in research related to teacher concerns, support, and satisfaction and commitment (Geheke & McCoy, 2007; Menlove et al, 2003; Miller et al, 1999; Westling & Whitten, 1996; & Whittaker, 2000). In order to answer RQ1, phase I of my study utilized an electronic survey distributed to GETs and SETs

within GCPS excluding those at William Monroe Middle School. Electronic surveys allow for flexibility of design and ease of use and accessibility for respondents (De Leeuw &, Berzelak, 2016). The electronic survey was developed and distributed using the website Qualtrics. The survey was confidential and the results for any one school were not known to the researcher.

The survey (Appendix A) was designed to determine teacher concerns related to four major categories identified by Billingsley (2005) which include: pedagogy, organization and management, collaboration, and support issues. The survey, which was adapted from Michael Fimian's Teacher Stress Inventory (Billingsley & Tomchin, 1992; Billingsley, 2004; Billingsley, 2005) used a 5-point Likert scale to not only identify and differentiate between the concerns of GETs and SETs, but also to determine teachers' perceptions of the intensity each concern has upon their role as an educator. Specific survey adaptations included a reduction in the number of specific concerns addressed and reorganization of concerns based on the aforementioned categories of concerns identified by Billingsley (2005).

For this study, the survey items were rephrased from negative concerns to neutral statements to elicit less biased responses from participants. The survey was field tested by doctoral students in an educational leadership program at the University of Virginia. Field testing provided increased alignment to the purposes of this capstone while also providing clarity of language, sequencing of questions posed, and focus upon RQs. More specifically, the categories of concerns utilized within the survey directly align to the conceptual framework for this study and research by Billingsley (2005) related to SETs.

Data from the survey was analyzed using univariate descriptive statistics and data displays. An illustration of the methodology related to RQ1 can be seen in Table 4.

In an attempt to increase teacher participation in completing the survey, I introduced myself to the faculty of each school in GCPS prior to sending out the email with the survey link. I coordinated visits with each building principal so that teachers were aware of not only who I was as a colleague and researcher, but to explain my

Table 4

Methodology for RQ1

Research Question	Rationale	Implementation	Method	Sample
RQ1: What do special education teachers (SETs) in GCPS identify as their teacher concerns and how do these compare to general education teachers' (GETs) concerns?	Provides insight into the concerns of both GETs and SETs and allows for a comparison to be made between these two groups.	Survey	Summarize responses using descriptive statistics	All GETs and SETs in GCPS (minus Middle School)

purpose and personally invite them to participate. Following each school visit, I sent out my initial email and survey link. One week later, I sent my request again. Two weeks after my initial email, I distributed postcards and snacks to teachers' mailboxes in their schools to once again request their participation and to thank them if they had already completed the survey. These efforts allowed me to increase the response rate for participation in Phase I of my study (Trespalacios, & Perkins, 2016).

Semi-structured interview questions with probes were utilized in phase II of my study. As I am an administrator within GCPS, a third-party researcher was utilized to conduct the interviews with current GCPS teachers in phase II of the study. Utilization of a third-party interviewer provided a good faith attempt to mask identities of teacher participants within the study's design. The third-party researcher was skilled in qualitative, semi-structured interviews and was approved by professors affiliated with the Curry School of Education and the University of Virginia. The interview protocols were piloted with a doctoral candidate from the University of Virginia. Feedback from the pilot session was utilized to enhance clarity of language, to measure allotted time for interviews, and to further align interview questions with RQs.

Interviews were done with three different groups of educators, SETs within their first year within the profession (P1), SETs within years 2-5 (P2-P3), and SETs that chose to leave GCPS while still categorized as a probationary teacher (Former P1-P5). Interviews with current GCPS teachers were held within their assigned school. Former employees were interviewed virtually, based upon their current residence. Interviews took approximately 30-60 minutes each. One P1 SET was individually interviewed in order to gain insight into his concerns as a first year special educator and his perceptions of support he received. This interview protocol addressed RQ2 and RQ3 to gain perspective of a novice special educator. Five P2-P5 SETs were interviewed in order to gain an understanding of the differences in supports that may be allocated to beginning special education teachers after completing their first year on the job. RQ3 was specifically addressed by interviewing both beginning SETs that chose to stay in GCPS and those that chose to leave. A separate interview protocol was developed for the SETs

that chose to leave GCPS or the profession. This protocol was created based on outcomes from both the survey in phase I as well as the other interviews in phase II. As these teachers no longer worked for GCPS, the researcher interviewed these professionals rather than the third-party interviewer. All interviews were recorded and transcribed and were analyzed and coded for themes related to Fuller's (1969) developmental conceptualization of teacher's concerns and Leithwood's (2012) leadership domains. An illustration of the methodology related to RQ2 and RQ3 can be seen in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5

Methodology for RQ2

Research Question	Rationale	Implementation	Method	Sample
RQ2: To what extent do SETs in GCPS feel supported by their principals? (a) What specific principal practices do SETs identify as supportive? (b) What concerns do SETs identify as being met by their principal's practices?	Provide insights into beginning SETs' concerns and their perceptions of support based on leader practices.	Semi-structured interviews with probes	Code for themes in using Fuller's concerns stages and the first 3 domains of Leithwood's OLF	3-5 P1 SETs

Researcher Bias, Assumptions, and Validity

It is critical, particularly in qualitative research, to be mindful of bias that can "weaken or even invalidate findings" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013, p. 294).

Likewise, it is important for the researcher to reveal any personal connections,

associations, and assumptions related to the study and to communicate measures taken to ensure validity (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). As previously stated, I have been

Table 6

Methodology for RQ3

Research Question	Rationale	Implementation	Method	Sample
RQ3: What leadership practices influence (SETs) decisions to remain in their current school, GCPS, or the profession?	Provide insights into beginning SETs' perceptions of leaders' impact on their intention to stay or leave.	Semi-structured interviews with probes	Code for themes in using Fuller's concerns stages and the first 3 domains of Leithwood's OLF	3-5 P2-P5 SETs 3-5 SETs who left GCPS while in P1-P5 status.

employed within the district under study since 2005. While I have never been a special education teacher, I have worked closely with SETs and students with disabilities in multiple capacities within GCPS including time as an inclusive general education teacher, an intervention specialist, Response to Intervention (RTI) coordinator, child study chair, and administrator of the special education department. As principal, I am responsible for the recruitment and retention of all faculty and staff and I operate under the assumption that my role critically impacts teachers' job satisfaction and their loyalty to my school and the profession. I believe that the lack of success that students with disabilities have experienced in GCPS (Appendix L) is directly related to the turnover among special educators within the county as well as the percentage of special educators in Greene that have five or less years of experience. I also believe that school leaders are uniquely positioned to provide the supports necessary to facilitate beginning teachers' growth and effectiveness in the classroom, thereby influencing student outcomes. It is these

assumptions and beliefs along with my understanding of the literature which led to the development of the conceptual framework being utilized in this capstone proposal.

In order to control the potential for researcher bias in this study, several measures have been taken. First, my study design demonstrates clear alignment between my purpose, research questions, and methods for data collection. Second, the survey utilized in phase I of this study was developed from a survey used in similar studies (Billingsley & Tomchin, 1992; Billingsley, 2004; Billingsley, 2005) and field tested among colleagues enrolled in an educational leadership program through the University of Virginia. Third, interview questions were semi-structured and align with literature related to the subject matter and purpose of this study. The semi-structured format outlined a clear set of questions which help to reduce bias while providing the flexibility needed to gain teacher perspective and in-depth responses. Furthermore, I used critical friends and my capstone committee as I analyzed my data, drew conclusions, and interpreted my findings. In so doing, I was able to identify any instances of prejudice or bias and completed my capstone project with objectivity.

Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013) provide the following considerations when addressing reliability in qualitative research.

- The study's general methods and procedures are described explicitly and in detail.
- We can follow the actual sequence of how data were collected, processed, condensed/transformed, and displayed for specific conclusion drawing.
- The conclusions are explicitly linked with exhibits of condensed/displayed data. (pp. 311-312)

I reflected upon these considerations throughout each iteration of my data analysis to ensure objectivity, clarity, and reliability of my findings. I attempted to be as objective as possible in all facets of this capstone project and was aware of my own assumptions and biases throughout the progression of my research.

Chapter 4: Findings

In order to improve and sustain quality instruction and programming for students with disabilities, GCPS must retain effective special education teachers. As a practicing building administrator in GCPS, I designed my study specifically to examine the beginning special education teacher attrition problem in Greene County Schools. The purpose of this study was to (a) identify the specific concerns of beginning SETs in Greene County Schools, (b) examine SETs' perceptions of principal practices they identify as being supportive of their needs, and (c) identify leadership practices which influence special educators' retention.

A mixed-methods study design was utilized for this capstone project. More specifically, a quantitative survey was utilized in the first phase of the study followed by in-depth, qualitative interviews in the second phase. Each phase of study sought to answer the following research questions:

- **Research Question 1 (RQ1):** What do special education teachers (SETs) in GCPS identify as concerns and how do these compare to general education teachers' (GETs) concerns?
- **Research Question 2 (RQ2):** To what extent do SETs in GCPS feel supported by their principals?
 - a) What specific principal practices do SETs identify as supportive?
 - b) What concerns do SETs identify as being met by their principal's practices?

- **Research Question 3 (RQ3):** What leadership practices influence teachers' decisions to remain in their current school, GCPS, or the profession?

Table 7

Summary of Data Samples

Survey Data	Qualitative Interviews
SETs & GETs currently employed in GCPS (Sample 1)	Probationary SETs currently employed in GCPS (Sample 2)
	Former SETs that left GCPS under probationary status (Sample 3)

A description of findings that emerged from this study will be presented within this chapter. Findings are grouped by research questions and further organized and described utilizing the theories integrated within the conceptual framework. Quantitative survey data from Sample 1 are presented first. This survey data was collected and analyzed in order to answer research question one. Specifically, I sought to identify the concerns of special educators and compare and contrast those concerns to that of general education teachers. Qualitative data from Samples 2 and 3 are presented next. This data was used to answer research questions two and three and was also triangulated with survey data to expound upon research question one.

Research Question One: What Do SETs in GCPS Identify as Concerns and How Do These Concerns Compare to GETs?

All teachers, whether they are general or special education teachers, have concerns. “The question of what concerns teachers and why is an important one for school administrators” (Yan Fung Mok, 2005, p. 53) as teacher development and persistence to remain in the profession appear to be related to beginning teachers’ ability

to address their perceived concerns. While beginning general education and special education teachers share a number of common concerns and challenges upon entering the field, special educators “have additional obligations that can differ from those of general educators” (Youngs, Jones, & Low, 2011, p. 1507). With the additional responsibilities that special educators’ positions entail, their attrition rates continue to be among the highest of all teaching positions (Billingsley, 2005). In order to identify the concerns of beginning SETs in GCPS, an electronic survey was distributed to all full time teaching faculty within the school division with the exception of William Monroe Middle School. The purpose of the survey was to identify the concerns of teachers, both SETs and GETs, within the specific context of Greene County Schools.

Excluding the middle school, there are 187 full time teaching staff in GCPS. All 187 teachers were invited to participate in the Teacher Concerns and Stress Inventory. The survey was distributed electronically via teachers’ school email addresses through the survey platform, Qualtrics. One hundred thirty-two responses were received for a response rate of seventy-one percent (132/187). Participants were not required to respond to every question within the survey, therefore there are not necessarily 132 responses for each question. Based on the demographics questions that were completed in full, there were 116 respondents to the survey for a response rate of sixty-two percent (116/187). A breakdown of the respondents’ demographics is illustrated in Table 8. These demographics are based upon self-reporting of survey participants.

As Table 8 illustrates, the majority of respondents to the survey self-report that they are elementary, general education teachers on continuing contracts with professional licensure. Additional demographic data was also collected related to the number of years

of service within the teaching profession. Thirty percent (35/116) of respondents have five or less years of experience in the teaching profession with twenty-seven percent (9/35) of these teachers serving as SPED teachers. Among all special education teachers that participated in the survey for this study, thirty-three percent (9/27) are within their first five years teaching in GCPS. The data related to years of experience for survey respondents can be seen in Table 9.

Table 8

Demographic Data Related to the Teacher Concerns & Stress Inventory

Participation Percentage (n)	Demographic
70% (81)	Elementary
30% (35)	Secondary
23% (27)	Special Education
77% (89)	General Education
20% (23)	Probationary
80% (93)	Continuing Contract (CC)
54% (62)	Previously Earned CC Status in Virginia
46% (53)	Has Not Earned CC status in Virginia
6% (7)	Provisional License
94% (109)	Professional License

Table 9

Years of Teaching Experience of Survey Respondents

Years of Experience	Special Education	General Education	All
1-5	9 (33%)	26 (29%)	35
6-10	2 (7%)	20 (23%)	22
11-20	6 (22%)	25(28%)	31
21+	10 (37%)	18 (20%)	28
Total	27 (23%)	89 (77%)	116 (100%)

As stated in chapter 3, the Teacher Concerns and Stress Inventory (Appendix A) was designed to determine teacher concerns related to four major categories identified by Billingsley (2005) which include: pedagogy, organization and management, collaboration, and support issues. Concerns specific to SETs that relate to pedagogy

include “assisting students with complex needs” and “helping students with individual needs versus demands of the general curriculum” (p. 67). Another category of SET concerns relates to organization and management issues which includes role ambiguity and “managing paperwork” and “large caseloads of students” with IEPs. The third category relates to collaboration and includes such concerns as “general educators’ reluctance to collaborate, problems working with paraprofessionals, and lack of time to collaborate with GETs” (p. 67). The final classification of SET concerns according to Billingsley (2005) is support issues which includes “feelings of isolation” and “lack of professional development” specifically focused on meeting the needs of students with disabilities (p. 67). An additional category, discipline and motivation, was included in the survey and is integrated within the conceptual framework for this study. Although not specifically addressed by Billingsley, one of Fuller’s central tenants related to concerns for task highlights teacher’s concerns related to classroom management and student discipline. This survey category includes the impact on classroom instruction due to students’ behavior, motivation, and effort.

The survey, which was adapted from Michael Fimian’s Teacher Stress Inventory (Billingsley & Tomchin, 1992; Billingsley, 2004; Billingsley, 2005) used a 5-point Likert scale (1= Not a Concern/No Stress, 5= Extreme Concern/Major Stress) to not only identify and differentiate between the concerns of GETs and SETs, but also to determine teachers’ perceptions of the intensity each concern has upon their role as an educator. Specific data related to each category from the survey is shared below.

Pedagogy. Under the category of pedagogy, respondents were asked to rate their level of concern on nine different survey questions related to classroom instruction,

resources, and student assessment. Each question began with the sentence stem, “I am able to...”. A full summary of all responses related to pedagogy may be seen in Appendix G. Of the nine attributes categorized within pedagogy, the same three attributes were identified by both SETs and GETs as the most concerning or stressful, all of which related to serving students with disabilities. “Providing supports to students with individual needs while meeting the demands of the general education curriculum” was identified as the greatest cause for concern for all educators (3.12) with sixty-seven percent of respondents identifying this factor as causing moderate to extreme stress in their daily work.

The second and third leading factors causing increased levels of concern or stress for all educators were “provide assistance to students with complex needs” (2.90) and “address individual student’s needs” (2.60). GETs rated “provide assistance to students with complex needs” (3.03) as their second greatest concern within this category while SETs rated “address individual student’s needs” (2.48) as their second highest cause for concern. It was interesting to note though, that all attributes related to students with disabilities within pedagogy were rated as a higher cause for concern by GETs rather than that of SETs. A comparison of the combined mean values and the level of stress assigned to each of the top three pedagogical concerns may be seen in Tables 10 and 11.

In general, the concerns of both SETs and GETs as it relates to pedagogy were similar. All educators within this study identified common attributes related directly to students with disabilities as the most concerning with the level of stress being greater for that of GETs. Where SETs reported levels of moderate stress (2.00) or higher in three of nine pedagogical attributes, GETs reported the same level of concern in five of nine

categories. Furthermore, the specific attributes identified as causing the most stress for
Table 10

Top 3 Pedagogical Concerns by Mean

Attribute	All	GETs	SETs
I am able to...			
...provide supports to students with individual needs while meeting the demands of the general education curriculum	3.12	3.29	2.59
...provide assistance to students with complex needs	2.90	3.03	2.48
...address individual student's needs	2.60	2.64	2.48

both GETs and SETs correlate to concerns for self in terms of teacher adequacy and concerns for impact in relation to meeting the academic needs of students (Fuller, 1969; Fuller & Brown, 1975). Table 12 indicates the alignment of the pedagogical attributes to their associated phase of concern from Fuller's developmental model.

Organization & Management. Under the category of organization and management, respondents were asked to rate their level of concern on seven different survey questions related to preparation time, caseload or class sizes, and role expectations. Each question began with the sentence stem, "I have...". A full summary of all responses related to organization and management may be seen in Appendix H. Of the seven attributes categorized within organization and management, both SETs and GETs identified four attributes with a stress level of 2.42 or higher. Three of those four attributes were shared by both SETs and GETs.

Of greatest concern to SETs in the category of organization and management was "adequate time to prepare for my lessons/responsibilities" (3.30). Twenty-two or 82% of

all SET respondents rated the amount of preparation time as a moderate to extreme cause of stress in their daily work. GETs identified this same concern with a mean of 3.29 with seventy-two percent (64 teachers) rating it at moderate to extreme levels of stress. For Table 11

Level of Stress for Top 3 Pedagogical Concerns

Attribute	1-No Stress	2- Mild Stress	3- Medium Stress	4- Great Stress	5- Major Stress
SETs					
I am able to...					
...provide supports to students with individual needs while meeting the demands of the general education curriculum	29.63% (8)	22.22% (6)	11.11% (3)	33.33% (9)	3.70% (1)
...provide assistance to students with complex needs	25.93% (7)	25.93% (7)	22.22% (6)	25.93% (7)	0.00% (0)
...address individual student's needs	25.93% (7)	22.22% (6)	37.04% (10)	7.41% (2)	7.41% (2)
GETs					
I am able to...					
...provide supports to students with individual needs while meeting the demands of the general education curriculum	3.37% (3)	23.60% (21)	31.46% (28)	23.60% (21)	17.98% (16)
...provide assistance to students with complex needs	8.99% (8)	26.97% (24)	28.09% (25)	23.60% (21)	12.36% (11)
...address individual student's needs	12.36% (11)	34.83% (31)	32.58% (29)	16.85% (15)	3.37% (3)

SETs, additional concerns included “time for administrative paperwork” (2.85), “the ability to fulfill legal requirements related to students with disabilities” (2.46), and “ability to meet the demands required by IEPs” (2.42). GETs had nearly identical high level concerns with only one variation. Rather than identifying “the ability to fulfill legal requirements related to students with disabilities (2.31) as one of their top concerns,

Table 12

Pedagogical Attributes and Concern Phase

Pedagogical Attribute	Phase of Concern	Characteristics of Concern Phase
...provides supports to students with individual needs while meeting demands of the general curriculum	Self	Adequacy as teacher; Content knowledge
...provide assistance to students with complex needs	Self	Adequacy as teacher
...address individual student's needs	Impact	Concern for students' needs

GETs identified “a manageable caseload/class size” (2.69) as one of their top concerns within this category. A comparison of the combined mean values and the level of stress assigned to each of the top four concerns related to organization and management may be seen in Tables 13 and 14.

Table 13

Top 3 Organization & Management Concerns by Mean

Attribute	All	GETs	SETs
I have...			
...adequate time to prepare for my lessons/responsibilities	3.30	3.29	3.30
...time for administrative paperwork in my job	3.01	3.04	2.85
...manageable caseload/class size	2.54	2.69	2.04
...ability to meet demands required by IEPs	2.45	2.44	2.42
...the ability to fulfill legal requirements related to students with disabilities	2.34	2.31	2.46

It is clear from the data related to organization and management that the utilization of time to manage instructional and administrative tasks is of high concern for both SETs and GETs while legal compliance with IEPs differentiates the two classifications of educators based on level of concern/stress. All of the attributes related

to the category of organization and management relate to task concerns as each attribute deals with the management of time, students, or resources. Table 15 illustrates the

Table 14

Level of Stress for Top Organization & Management Concerns

Attribute	1-No Stress	2- Mild Stress	3- Medium Stress	4- Great Stress	5- Major Stress
SETs					
I have...					
...adequate time to prepare for my lessons/ Responsibilities	7.41% (2)	11.11% (3)	44.44% (12)	18.52% (5)	18.52% (5)
...time for administrative paperwork in my job	14.81% (4)	25.93% (7)	29.63% (8)	18.52% (5)	11.11% (3)
...the ability to fulfill legal requirements related to students with disabilities	19.23% (5)	34.62% (9)	30.77% (8)	11.54% (3)	3.85% (1)
...ability to meet demands required by IEPs	23.08% (6)	34.62% (9)	19.23% (5)	23.08% (6)	0.00% (0)
GETs					
I am able to...					
...adequate time to prepare for my lessons/ Responsibilities	10.11% (9)	17.98% (16)	26.97% (24)	22.47% (20)	22.47% (20)
...time for administrative paperwork in my job	13.48% (12)	22.47% (20)	31.46% (28)	11.24% (10)	21.35% (19)
...a manageable caseload/ class size	23.60% (21)	19.10% (17)	30.34% (27)	19.10% (17)	7.87% (7)
...ability to meet demands required by IEPs	25.00% (22)	32.95% (29)	22.73% (20)	11.36% (10)	7.95% (7)

alignment of the organization and management attributes to the associated phase of concern from Fuller's (1969, 1975) developmental model.

Collaboration. Under the category of collaboration, respondents were asked to rate their level of concern on four different survey questions related to their work with various school community members including teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents. Work with administrators is addressed in another category and more specifically in data

related to research questions two and three. Each question in this category began with the sentence stem, “I have...”. A full summary of all responses related to collaboration may

Table 15

Organization and Management Attributes and Concern Phase

Org. & Management Attribute	Phase of Concern	Characteristics of Concern Phase
...adequate time to prepare for my lessons/responsibilities	Task	Managing time
...time for administrative paperwork in my job	Task	Managing time
...a manageable caseload/class size	Task	Managing time; students
...ability to meet demands required by IEPs	Task	Managing time; students; resources

be seen in Appendix I. Of the four attributes categorized within collaboration, both SETs and GETs identified two of the attributes nearly twice as stressful as the other two attributes within the same category. Although the top two concerns for SETs and GETs are the same, collaboration is the only category within the survey as a whole in which SETs rated their level of stress higher than GETs did on their most taxing concerns.

Of greatest concern to both SETs and GETs were “time to collaborate with my general education/special education peers” and “parents that support my work with students.” The mean scores for SETs were 2.89 and 2.59 respectively while GETs mean scores were 2.74 and 2.39. Sixteen or fifty-nine percent of all SET participants rated “time to collaborate with my general education/special education peers” as a moderate to extreme level of stress while fifty or fifty-eight percent of all GETs rated the same attribute as a moderate to extreme level of stress. Twelve or forty-four percent of all SET participants and forty or forty-five percent of GETs had similar ratings for “parents that support my work with students.” Of lesser concern to both SETs and GETs were the

attributes “paraprofessionals that are effective in the classroom” and “peers that are interested in collaboration.” A comparison of the combined mean values and the level of stress assigned to each of the top concerns related to collaboration may be seen in Tables 16 and 17.

Table 16

Top Collaboration Concerns by Mean

Attribute	All	GETs	SETs
I have...			
...time to collaborate with my general education/special education peers	2.77	2.74	2.89
...parents that support my work with students	2.44	2.39	2.59

With data for both SETs and GETs showing a high concern for time for collaboration and lower concern for the willingness of peers to collaborate, it seems that the desire to collaborate is present. However, based on this survey datum, the perception for both SETs and GETs is that there is not enough time to collaborate fully or effectively. As the attribute “I have time to collaborate with my general education/special education peers” directly relates to the management of time and resources, this attribute aligns with concerns related to tasks (Fuller 1969; Fuller & Brown, 1975).

Discipline and Motivation. Under the category of discipline and motivation, (see Table 18) respondents were asked to rate their level of concern on five different survey questions related to the impact of student behavior and motivation on instruction and teacher authority. Each question began with the sentence stem, “I feel that my classroom...”. A

Table 17

Level of Stress for Top Collaboration Concerns

Attribute	1-No Stress	2- Mild Stress	3- Medium Stress	4- Great Stress	5- Major Stress
SETs					
I have...					
...time to collaborate with my general education/ special education peers	7.41% (2)	33.33% (9)	29.63% (8)	22.22% (6)	7.41% (2)
...parents that support my work with students	18.52% (5)	37.04% (10)	22.22% (6)	11.11% (3)	0.00% (0)
GETs					
I am able to...					
...time to collaborate with my general education/ special education peers	18.39% (16)	24.14% (21)	29.89% (26)	20.69% (18)	6.90% (6)
...parents that support my work with students	24.72% (22)	30.34% (27)	29.21% (26)	12.36% (11)	3.37% (3)

full summary of all responses related to discipline and motivation may be seen in

Appendix J. Of the five attributes categorized within discipline and motivation, both SETs and GETs identified the same top three concerns with all means reported at 2.56 or higher.

SETs identified “instruction is impacted by discipline problems” (3.19), “instruction is affected by students who are poorly motivated” (2.63), and “my classroom would be more effective if some students tried harder” (2.56) as the most significant causes of stress and concern in daily practice. “Instruction is impacted by discipline problems was the highest rated cause for concern by SETs with seventy-four percent (20) of respondents identifying this attribute as a moderate to extreme concern. While SETs rated these attributes as priority concerns, GETs identified these concerns at even higher rates than the SETs. For GETs, “instruction is impacted by discipline problems” had a mean of 3.28, followed by “instruction is affected by students who are poorly motivated” (3.11), and “my classroom would be more effective if some students tried harder” (2.94).

A comparison of the combined mean values and the level of stress assigned to each of the top concerns related to discipline and motivation may be seen in Tables 18 and 19.

Table 18

Top Discipline & Motivation Concerns by Mean

Attribute	All	GETs	SETs
I feel that my classroom...			
...instruction is impacted by discipline problems	3.26	3.38	3.19
...instruction is affected by students who are poorly motivated	3.00	3.11	2.63
...would be more effective if some students tried harder	2.85	2.94	2.56

In all five attributes within this category, GETs consistently rated their level of concern higher than SETs. It is clear however, that attributes related to discipline and motivation are reported by teachers in GCPS to be the most stressful characteristics of their job based on the combined means within the survey given. Each of the attributes categorized within discipline and motivation correlate primarily to concerns for self (Fuller, 1969; Fuller & Brown, 1975) since each relates to the adequacy of the teacher to control student and classroom behaviors. Table 20 illustrates the alignment of the discipline and motivation attributes to the associated phases of concern from Fuller's (1969, 1975) developmental model.

Support. Under the final category of support, survey respondents were asked to rate their level of concern on eight different survey questions related to administrators, professional development, evaluation, and resources, (See Table 21). Each question began with the sentence stem, "I feel...". A full summary of all responses related to

support may be seen in Appendix K. Of the eight attributes categorized within support, only one attribute was a comparable level of concern for both SETs and GETs. “I have

Table 19

Level of Stress for Top Discipline & Motivation Concerns

Attribute	1-No Stress	2- Mild Stress	3- Medium Stress	4- Great Stress	5- Major Stress
SETs					
I feel that my classroom...					
...instruction is impacted by discipline problems	11.11% (3)	14.81% (4)	37.04% (10)	18.52% (5)	18.52% (5)
...instruction is affected by students who are poorly motivated	22.22% (6)	37.04% (10)	7.41% (2)	22.22% (6)	11.11% (3)
...would be more effective if some students tried harder	25.93% (7)	29.63% (8)	18.52% (5)	14.81% (4)	11.11% (3)
GETs					
I feel that my classroom...					
...instruction is impacted by discipline problems	7.87% (7)	24.72% (22)	22.47% (20)	21.35% (19)	23.60% (21)
...instruction is affected by students who are poorly motivated	10.11% (9)	23.60% (21)	28.09% (25)	21.35% (19)	16.85% (15)
...would be more effective if some students tried harder	11.24% (10)	30.34% (27)	23.60% (21)	22.47% (20)	12.36% (11)

Table 20

Discipline and Motivation Attributes and Concern Phase

Discipline & Motivation Attribute	Phase of Concern	Characteristics of Concern Phase
...instruction is impacted by discipline problems	Self	Class Control
...instruction is affected by students who are poorly motivated	Self	Adequacy as teacher; Class control
...would be more effective if some students tried harder	Self	Adequacy as teacher

control over decisions made about classroom/school matters” was identified as the greatest cause for concern for all educators (2.29) with thirty-eight percent (44) of

respondents identifying this factor as causing moderate to extreme stress in their daily work. However, there was a notable variation between the mean scores of this attribute between SETs (1.89) and GETs (2.42).

Table 21

Support Attributes and Concern Phase

Support Attribute	Phase of Concern	Characteristics of Concern Phase
...I have control over decisions made about my classroom/school matters	Self	Adequacy as teacher; control
...I have access to needed resources/materials related to my classroom	Impact	Meeting needs of students
...supported by administration	Impact	Meeting needs of students
...connected to colleagues on the job	Self	Evaluative opinions of others
...I have opportunities for professional development related to my work	Impact	Meeting needs of students

For SETs, none of the attributes under the category of support had a mean at 2.00 or above. The concerns that were closest were “I have access to needed resources/materials related to my classroom” (1.78) and “I have opportunities for professional development related to my work” (1.70). Conversely, GETs had a mean score above 2.00 for two attributes within the support category and three more rated higher than seven out of eight attributes rated by SETs. Additional concerns for GETs included “I have access to needed resources/materials related to my classroom” (2.16), “I feel supported by administration” (1.93) and “I feel connected to my colleagues on the job” (1.82). In general, attributes within the category of support provide teachers with improved opportunities to meet the demands of their jobs. Therefore, the majority of

attributes align with the concern for impact (Fuller, 1969; Fuller & Brown, 1975) as shown in Table 21.

A comparison of the combined mean values and the level of stress assigned to each of the top concerns related to support may be seen in Tables 22 and 23.

Table 22

Top Support Concerns by Mean

Attribute	All	GETs	SETs
I feel...			
...I have control over decisions made about my classroom/school matters	2.29	2.42	1.89
...I have access to needed resources/materials related to my classroom	2.07	2.16	1.78
...supported by administration	1.87	1.93	1.67
...connected to colleagues on the job	1.78	1.82	1.67
...I have opportunities for professional development related to my work	1.77	1.80	1.70

Summary of Findings from Teacher Concerns and Stress Inventory

In examining the total mean for each category within the Teacher Concerns and Stress Inventory utilized for this study, “support” in GCPS was rated at the lowest level of stress or concern for all teachers with a combined mean of 1.83. In contrast, “discipline and motivation” was of greatest concern based on the combined mean of 2.73. Table 24 summarizes the combined means for each overall category in the survey and the primary concern phase (Fuller, 1969; Fuller & Brown, 1975) for each category.

In the context of Greene County Public Schools, based on the survey data received in the Teacher Concerns and Stress Inventory, SETs and GETs have very similar concerns. For both special and general educators, the concerns that are self-reported as the most stressful on the job are those related to concerns for task and self under the categories of discipline and motivation, organization and management, and collaboration.

Both groups of educators are extremely concerned about the effectiveness of instruction in the classroom due to the impacts of student discipline and motivation. SETs and GETs

Table 23

Level of Stress for Top Support Concerns

Attribute	1-No Stress	2- Mild Stress	3- Medium Stress	4- Great Stress	5- Major Stress
SETs					
I feel...					
...I have control over decisions made about my classroom/school matters	44.44% (12)	29.63% (8)	18.52% (5)	7.41% (2)	0.00% (0)
...I have access to needed resources/materials related to my classroom	44.44% (12)	37.04% (10)	14.81% (4)	3.70% (1)	0.00% (0)
...supported by administration	59.26% (16)	18.52% (5)	18.52% (5)	3.70% (1)	0.00% (0)
...connected to colleagues on the job	55.56% (15)	25.93% (7)	14.81% (4)	3.70% (1)	0.00% (0)
...I have opportunities for professional development related to my work	55.56% (15)	29.63% (8)	7.41% (2)	3.70% (1)	3.70% (1)
GETs					
I am able to...					
...I have control over decisions made about my classroom/school matters	29.67% (24)	31.46% (28)	21.35% (19)	13.48% (12)	6.74% (6)
...I have access to needed resources/materials related to my classroom	33.71% (30)	30.34% (27)	24.72% (22)	8.99% (8)	2.25% (2)
...supported by administration	50.56% (45)	22.47% (20)	14.61% (13)	7.87% (7)	4.49% (4)
...connected to colleagues on the job	46.07% (41)	37.08% (33)	8.99% (8)	4.49% (4)	3.37% (3)
...I have opportunities for professional development related to my work	54.55% (48)	19.32% (17)	20.45% (18)	3.41% (3)	2.27% (2)

are also concerned about the allotment of time in the daily schedule as it relates to collaboration with peers and preparation for instruction. Overall, SETs and GETs feel supported by their colleagues and peers but not necessarily feeling the same level of support from parents. In contrast, there are two areas that seem to differentiate the concerns of SETs and GETs. One difference is that SETs are significantly more

Table 24

Summary of Combined Means by Category

Survey Categories	Combined Mean	Primary Concern Phase
Pedagogy	2.17	Self/Impact
Organization & Management	2.51	Task
Collaboration	2.32	Task
Discipline & Motivation	2.73	Self
Support	1.83	Impact

concerned about matters related to compliance with IEPs than GETs. Another distinction is the fact that GETs seem to have greater perception of stress on the job than SETs report.

Interview Data Related to Research Question One

In Phase II of this study, current and former SETs under probationary status were asked questions related to their experiences as beginning special educators in GCPS. Information from these interviews was triangulated with data from Phase I to expand upon research question one. The complete interview protocols used for Probationary Year 1, Year 2-5, and former SETs may be seen in Appendices C, D, and E. For current GCPS employees, the SET participants included one teacher in Year 1, three teachers in Year 2, one teacher in Year 4, and one teacher in Year 5 of their teaching careers in GCPS. Of the former SETs that were interviewed, one teacher left after completing Year 2, one teacher completed Year 3, and the final teacher left after Year 4 in GCPS.

The qualitative methods utilized in the second phase of this study allowed the researcher an opportunity to analyze data in depth, locate patterns, and identify themes. Findings in this section are organized based on the literature related to beginning

teacher's concerns (Fuller 1969; Fuller & Brown, 1975; Billingsley, 2005) which are integrated into the conceptual framework and includes specific excerpts from the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with current and former SETs. Concerns for self and task dominated the responses of all the teachers who participated in samples 2 and 3.

Concerns for self. Teacher concerns for self, center on adequacy with regard to class control, ability to understand subject matter, and the evaluative opinions of others (Fuller, 1969; Fuller & Brown, 1975). Fuller posited that concerns about students cannot be addressed by teachers until immediate concerns for self and task are addressed (Pigge & Marso, 1997). As one of the interview participants reflected on her own progress in her first four years as a special educator, she recognized her concerns for self, outweighed the needs of her students early on in her career.

In my first year of teaching I was not in tune with students' needs. I was worried about just doing everything right and making sure I could come back next year. Not to say I didn't care about my students. I just didn't know any better.

Adequacy as an educator was a common theme among all of the probationary SETs that were interviewed. Novice teachers in particular shared about their concerns related to the evaluative opinions of others. SETs demonstrated worry or stress with regard to not only the evaluative opinions of supervisors but that of colleagues as well.

I was worried that I was going to be treated the same as I was when I was a student teacher. I didn't want to be looked down upon so collaborating was definitely a concern of mine. But my colleagues respected me. They came to me to ask questions so I would provide whatever answer I could to the best of my knowledge and that always made me feel good. I felt respected in the environment.

When it comes to the evaluative opinions of supervisors, four out of six SETs demonstrated not only their concern for self but the need for frequent feedback. One SET shared his sense of validation based on a comment he had heard a supervisor had said.

My administrator has commented several times that I have not needed as much support as a standard first year teacher. As a matter of fact, I got a big compliment, second hand. I heard from someone else that said, "Do you think he did this?" And the AP made a comment, "Well, if he didn't, it'll be the first mistake he's made so far." It was halfway through the school year, so that let me know there wasn't another shoe waiting to drop, that everything was up to par so far.

This same teacher demonstrated further his need for acceptance from his colleagues and administrators. In fact, he discussed actions he takes in order to develop public perception about himself as an open and coachable professional.

I've always found it beneficial not just to bother one person, but to spread the help around because then you create an atmosphere among administrators and teachers that you're open to admitting mistakes, you're open to receiving help, and that you are not arrogant and stuck up, and that you know everything. So it's helpful to ask for help. Sometimes even when you know the answer, just to verify and because it shows you're willing.

Conversely, another SET made note about her initial concerns in going to the principal when she needed support. Whether it was a question about instruction or needed resources, she felt that it would make her appear to be ineffective or unprepared as a professional if she asked questions to her administrator.

It was nice having the freedom to teach in whatever direction I wanted. But it was one of the scariest parts because I did not know what I was going to do. I felt like I could ask for help, but I was embarrassed. I didn't want to go ask. I didn't want to go to my administration that just hired me and go, "I don't know what I'm doing."

Content knowledge and the ability to fully comprehend and deliver instruction on required curriculum standards was another common theme among SETs. All nine

participants made mention of concerns related to content knowledge and instructional delivery but the most in depth descriptions of these types of concerns came from the SETs formerly employed by Greene. All three noted concerns related to the variety of content they needed to learn in order to teach effectively in both self-contained and collaborative environments.

Coming into Greene, I did not have any teaching experience. I was still working on my degree at JMU...so I started with a provisional license. And so I was thrown into a classroom and told, OK, go teach them. So it wasn't something where I was super familiar with the content. I taught four different subjects areas my first year. It was hard and very confusing.

Legal compliance was a commonly identified concern of beginning special educators. In fact, legal compliance was the number one concern for four out of the six participants in sample 2 and legal compliance was mentioned as one of the top two concerns by five out of six participants in the same sample. While IEP development aligns with concerns for task, there are aspects of legal compliance which also correlate to concerns for self. In particular, concerns related to adequacy and the evaluative opinions of others emerged within some of the responses from novice SETs (four out of six).

I would say my first and foremost worry is that we are dealing with a legal document and [I worried] that I was going to screw something up. So I would send drafts of my IEPs to my mentor, the administrator, and someone in special services. I wanted feedback from all of them so that I knew when I walked into my IEP meeting with the parent, my final product was solid.

Table 25 highlights the frequency of the top professional concerns identified by all SETs in samples 2 and 3. For a complete listing of the top concerns for each interview participant, see Appendix M.

As can be seen in Appendix M and table 25, legal compliance related to IEPs was one of the most common, self-identified concerns of beginning SETs in GCPS. Based on the interview data of probationary SETs currently employed in GCPS, it would seem that legal compliance is of greatest concern to probationary SETs in the first five years of their careers followed closely by the ability to collaborate with general educators next.

Table 25

Frequency of Top Concerns Identified by Current and Former GCPS SETs (Samples 2 & 3)

Top Concerns as Special Educators in GCPS	Frequency of Concern (n=9)
Legal compliance related to IEPs	6
Time constraints for IEP completion and competing demands of instruction	4
Concerns related to collaborative classrooms with GETs	6

Concerns for task. Task concerns relate to the performance of teaching tasks such as managing “students, time, and resources” (Yan Fung Mok, 2005, p. 55). Task concerns are especially relevant to special educators in that they are responsible for modifying the curriculum for students with widely varying needs and disabilities, devising individual education programs (IEPs), employing assistive technology, and complying with federal special education laws” (Youngs, Jones, & Low, 2011, p. 1507) in addition to the classroom teaching duties that general education teachers have. Balancing time between the needs of instruction and case management was identified as a constant challenge for SETs regardless of years of experience as illustrated in Table 25.

It can be hard to navigate the amount of content that you’re trying to put in front of the children and the paperwork requirements. As I was trying to navigate the daily responsibilities of teaching, I felt a little isolated because I wanted to do the best that I could and trying to make sure the students get my best instruction and maintaining all of the documentation and meeting timelines, it was challenging and sometimes isolating, especially my first year.

Caseload management is an example of a task concern. One teacher discussed the differences between the manageability of her caseload size from her first year to her second. She shared that since caseloads are assigned by grade level, she had a caseload of 18 as a first year, novice special educator but as a second year SET, her current caseload is eight.

I ended the year with an 18 student caseload. It was hard and I don't feel I was able to meet the needs of all of the students. I connected and I tried to help, and tried to help them reach their goals as best I could, but I know that some of them went without what they really needed, which is unfortunate. I don't know how we would have effectively mixed grade levels, but having 18 students on one caseload is pretty impossible.

Another SET noted that her caseload size has steadily increased throughout the school year. She stated that this occurs due to the fact she is assigned to the third grade.

According to her, since the third grade is the first year students are required to take high stakes state assessments, more students are found eligible for special services in her grade level.

My caseload has always increased throughout the year and so this year has been one of the worst. I started this year with eight and now I am up to thirteen and two are VAAP so they're extremely low. That's been really hard to juggle, the varying [ability] levels that I work with. It's one of my biggest complaints this year but it's nothing that can be controlled. It's just really challenging because me and my assistant, our schedules have changed every week trying to cover all the kids I am assigned.

Although the majority of SETs (six out of nine) reported acceptable caseload sizes while in GCPS, it is clear from the excerpts above that the perceived manageability of the student caseload is critical to SET and student success. As shared by special educators, manageability does not just include the number of students on a caseload. It also entails the severity of the disabilities of the students, the services to be provided, and the time

needed to provide said services. A task associated with caseload management is data collection related to student's IEP goals. Concerns related to this task were specifically addressed by one of the sample 2 participants.

One of the hardest things to do is keeping data. I find it hard to balance keeping data for goals and actually teaching kids what they need to meet their goals. It's definitely hard to find the assessments to pull so that I can put it on paper that a student is making progress towards a goal. You just don't always have the time.

The ability of special educators to manage time and students at all levels emerged as a common theme as all six of the SETs in sample 2 discussed this issue. Meeting timeline demands for IEPs and providing services was a common cause of stress for special education teachers. The constructs of the daily schedule and competing demands within the school provided challenges to SETs.

It's really hard at the high school level with scheduling and services. It can be conflicting, and I don't know that it's any one person's fault. But you find yourself making decisions and weighing the needs and which are the greatest needs.

At the elementary level, the placement of students in multiple classes can be a challenge for SETs. Clustering of students with disabilities was mentioned frequently by elementary teachers in order to make it more feasible to provide services and supports. Although identities of interview participants were masked, based on responses from interviews, the researcher was able to identify that three sample 2 participants were at the elementary level and all three commented on the importance of student placements. Similarly, providing caseload management to students that are not in any assigned classes of the teacher was especially difficult to accomplish as a beginning SET.

Managing student behavior was another commonality among task concerns for SETs as six out of nine participants discussed this topic. Multiple SETs shared that their

concern for class control and managing student behavior was especially prevalent in their first year on the job. One teacher shared that behavior was always her biggest concern her first year. Another stated that as a provisionally licensed teacher, she had no idea how to manage students in a classroom, especially in the self-contained setting. Another noted her reliance upon the principal for support with student discipline.

I feel like I do more behavior management than I thought I would. A lot of kids today need behavior support and guidance on controlling their actions. I think a lot of teachers put that on administrators to do. A lot of my colleagues claimed that [classroom management] was not something they learned in school. But it's hard. Every set of kids is different and they have different needs. You can have all these strategies to pull from but it might not be the right one for that kid. Last year I had a student who at times, we were scared of him. We relied on [the principal] to be on call.

Table 26 summarizes the frequency of concerns related to teaching tasks for special educators.

Concerns for impact. Concerns of teachers related to impact situate around the success of pupils rather than on the teacher. Impact concerns of teachers include: focus on students' academic growth and teacher reflection on their impact on student performance, the ability to understand pupils' capacities, specifying objectives for

Table 26

Frequency of Task Concerns Identified by Current and Former GCPS SETs (Samples 2 & 3)

Frequency of Task Concerns for SETs	Frequency of Concern (n=9)
Balancing time between case management and instruction	4
Concerns related to size of case load	4
Concerns related to management of case load	7
Concerns related to student behavior and classroom management	6

students, student assessment, and evaluating oneself in terms of pupil gain (Fuller, 1969, p. 221). When teachers demonstrate concern for impact, they reflect on their own ability to meet the academic, social, and behavioral needs of their students. While there are some examples of impact concerns within the survey and interview data, the prevalence of these types of concerns were less obvious for novice teachers as compared to concerns for self and task. One beginning SET noted her priority in developing positive and productive relationships with her students.

I would say that my relationship with my students is my number one priority outside of them trying to reach their IEP goals. It's trying to balance everything that I know I need to do, but my relationship with kids always comes first.

Another teacher expressed her concern about her ability to develop professional relationships with students on her caseload that she does not directly teach. She explained that she felt she had to over-rely on general education teachers for input and feedback related to her students' IEP goals and that ultimately, she managed the paperwork for the student rather than actually providing any actual academic impact.

One area of concern related to teacher impact on students had to do with student performance on high stakes assessments (Standards of Learning or SOLs). One teacher at the elementary level made note of the differences in her experience at varying grade levels in her school. She demonstrated concern for instructing and assessing students in preparation for SOLs. A concern she did not fully experience in primary grades that were not required to give SOLs.

It's interesting how much more pressure you feel when you're in an SOL year. I didn't feel that in first or second grade, it wasn't there. It was more working on those IEP goals and teachers are a little bit more understanding if you don't have a grade for certain things that might not be appropriate to teach to certain

students. So you really focus on the instruction of the general curriculum and using testing accommodations a lot more.

Another teacher noted her concerns related to providing services to students in high school that are required to pass SOLs in order to graduate. Her concerns related to helping students to pass required SOLs like Algebra I but also feeling concerned about students' readiness to actually graduate and transition beyond high school.

SOLs are terrible for the students on my caseload. That is the hardest part about my job, is getting some of my students to pass an algebra test that everything about their disability says that it is what's hard for them, but yet they still have to do it in order to graduate. I just wish we had more resources to meet kids' needs. It makes me sad because we could be doing so much more for some of these kids. Some of them just get by and then they graduate and I don't know if they are really ready for that.

Table 27 summarizes the frequency of concerns related to impact for SETs within samples 2 and 3.

Table 27

Frequency of Impact Concerns Identified by Current and Former GCPS SETs (Samples 2 & 3)

Frequency of Task Concerns for SETs	Frequency of Concern (n=9)
Developing relationships with students	2
Assisting students to pass high stakes assessments (SOLs) or graduate	3

Summary of Findings for Research Question One

Overall, the concerns of beginning teachers are dominated by concerns related to self and task. Legal compliance related to IEPs was found to be one of the leading concerns for beginning special educators. Being accepted in collaborative settings by general education teachers, being assigned to multiple collaborative teachers and subjects, managing student behavior, and managing students on caseloads that are not taught directly by the special educator were additional concerns shared by novice SETs.

The concerns identified by beginning SETs in the qualitative interviews highlighted specifically the differences between the responsibilities of SETs and GETs. Moreover, these findings demonstrate that while both SETs and GETs have similar concerns, the additional duties the special educators have increases the amount of concerns these teachers experience on a daily basis and throughout their careers. Despite the fact that special educators have additional concerns, it is important to recognize the fact that within this study, it was found that GETs report higher levels of stress over that of SETs. This was an unexpected finding and one that was in direct contrast to the researcher's original hypothesis.

The next section will further utilize data from the second phase of study in order to answer research questions two and three. Data that answers research question two will be addressed first. This section will be organized utilizing the first three domains of leadership practice from the Ontario Leadership Framework (2012), a framework incorporated into the conceptual framework for this study.

Research Question Two: To What Extent Do SETs in GCPS Feel Supported by Their Principals?

In order to address this research question, two sub-questions were developed. The first sub-question focused on identifying principal practices that SETs found supportive. The second sub-question focused on the specific concerns that SETs felt were met by their principals' leadership practices. Excerpts from interviews will be shared that demonstrate principal practices identified by SETs as supportive to their work. These practices are categorized as setting directions, building relationships and developing people, and developing the organization (Leithwood, 2012).

Setting directions. According to Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), setting directions is aimed at developing “shared understandings about the organization and its activities and goals that can under gird a sense of purpose or vision” (p. 8). Setting directions often includes “articulating a vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, and creating high performance expectations” (p.8). Principals are responsible for creating a school culture that is collaborative and inclusive and provides positive working conditions (Pugach, Blanton, Correa, McLeskey, & Langley, 2009, p.18). Singh and Billingsley (1998) identified communicating a vision and goals for the school and providing clear expectations as key components of principal support which align with the leadership domain of setting directions.

One leadership practice discussed by a former GCPS SET that she found tremendously important to her success was the shared vision of inclusion demonstrated by the administrator in charge of special education. This shared vision for inclusion was made explicit to the school community as a whole and the teacher shared that she felt more valued by both her administrators and her collaborative teachers due to the vision and communication by the administrator.

I felt supported by the administration when I moved to GCPS. I felt like I had the same philosophy of inclusion as the principals. So that really helped me a lot with the transition, especially with my work with collaborative teachers.

For some (three out of nine) of the SETs, the expectation for collaboration was made clear by principals both with the provision of structures that supported collaboration and the involvement of administrators among collaborative teams. Common planning time and/or teaming was noted as a highly valued structure provided by administrators that supported the expectation of collaboration. This leadership activity

was case sensitive, as different SETs had different experiences based on their assigned school. All three SETs included in sample 3 noted their appreciation for common planning time and/or teaming. However, even if beginning SETs didn't experience the ideal settings for collaboration with peers, they recognized the importance of it.

Another concern I have in this school is the lack of ability to provide a collaborative environment with the current way the schedule is set up. I provided support as much as I could, but we didn't have enough planning time and enough time when I was in the classroom in order to teach together. The other teacher was always teaching and I was always floating and assisting. That's not collaborative.

Other SETs (three in sample 2) in GCPS felt that the structures were appropriate and provided opportunities for collaboration among SET and GET teams as well as grade level teams. Class assignments for instruction were also noted as a powerful impact on stress and the demands placed upon SETs.

I did appreciate that when I was teaching in Greene we were teamed so we did have a group of people that worked together that shared the same students and had common planning time to address concerns with students. In my last year in Greene, I focused on two content areas that I was highly qualified in. That also made it easier to collaborate with two general education teachers instead of the four I had to try to meet with my first year.

Building relationships and developing people. Developing people relates to capacity building as well as motivating members of the organization. "Offering intellectual stimulation, providing individualized support and providing appropriate models of best practice" are often associated with building relationships and developing people within the organization (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 9). Singh and Billingsley (1998) identified multiple principal practices that reflect this leadership domain from the OLF. Examples of these practices include providing frequent and fair feedback and evaluations, recognizing accomplishments, and

engaging in discussions with teachers related to instructional practices. This leadership domain was reflected in multiple ways from SETs in samples 2 and 3.

Beginning special educators valued feedback from their administrators as noted by all nine participating SETs. Two specific contexts related to feedback were identified within this study. These contexts included feedback related to classroom instruction, and feedback related to IEP development and facilitation of IEP meetings. As it relates to instruction, SETs shared a desire for constructive feedback. One beginning SET felt very strongly that her principal was a valuable resource when it came to providing constructive feedback related to her instruction.

[My principal] would come in and watch me and he'd always set up a meeting afterwards to discuss it. I always felt like his comments were constructive and helpful and never like "Oh, this is wrong. You should do it this way." He'd always have some sort of resource or person that I could go to work on whatever skill it was I was lacking. He also always had something positive to say. That always made me feel good. He definitely supported me and I never felt intimidated to go to him and say, "Hey, I'm struggling with this. I need help. What should I do?"

Other SETs (2) emphasized the importance of their principal asking directly in what area the SET would like feedback. One teacher noted that she recognizes she has areas to develop and she appreciates when the principal seeks her input prior to formal observations.

I always like whenever they ask questions like "What am I going to see when I observe you? What can I expect? What do you want me to look for? What do you want me to give you feedback on?" I always appreciate that because everyone has something to work on and they want to know from me what I want them to observe.

Another teacher shared similar appreciation for not only the constructive nature of the feedback, but the manner in which the feedback was shared.

I think the feedback that I was provided was really important, especially the constructive feedback. Because even to this day I remember some of the constructive feedback and I'm still trying to work on it. And it was presented in a professional way and a way that was meant to challenge me to become a better teacher. Not to criticize, but to actually just challenge me to be even better.

The development of trust between administration and special educators was highly valued by SETs as professional working relationships developed between teachers and principals. Five SETs shared the importance of principals being receptive to feedback from special educators related to student placements and collaborative pairings. These SETs appreciated when principals would take the time to actively listen to their input on students, their behaviors, their needs, and suggestions for class placements or schedules for the next school year.

The administration was always really supportive of the vision of collaboration so I always tended to get paired with who I liked and who I worked well with. They allowed me to work with who I saw success with, which in turn I think helped the kids.

The same teacher elaborated further by explicating how she felt supported by administrators because they trusted her to make appropriate decisions for her students as it related to her teaching and her work with behavior and IEP management.

They trusted me to educate the students how I felt they needed to be educated. They trusted me to have fidelity with their IEPs and implement their IEP in all classes. They trusted me with decisions in terms of behavior and things the kids needed.

Another SET reflected on her role as SPED chair and the interactions she had with the principal in order to develop caseload assignments of special educators with students with disabilities.

The principal has been great about working with me when I shared I had created schedules and caseload assignments for the third graders. It was interesting

getting each other's perspectives. The principal listened and supported the work I did and the recommendations I had made for next year.

Develop the organization. Developing the organization refers to the conditions and culture within which members of the organization work. Leaders must attend to the structures of the organization in order to “facilitate the work of its members” and ensure structures support the work towards an “improvement agenda” (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 9). Singh and Billingsley (1998) identified multiple principal practices that reflect this leadership domain from the OLF. Examples of these practices include assisting with discipline and the provision of resources and providing a supportive learning community for peer support.

Interviews with all current and former SETs began with teachers sharing their experiences as beginning teachers in GCPS. In general, all nine teachers reported feeling supported and welcomed into their respective schools. One teacher shared the following:

I've enjoyed working in Greene County. I felt that I have been supported by administration and my colleagues and I felt that I could get along with the kids well.

Another teacher shared similar sentiments related to administrative and collegial support by stating:

[My experience] has been very positive so far throughout the school year. I have received support from administrative staff. I have received support from teachers. I was assigned a mentor. That was important, somebody I know that I could go to, a seasoned professional. And it's been a positive experience so far.

Leadership practices identified by beginning SETs that align with the domain of developing the organization ranged from those impacting instruction and student discipline to those affecting IEP implementation and management. The most commonly noted support was the assignment of a mentor. In fact, every special educator

interviewed, whether a current or former GCPS employee, emphasized the importance of not only having a mentor, but the critical need for the mentor to be a certified, experienced special educator as well. Each participant shared that the administrator had been responsible for assigning the mentor and that structures were in place by central office administration to ensure at least monthly mentor/mentee meetings. The proximity of the mentor within the building was noted by two SETs as particularly valuable, especially for availability to respond to questions.

I do really appreciate both as a special education teacher and a new teacher in general having the connection within the school building and having that person that has been assigned as your mentor. Having a connection with more veteran teachers than you made it a lot easier. I had the benefit of sharing a classroom with my mentor. Having that person that was constantly there with me made it very, very easy. I didn't even have to walk out of the classroom to ask questions.

Just as beginning SETs noted the need for an accessible mentor, there were similar needs from administration. Although it was not necessarily the principal that was identified as the beginning special educator's go to school leader, a building level administrator, usually an assistant principal, was utilized by most SETs for support. In fact, all SETs that participated in the second phase of this study identified a specific administrator that they felt most supported by.

I mainly dealt with the assistant principal my first year when I had special education questions. She was more available for IEP meetings than the principal was. She was always very flexible, positive, and listened about student's needs. She was right across from my classroom so being close I think helped with trying to keep up that daily communication about needs of certain students. And she would come to IEP meetings and be involved and supportive.

Based on the information shared by beginning SETs in this study, it would seem that special educators feel connected and supported by the administrator most visible in the SETs' daily or weekly work. Most commonly, it was the administrator most involved

in the formal evaluation process with the beginning SET who stood out to the teachers as being supportive. This was specifically commented on by four of the participants.

Furthermore, it was also the principal that regularly participated in IEP meetings facilitated by the beginning SET that became most “supportive” to the teacher.

I have had very little interaction with the principal. There’s an assistant principal that’s in charge of special education and she’s been in all my IEP meetings. She’s followed up with me on things. She’s been in more of a supervisory position as far as me being in my first year as a SPED teacher.

Having a visible, readily available administrator was noted as a positive, supportive characteristic of school leaders. Four of the SETs communicated about the “huge learning curve” there is as a beginning teacher, especially for beginning SPED teachers with the additional stresses that IEP compliance brings. There were many questions that often needed immediate responses, and overall, beginning SETs in GCPS perceived that their principals were available to respond to their needs and queries. One teacher noted her preference for going to her building administrator rather than the central office special services department. She identified her principal as an “intermediary” and a valuable resource for providing support.

I would go to my principal because I knew that he would always send me to the right person if he didn’t have the answer himself. His knowledge of the resources available in the division was great. He could always be that intermediary to direct me to the right place. I felt like that was his most important role for me.

Beginning special educators shared the importance of availability and visibility of administrators not only for responding to questions regarding instruction and IEPs, but six teachers also noted support related to student discipline and classroom management as a critical leadership practice. One teacher reflected upon the challenges of classroom

management as a first year, provisionally licensed teacher. She relied upon her principal for support and modeling for some of her most behaviorally-challenged students.

I felt like our principals were always available. I did feel like there was a lot of support. I remember my first year, I had a very difficult self-contained class and my principal would come down to my classroom to support classroom management and just kind of model things for me.

Availability and visibility also allowed for more opportunities for communication.

SETs mentioned the support they felt when principals checked in informally and had discussions about student behaviors. Presence and participation in IEP meetings were seen as critical to all beginning SETs. Three others discussed the support of administrators that reached out about needed resources. One teacher shared her appreciation for her principal reaching out to her regarding furniture and needed resources for her classroom. As the identified teacher for serving the needs of emotionally disturbed students, she was grateful for the opportunity to work alongside the principal to set up her classroom to meet the needs of her specific students' needs.

Although not every SET has had this experience, four teachers discussed their great appreciation for and reliance upon administrators that had strong background knowledge or experience in special education. One SET discussed the impact on equity for SWD when administrators have SPED knowledge.

I knew that if I had questions about special education or if some issue came up I could go to my principal. Having somebody who really understood special education in a leadership role within the school was important. I felt that our students had more equitable experiences, because in other schools I have either student taught in or volunteered in, where that dynamic wasn't present, then I didn't see as many opportunities for students with disabilities.

SETs who did not feel that their principal had a background in special education made it clear that this was a strong need and concern. One SET described an experience in which

the administrator attending an IEP meeting suggested a testing accommodation for read aloud for a student that did not qualify for that accommodation. This lack of knowledge added stress to the SET and left her having to explain to the administrator and the parent why such an accommodation was not allowable for this particular student. Another teacher described her concerns about being in IEP meetings in which the lack of knowledge of the administrator lends itself to confusion and the appearance of the team “not being on the same page.”

It’s very hard being in an IEP meeting where I know more about special education than my administrator does. We all need to be on the same page and have an understanding of the student and the resources we have available. It would be wonderful to have that person who truly knows more about special education that contributes to the team and not just someone that signs the paperwork at the end of the meeting.

The professional knowledge of the administrator was an important factor to all SETs. Being prepared as the administrator prior to IEP meetings was a key leadership action mentioned specifically by three different teachers. This included reviewing the IEP, having knowledge of the student, and interacting with and supporting the work of the SPED teacher during the meeting. Besides the emphasis on understanding special education laws, policies, and requirements, having a strong knowledge about specific students on teachers’ caseloads was also valuable. Overall, beginning SETs stated that they felt more supported by principals that had background knowledge about individual students. When principals shared information about home life or prior incidents related to students, SETs gained a better understanding about their students. Gaining this type of information and communicating with the administrators was appreciated by the SETs and

allowed for a more collaborative approach for problem solving and implementing interventions.

Oversight related to IEPs was also cited by three SETs as a supportive leadership action by principals. Particularly since IEP compliance is such a cause for concern for beginning special educators, IEP oversight was seen as a critical asset. SETs appreciated having administrators that were willing to review IEP drafts prior to the drafts being sent home to parents. In addition to IEP oversight, presence and involvement in IEP meetings was cited most often by beginning SETs as being supportive of their roles as this was discussed by all nine SETs.

I really appreciated administrators sitting in on IEP meetings and sharing ideas about how to support our students. I always felt like the administration had my back. They were there to support everything that was going on in the classroom. And so because of that, that made me feel like we were all part of a team and that our goal was truly to make sure the students we were educating were making progress and having their needs met.

Based on survey data from phase I of this study, teachers do not consistently feel that parents support their work. Thusly, beginning SETs appreciated having the support of an administrator in IEP meetings when parents were in attendance. One teacher shared a specific case regarding a highly involved parent that had concerns about her daughter's transition into a new school.

I remember being so nervous about having Emma on my caseload and I remember talking to my administrator about that because I knew her mom was not happy with her child's last school experience. I remember going to my administrator and asking what to do and trying to navigate the positive relationship from the beginning of the year. Every meeting, my administrator was there and then it turned out to be a really good experience for Emma and her mom.

Finally, all current SETs mentioned the provision of professional development from the central office level as a supportive structure from administration. While all beginning teachers may benefit from professional development, administrators need to keep in mind the types of professional development that would specifically support novice SETs. In GCPS, the recent addition of SPED and IEP boot camps that have been provided as professional development were extremely helpful to novice SETs. It was noted by one SET in particular as critical to growth as work with the online systems for developing IEPs was not something preservice programs were able to address. Although these professional development sessions were not facilitated by principals, they were often involved in the communication process in order for SETs to attend and directly impacted their own professional knowledge and growth for completing required job responsibilities.

Summary of Findings for Research Question Two

In general, all SETs within phase II of this study reported feeling supported by their principals and other administrators despite the challenging nature of the role special educators have in schools. The majority of the principal practices identified by SETs as being supportive were within the leadership domain of develop the organization. SETs valued constructive feedback from principals on instruction as well as IEP oversight and the facilitation of IEP meetings. Having administrators that were visible and available to respond to questions, providing support and modeling related to student discipline and classroom management, providing resources for instruction, and supporting the work of SETs in IEP meetings were also discussed. Special educators emphasized the importance of having administrators that had an understanding of special education laws, policies,

requirements, and procedures and placed value on active participation in IEP meetings. Having and sharing knowledge related to SWD and suggestions for interventions was also appreciated. Finally, having structures in place to facilitate the work of SETs was also noted as extremely valued. These structures included the assignment of a mentor certified in special education, common planning time, teaming, and manageable caseload and class assignments. Figure 4 summarizes the leadership actions identified by beginning SETs and the concerns those actions address.

Figure 4

Summary of SET Concerns & Supportive Principal Practices

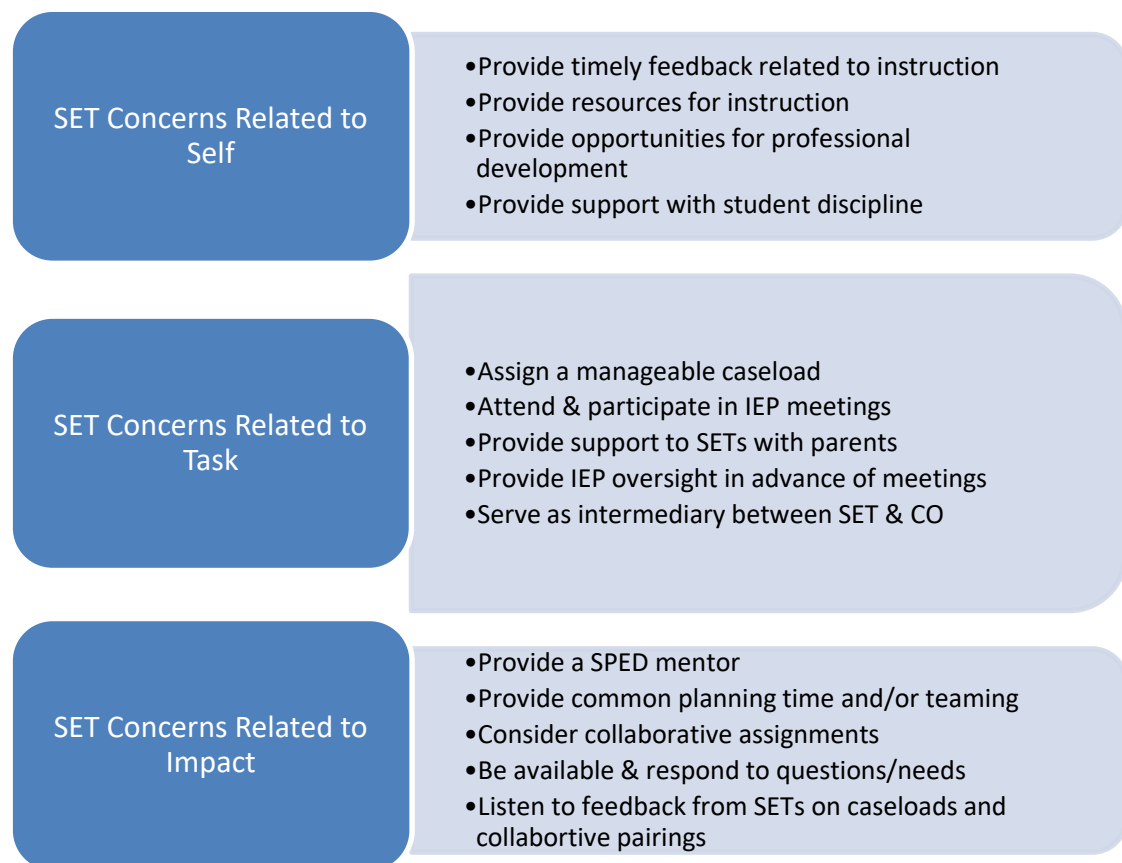


Figure 4: This figure illustrates the connections between the concerns of beginning SETs and the leadership practices which address those concerns.

While in general it appears that feedback provided by both current and former SETs demonstrates that administrators in GCPS are supportive of novice special educators, it is noteworthy to mention that having high expectations and/or accountability for SETs is also critically important. As the data revealed, SETs have lower levels of reported stress compared to that of general educators and it is curious as to why that would be the case. One possible explanation for such a finding could be that special educators do not feel the same level of accountability for student performance on high stakes exams that GETs experience. Student growth and success should be of equal importance to SETs and GETs. As such, it is important that school leaders not only provide support for their novice educators, but maintain high expectations for accountability as well.

The next section will further utilize data from the second phase of study. Data that answers research question three will be specifically addressed. Research question three focused on special educators' intention for retention both within GCPS and the profession.

Research Question Three: What Leadership Practices Influence Teachers' Decisions to Remain in Their Current School, GCPS, or the Profession?

In order to address research question three, teachers in sample two (current SETs) were asked directly about their likelihood to remain in their school and in special education. Teachers in sample three (former SETs) were asked to identify their reasons for departing GCPS. Additionally, these educators were asked to identify something that their administrator could have done better or differently to better support them as beginning SETs. All nine participants in phase II interviews stated that they had

intentions of remaining in education but not necessarily special education. One teacher, had just completed her administrative endorsement and is currently seeking a position as an assistant principal. Another teacher is in the process of applying for a Special Education Leadership Fellowship within her new school district. Whereas a current SET is planning to work in education through a hospital which is why she switched from general education to special education in the first place.

For current SETs, three out of the six SETs interviewed in sample two stated that they intended to remain both in their current school in GCPS as well as in special education. One SET was actively applying and interviewing with other school divisions while another was not certain of her intent to remain in GCPS, although she stated she has remained in Greene longer than originally anticipated due to the positive experiences she has had with administrators and colleagues. Table 28 illustrates each of the current SETs' intentions related to retention and their stated purposes or reasons supporting those decisions.

Factors that affect teacher attrition in special education can be classified into two groups, teacher characteristics and working conditions. Teacher characteristics include such identifiers as age, gender, certification, and experience. "Special education teachers who quit tend to be younger and inexperienced, uncertified, have higher than average test scores, and are influenced by personal factors such as children or family moves" (Strong, 2009, p. 31). For the former special educators who left GCPS while still under probationary status, all three stated that they left due to reasons categorized as teacher characteristics. All three were younger, female teachers that left primarily for familial and monetary reasons. Each teacher is currently still employed as a special educator in

Table 28

Current SETs Intention for Retention

SET	Intent to Remain in GCPS	Intent to Remain in Special Education	Reasons Supporting Decision
P1a	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Feels welcomed and supported ●Moved family to Greene County
P2b	No	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Distance from home ●Feels confident in knowledge gained in GCPS to change schools
P4d	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Supportive and ethical practices of administrators play role in retention
P5e	Uncertain	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Distance from home ●Positive community & supportive administrators ●Feels valued and respected
P2f	No	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plans to work in education in hospital setting ●Appreciates willingness of administrators to move to SPED to support future plan/goal
P2g	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Feels trusted and supported ●Principal does not overemphasize SOL results or cause additional stress

their new school divisions. All three stated that they would have been willing to remain in GCPS had it not been for personal reasons. They felt welcomed, supported, and respected and enjoyed their time in Greene overall. In fact, two of the former employees stated that their interactions with administrators in Greene provide at least in part, inspiration for them to seek leadership positions within their new schools.

I valued the administration and the relationships I had with everyone there. I learned a lot of what to do as a teacher and a future administrator. It kind of inspired me to go forward with my goals of becoming an administrator because I learned a lot of positive things that administrators should be and should do from Greene.

Each of the former employees were asked to identify a practice that would have further positively influenced their experience in GCPS. Two out of three stated that they would have appreciated greater frequency of constructive feedback, particularly if that

feedback could be related more specifically to specialized instruction. One teacher felt that her principal provided quality feedback but that it was about teaching in general, and not specific to special education. One of the teachers is currently working in a charter school in the south where she states she received weekly feedback from a former special educator now in a leadership role within her charter system. Table 29 illustrates the reasons for each teacher's departure from GCPS and their suggestions for improvement.

Table 29

Former SETs Identified Reasons for Departure & Suggestions for Improvement

SET	Reasons for Departure from GCPS	Suggestions for Principal Improvement
Former P2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Got married ●Moved closer to family ●Increased pay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Increase frequency of observations and feedback
Former P3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Work closer to home ●Work in same school district as husband and children ●Increased pay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Hold same expectations and accountability for all teachers
Former P4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Had a child ●Moved closer to family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Increase feedback specific to providing specialized instruction

Summary of Findings for Research Question Three

Fifty percent of the current teachers in sample two of this study have intentions to remain in GCPS as well as in special education. Of the remaining three, one is actively seeking employment in a district closer to her home, another has plans to move from public schools to education for hospitalized children, and the third is uncertain of her commitment to Greene as she stated that she has already remained in the division longer than she thought she would. It is important to note though that this SET stated that she has remained in GCPS due to the supportive environment in which she works. For the teachers that have left GCPS already, all reasons for their attrition can be related to

teacher characteristics primarily related to their age and family needs. Their decisions to leave GCPS were not directly associated with any specific leadership actions of their principals. They each stated that they felt supported and appreciated the efforts of their administrators but they did offer suggestions for leadership improvement that would be beneficial for other SETs in the division.

Chapter Summary

Quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data were collected in order to answer the three research questions for this study. Survey data provided insight into the professional concerns of teachers in Greene County Public Schools. Specifically, data provided information related to the types of concerns GETs and SETs have related to all aspects of their work. By capturing data related to perceived intensity of stress, it allowed for comparisons to be made between the concerns of GETs and SETs. When survey data was combined with interview data, it not only provided further support related to beginning SET concerns but it also allowed for connections to be made between the leadership practices of school administrators and the concerns of teachers.

After a thorough analysis of all data gathered for this study, four main themes emerge.

1. Although SETs and GETs have similar concerns, it is the additional task concerns that SETs have related to their role as special educators that are most stressful to their daily work. These task concerns relate to legal compliance and collaboration with GETs.

2. The utilization of specific supports can facilitate SETs' developmental progression from their concerns for self and task to their concerns for impact on students.
3. There are many leadership practices exhibited by current and former principals that SETs identify as being supportive.
4. The administrator's knowledge of special education and students with disabilities enhances their ability to fully support special education teachers.

In the next chapter, I will discuss each of these themes utilizing the lens of my conceptual framework and literature related to the concerns of beginning teachers and leadership practices that support retention. Four recommendations for leadership in Greene County Public Schools will be made in addition to implications for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

As a school principal, I have observed firsthand the negative effects of high turnover on the entire school community and the educational experiences of my students, especially those with exceptional needs due to disabilities. As noted by Billingsley (2005), high levels of attrition are costly, reduce teacher quality, divert attention from school improvement efforts, and interfere with the quality of services that students with disabilities receive" (pp. 26-27). High levels of teacher turnover, year after year, negatively impacts "program stability and quality" (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1993, p. 371) and is therefore harmful for districts, schools, and students (Burkhauser, 2017). Andrews and Quinn (2005) suggest that it takes three to five years for beginning teachers "to become proficient, thus it is incumbent on school leaders to do everything possible to support and retain teachers to ensure students are taught by educators who have learned to teach well. Without retention of high quality teachers, it is difficult for schools to sustain improvement efforts, develop effective, collaborative teams, or to "integrate new skills into daily practice" (Billingsley, 2005, p. 28).

School principals are perfectly positioned to cultivate environments that support the needs of novice educators as they strive to meet the complex and diverse needs of their students (Correa & Wagner, 2011). Support from administration is key to the successful development of beginning teachers. As noted by Correa and Wagner (2011), "active engagement by the principal in induction and mentoring programs in conjunction with quality interactions regarding day-to-day policies, procedures, and instructional

practices are integral to cultivating beginning SETs and keeping them in the field" (p. 23). Doing so requires an understanding of the needs of beginning special education teachers and the specific context in which SETs work.

The following discussion focuses on the four themes that emerged through the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data within this study. These findings address the research questions which were the basis for the development of this capstone project on SET attrition in GCPS. This chapter includes a discussion of each theme, the limitations of this study, implications for research, and recommendations for practices.

Theme One: Specific Task Concerns of SETs

The first theme that will be discussed relates to teacher concerns, specifically those that differentiated the concerns of SETs from GETs. Although SETs and GETs have similar concerns in general, it is the additional task concerns that SETs have related to their role as special educators that are most stressful to their daily work. These task concerns relate to legal compliance with IEPs and collaboration with general educators.

Legal compliance. All teachers in GCPS identified concerns related to serving students with disabilities as causing high levels of stress in their work. Legal compliance related to IEPs, however was an area of concern that special educators emphasized. Factors related to compliance included an array of responsibilities for special educators that novice SETs in particular reported feeling unprepared to handle in their first years on the job. Navigating online IEP platforms, meeting timeline requirements for paperwork, providing services to students, facilitating IEP meetings, collecting student data, and supporting the needs of students based on their IEP goals are all examples of tasks that relate to legal compliance. This finding is consistent with Nance and Calabrese (2009)

whose study found that frequently changing legal requirements impacting teachers' daily functioning and SETs' frustrations with paperwork and administrative tasks were major contributors to SET attrition. The paperwork and administrative tasks reduced time with students and instructional planning sessions with peers, which undermined their sense of instructional effectiveness. These are the types of tasks that not only differentiate the role of the special educator from the general educator but also highlight some of the greatest stressors in the work of SETs in schools.

Collaborative teaching. Collaboration with general education teachers was identified within the quantitative survey of this study as the only category in which SETs self-reported greater levels of stress than GETs. Special educators in Greene are commonly assigned to collaborative classrooms with multiple general education teachers, across a variety of content areas, and in many cases across multiple grade levels. SETs are left to navigate their role in a variety of class environments which necessitates the need to develop effective and professional relationships with various GETs in order to meet the needs of their students. This finding is consistent with Youngs, Jones, and Low (2011) who emphasized the additional stressors that SETs have above and beyond that of GETs as special education teachers are often responsible for teaching multiple subjects across multiple grade levels, have limited opportunities for collaboration with peers, and have little access to professional resources to meet the needs of their diverse students (p. 1512).

SETs in GCPS also reported concerns related to adequacy and the evaluative opinions of their peers as well as concerns related to the management of students, time, and resources in collaborative classrooms. Their role as collaborators in general

education classrooms also exacerbated the stresses of legal compliance as they struggled to balance time commitments to both responsibilities. These findings were also discussed in the work of Billingsley (2005) who identified four major categories of SET concerns: pedagogy, organization and management, collaboration, and support issues. Concerns related to legal compliance and collaboration that Billingsley identified through her work include role ambiguity and “managing paperwork” and “large caseloads of students” with IEPs as well as “general educators’ reluctance to collaborate, and lack of time to collaborate with GETs” (p. 67).

Theme Two: Facilitating SETs’ Developmental Progression of Teaching Concerns

The second theme relates to the developmental concerns of beginning special educators. One finding which emerged through this study is that concerns for self and task dominate the daily functions of beginning SETs in GCPS. When teachers are focused on concerns related to self and task, they are unable to fully and effectively address the academic, behavioral, and emotional needs of students. Therefore, the second theme is the utilization of specific supports can facilitate SETs’ developmental progression from their concerns for self and task to their concerns for impact on students.

Concerns for self. This theme directly relates to the work of Fuller (1969) and Fuller and Brown (1975). Teacher concerns for self, center on adequacy with regard to class control, ability to understand subject matter, and the evaluative opinions of others. Fuller posited that concerns about students cannot be addressed by teachers until immediate concerns for self and task are addressed (Pigge & Marso, 1997). Adequacy as an educator was a common theme among the probationary SETs that were interviewed. Novice teachers in particular shared about their concerns related to the evaluative

opinions of others as they expressed feelings of anxiousness or stress with regard to not only the evaluative opinions of supervisors but that of colleagues as well. When it comes to the evaluative opinions of supervisors, SETs voiced not only their concern for self but the need for frequent feedback to validate their work. Beginning SETs often noted their unwillingness to seek out administrators for assistance for fear of being perceived as ineffective or unprepared as a professional.

Concerns for tasks. Task concerns relate to the performance of teaching tasks such as managing “students, time, and resources” (Yan Fung Mok, 2005, p. 55). Task concerns are especially relevant to special educators in that they are responsible for modifying the curriculum for students with widely varying needs and disabilities, devising individual education programs (IEPs), employing assistive technology, and complying with federal special education laws” (Youngs, Jones, & Low, 2011, p. 1507). Balancing time between the needs of instruction and case management was identified as a constant challenge for SETs regardless of years of experience.

Caseload management is a specific example of a task concern that was noted within the findings. Although the majority of SETs reported acceptable caseload sizes while in GCPS, it was clear from the interviews that the perceived manageability of the student caseload is critical to SET and student success. As shared by special educators, manageability does not just include the number of students on a caseload. It also entails the severity of the disabilities of the students, the services to be provided, and the time needed to provide said services. The ability of special educators to manage time and students at all levels emerged as a common theme. Meeting timeline demands for IEPs and providing services was a common cause of stress for special education teachers. The

constructs of the daily schedule and competing demands within the school provided challenges to SETs. Clustering of students with disabilities was mentioned frequently by elementary teachers in order to make it more feasible to provide services and supports. Similarly, providing caseload management to students that are not in any assigned classes of the teacher was especially difficult to accomplish as a beginning SET. Managing student behavior was another commonality among task concerns for SETs. Multiple SETs shared that their concern about class control and managing student behavior was especially prevalent in their first year on the job. During interviews with current probationary SETs, instruction and impact on student performance was rarely discussed if at all in some cases. Many novices focused almost exclusively on organizational and task concerns which directly aligns to Fuller's (1969) conceptualization of beginning teacher concerns.

Concerns for impact. This theme is further related to literature which focuses upon teacher development. Kagan (1992) stated that it is only after “novices resolve their images of self as teacher that they begin to turn their focus outward and concentrate on what pupils are learning from academic tasks” (p. 147). Realities of classroom teaching combined with inadequate procedural knowledge causes novice teachers to focus on authority and class control. Lesson plans are formulated based on discouraging misbehavior rather than promoting student learning (ie. Glassberg & Sprinthall, 1980; Hoy, 1967, 1968, 1969; Hoy & Rees, 1977; Jones, 1982). Early stages of classroom practice are spent acquiring procedural knowledge and routines that integrate instruction and management. Over time, “novices move from an initial stage where performance is

laboriously self-conscious to more automated, unconscious performance” (Kagan, 1992, p. 155).

Principals are uniquely positioned to provide support for beginning teachers as they transition into their new roles as educators and assist beginning teachers in becoming effective practitioners. Principals must provide supports to SETs to “improve the performance and retention of beginning teachers to both enhance and prevent the loss of human capital, with the ultimate aim of improving the growth and learning of students” (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011, p. 203). Thusly, principals must assist novice SETs to address their concerns for self and task so that more attention may be focused upon the teacher’s impact on students.

Theme Three: Supportive Practices of GCPS Administrators

Studying the concerns of SETs and the leadership practices that support those concerns in the specific context of GCPS was one of the main purposes for this project. The third theme which emerged from this study is that there are many leadership practices exhibited by current and former principals in GCPS that SETs identify as being supportive. These principal practices aligned with OLF leadership domains of setting directions, building relationships and developing people, and developing the organization (Leithwood, 2012).

Setting directions. One leadership practice discussed by SETs was the shared vision of inclusion demonstrated by the administrators in charge of special education. This shared vision for inclusion was made explicit to the school community as a whole allowing SETs to feel more valued by both administrators and collaborative teachers. For some of the SETs, the expectation for collaboration was made clear by principals both

with the provision of structures that supported collaboration and the involvement of administrators among collaborative teams. Communicating a shared vision and clear expectations expressly align with leadership domains and practices from Leithwood's Ontario Leadership Framework (2012).

According to Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), setting directions is aimed at developing "shared understandings about the organization and its activities and goals that can under gird a sense of purpose or vision" (p. 8). Setting directions often includes "articulating a vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, and creating high performance expectations" (p.8). Principals are responsible for creating a school culture that is collaborative and inclusive and provides positive working conditions (Pugach, Blanton, Correa, McLeskey, & Langley, 2009, p.18). Singh and Billingsley (1998) identified communicating a vision and goals for the school and providing clear expectations as key components of principal support which align with the leadership domain of setting directions. By sharing clear expectations related to inclusion and collaboration, GCPS administrators demonstrated practices related to the domain of setting directions.

Common planning time and teaming were also noted as highly valued structures provided by administrators that supported the expectation of collaboration. This leadership activity was case sensitive, as different SETs had varying experiences based on their assigned school. Even if beginning SETs did not experience the ideal settings for collaboration with peers, they recognized the importance of it. Some SETs in GCPS perceived that structures in place were appropriate and provided opportunities for collaboration among SET and GET teams as well as grade level teams. Class

assignments for instruction were also noted as a powerful impact on stress and the demands placed upon SETs.

Building relationships and developing people. Beginning special educators valued feedback from their administrators. Two specific contexts related to feedback were identified within this study. These contexts included feedback related to classroom instruction, and feedback on IEP development and facilitation of IEP meetings. As it relates to instruction, SETs shared a desire for constructive feedback. In addition to having an appreciation for the constructive nature of the feedback, the manner in which the feedback was shared was also valued by SETs. These findings align with research on feedback from Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2014) who contend that effective feedback for educators must be differentiated in order to support teachers' growth in ways that develop their "internal capacities" (p. 17). By providing SETs with differentiated and frequent feedback, principals enable SETs to "better manage the complexities of learning and teaching" (p. 17), especially in meeting the diverse needs of exceptional students with disabilities.

The development of trust between administration and special educators was highly valued by SETs as professional working relationships developed between teachers and principals. According to Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015), trust can be defined as "a willingness to make oneself vulnerable to someone else in the belief that your interests or something you care about will not be harmed" (p.68). As education is a complex system with interdependent community members, having cooperation and collective trust creates a climate of success more likely to achieve essential educational goals (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Many SETs in GCPS shared the importance

of principals being receptive to feedback from special educators related to student placements and collaborative pairings. SETs appreciated when principals would take the time to actively listen to their input on students, their behaviors, their needs, and suggestions for class placements or schedules for the next school year. These types of principal practices not only offer teachers the opportunity for involvement but also provide influence over organizational decisions which directly affect the teacher and further fosters mutual trust between teachers and administrators (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

Developing the organization. Developing the organization refers to the conditions and culture within which members of the organization work. According to Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), leaders must attend to the structures of the organization in order to “facilitate the work of its members” and ensure structures support the work towards an “improvement agenda” (p. 9). Providing a supportive learning community for peer support was a common finding among SETs within this study. In general, all teachers reported feeling supported and welcomed into their respective schools by both administrators and colleagues. Leadership practices identified by beginning SETs ranged from those impacting instruction and student discipline to those affecting IEP implementation and management. The most commonly noted support was the assignment of a mentor. In fact, every special educator interviewed, whether a current or former GCPS employee, emphasized the importance of not only having a mentor, but the critical need for the mentor to be a certified, experienced special educator as well. These findings correspond to research by Smith

and Ingersoll (2004) whose research found that mentors with similar licensure to novice teachers had positive effects on beginning teacher retention.

Just as beginning SETs noted the need for an accessible mentor, there were similar needs from administration. Although it was not necessarily the principal that was identified as the beginning special educator's leadership contact, a building level administrator, usually an assistant principal, was utilized by most SETs for support. In fact, all SETs that participated in the second phase of this study identified a specific administrator by whom they felt most supported. Special educators in GCPS feel connected and supported by the administrator most visible in the SETs' daily or weekly work. Most commonly, it was the administrator most involved in the formal evaluation process with the beginning SET that stood out to the teachers as being supportive. Furthermore, it was also the administrator that regularly participated in IEP meetings facilitated by the beginning SET that became most "supportive" to the teacher.

Literature by Billingsley et al (1995) and Schnorr (1995) indicated that the "top-rated incentive" for SETs to remain in the field was having a supportive principal. Having a visible, readily available administrator was noted by SETs in GCPS as a positive, supportive characteristic of school leadership. Many of the SETs communicated about the "huge learning curve" of a beginning teacher, especially for beginning SPED teachers with the additional stresses that IEP compliance brings. There were many questions that often needed immediate responses, and overall, beginning SETs in GCPS shared that their principals are available to respond to their needs and queries. Serving as an "intermediary" between the SET and central office was seen as a valuable resource for providing support.

Beginning special educators also communicated the importance of availability and visibility of administrators for support related to student discipline and classroom management. The presence of administrators allowed for more opportunities for communication. SETs mentioned the support they felt when principals checked in informally and had discussions about student behaviors. Others discussed the support of administrators that reached out about needed resources.

Oversight related to IEPs was also cited by multiple SETs as a supportive leadership action by principals. Particularly since IEP compliance is such a cause for concern for beginning special educators, IEP oversight was seen as a critical asset. SETs appreciated having administrators that were willing to review IEP drafts prior to the drafts being sent home to parents. In addition to IEP oversight, presence and involvement in IEP meetings was cited most often by beginning SETs as being supportive of their roles. Finally, providing opportunities for professional development related to their role as special educators was a positive support to novices, particularly in relation to IEP development and management.

Theme Four: The Administrator's Knowledge of Special Education

The final theme which emerged from this study was that administrators' knowledge of special education and students with disabilities has an impact on the principals' ability to fully support beginning special education teachers. Through this research project it was found that not every SET in GCPS has had the benefit of working with administrators with a wealth of experience or knowledge related to special education. Despite the varied experiences of the beginning SETs within this study, all

participants discussed the importance of having a knowledgeable administrator to support the work of special educators.

Background in special education. SETs who did not feel that their principal had a background in special education made it clear that this was a strong need and concern. The professional knowledge of the administrator was an important factor to all SETs. Being prepared as the administrator prior to IEP meetings was a key leadership action mentioned by multiple teachers. This included reviewing the IEP, having knowledge of the student, and interacting with and supporting the work of the SET during the meeting. Besides the emphasis on understanding special education laws, policies, and requirements, having a strong knowledge about specific students on teachers' caseloads was also valuable. Overall, beginning SETs stated that they felt more supported by principals that had background knowledge about individual students. When principals shared information about home life or prior incidents related to students, SETs gained a better understanding about their students. Gaining this type of information and communicating with the administrators was appreciated by the SETs and allowed for a more collaborative approach for problem solving and implementing interventions.

Principals must have the ability to serve as instructional leaders for special educators. According to Pugach, Blanton, Correa, McLeskey, and Langley (2009), "if principals do not have sufficient instructional background in special education, they must rely on distributed leadership from veteran SETs or district-level staff to provide instructional support and assist with evaluation of beginning SETs" (p. 29). Beginning SETs often need support in identifying and implementing instructional strategies, behavior management techniques, or accommodations for the varying needs of the

students they serve. If principals do not have the knowledge to provide support for beginning SETs, they must be able to identify other educators who can and will provide assistance to novice SETs. In addition to instructional knowledge, a supportive principal must have solid “understanding of special education regulations, legal policies, and administrative procedures” (Pugach, Blanton, Correa, McLeskey, & Langley, 2009, p. 29) in order to support beginning SETs’ concerns.

Oversight of IEP process. Oversight related to IEPs was also cited by multiple SETs as a supportive leadership action by principals. Particularly since IEP compliance is such a cause for concern for beginning special educators, IEP oversight was seen as a critical asset of principals. SETs appreciated having administrators who were willing to review IEP drafts prior to the drafts being sent home to parents. In addition to IEP oversight, presence and involvement in IEP meetings was cited most often by beginning SETs as being supportive of their roles. These types of principal practices are similar to those stated in the literature by Billingsley (2005) who posits that administrators should not only be involved in IEP meetings with SETs but ensure that the role of the administrator within the IEP process is made clear (p.85). Furthermore, Billingsley (2005) contends that it is the duty of the administrator to ensure that both administrators and mentors fully support the work of beginning SETs by providing guidelines for IEP development, models of IEPs, and supporting the facilitation of IEP meetings (p. 85).

Limitations

As noted previously, there were several limitations to this study. Studying a restricted population in a single, small, rural community may limit the generalizability of the findings to other school divisions, particularly those in urban and suburban locations.

The inconsistency with which GCPS conducted, recorded, and organized exit interviews limited the researcher's ability to draw comparisons between reported reasons for attrition among GETs and SETs in Greene County. This lack of data also minimized the comparisons which could be made between national attrition data and that of Greene County Schools. In addition, this study was designed based upon teacher perceptions and self-reports which are typically less reliable than other qualitative or quantitative methods.

Another limitation that is important to note is the limited number of special education teachers in GCPS that participated in the quantitative survey in phase I. Of the 116 respondents that completed the survey in full, only twenty-three percent (N=27) were special educators. Furthermore, only nine of the twenty-seven special education teachers that responded to the survey were probationary or beginning SETs. Therefore, this sample size should be considered when examining the generalizability of the study's findings.

A final limitation that should be noted relates to the former special educators that participated in phase II. In addition to a limited sample size (N=3), two of the three participants left GCPS several years ago. The experiences they had as far back as the 2015-2016 school year may no longer reflect current practices in GCPS. These limitations as a whole should be considered when reviewing the recommendations from this study.

Implications for Research

It is hoped that the findings, themes, and recommendations from this study provide information germane to special education teacher attrition and leadership

practices which support beginning SETs. Based on data from this study, it was found that beginning SETs in GCPS are highly concerned about collaboration with general educators. Considerations for future research should include studies which focus on effective and productive collaborative teams. In this way, strategies and interventions that promote collegiality could be examined. Additionally, this type of investigation could reveal best practices related to instructional delivery methods among collaborating SETs and GETs.

Another finding which emerged from this study related to special educators' perceptions of supportive principal practices. Given the limited sample of SET participants in this study as well as the rural location of the school division under study, it would be prudent for future research on this topic to include a broader range of school districts and an increased number of SET participants. In this manner, it would be possible to generalize the findings and recommendations to a greater extent.

Given that special educators' commitment to remain within their schools and the profession are often dependent upon working conditions and the level of support provided by their principal, this study sought to identify the particular practices that SETs found supportive to their work. This study revealed that there are many practices already implemented by GCPS administrators that influence a positive and supportive working environment for SETs. These practices were found to be related to the OLF leadership domains of setting directions, building relationships and developing people, and developing the organization. In GCPS, the large majority of the practices identified as supportive related to principal feedback and discussions related to instruction, structures

that promoted a supportive learning community for peer support, and assistance with discipline and resources.

The leadership domains within the OLF are complex and this complexity should be studied further. Studies could be conducted that focus on specific domains in order to further identify particular practices within each domain that positively influence special educators' intentions to remain in the field. Similarly, SETs that remain in the field for the majority of their teaching careers could be specifically studied in order to identify the leadership factors of greatest influence to them. Such studies could utilize surveys or focus groups of special educators that have remained in the field.

These implications for future research support the literature related to special education teacher attrition and leadership practices which support SET retention. The final section of this chapter will highlight the recommendations that could bolster GCPS' ability to provide supportive working environments for beginning SETs and positively influence retention.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were developed in order to strengthen the supports that beginning SETs in GCPS receive. These recommendations are meant to further improve upon working conditions of our special educators and positively influence their intentions to remain in the field and more specifically in GCPS. These recommendations were developed based on the findings from this capstone project and are supported by the literature related to the needs of beginning SETs and the principal's role in retention of special educators.

Recommendation 1: Provide professional development opportunities for principals in order to increase their knowledge and understanding of special education and students with disabilities.

“Special education has an instructional mission and school systems have the legal responsibility to make sure that students with disabilities are provided what they need to learn” (Billingsley, 2005, p. 22). Federal legislation such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires schools to provide a *free and appropriate public education* (FAPE) to all students. More specifically, schools are required to provide “individual consideration” and “equity under the law” so that students with specific learning disabilities have access to the general education curriculum (Billingsley, 2005). As building administrators and school leaders, principals must take responsibility for meeting the legal requirements related to special education and supporting the teachers working directly with students with disabilities. For beginning SETs to gain the proficiency they need to provide a free and appropriate public education, they must be supported by principals that understand special education.

All SETs within this study reported the critical nature of the background experience and knowledge of the principal in special education. SETs that had knowledgeable administrators appreciated the types of supports that these principals were able to provide. Supports included IEP oversight, active participation in IEP meetings, instructional support related to meeting the academic and behavioral needs of SWD, and providing resources for specialized instruction. These types of leadership practices were identified as being supportive and enabled SETs to more effectively perform their role responsibilities. However, these types of practices and experiences for SETs in GCPS

were inconsistent across schools. Multiple SETs discussed concerns related to incidents they have had with administrators who did not have the knowledge needed for support, thereby causing additional stress and dissatisfaction on the part of the special educator.

This recommendation is meant to improve upon the professional knowledge of school administrators related to special education so that they are better positioned to provide the supports to novice SETs that they will surely need. Principals do not necessarily require newly created professional development sessions meant just for administrators although it would certainly be an option. Current SETs appreciated the professional development sessions they received from the special services department of central office. These sessions, IEP and SPED boot camps, could be attended by principals or recorded for virtual learning. In this way, principals are not only gaining the knowledge needed but are also receiving the same messaging that beginning SETs receive which would allow all parties to have a shared understanding of expectations and procedures. In addition to these boot camps, other professional development opportunities are offered throughout the school year that directly relate to special education teachers. Some examples of professional development that have been consistently offered include goal development, data collection, and reading interventions. Principals should be strongly encouraged to attend these sessions.

Another way to improve upon the knowledge of special education for administrators would be to provide summaries related to special education updates from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). In this way, principals could be kept up to date on changes to the law and policies related to special education. Similarly, frequent communication should be maintained between the director of special services

and school principals related to any concerns or needed changes that arise related to IEP development or management. For example, if a particular SET is struggling to provide evidence for accommodations within an IEP or is consistently missing deadlines for IEP submission, the principal must be included in the communication in order to provide support and ensure appropriate services are being provided to the students.

Recommendation 2: Provide all educators in GCPS with documentation and other forms of communication which explicitly identify expectations related to inclusion and collaboration.

Findings in this study highlighted the fact that there are currently many practices in place by certain administrators that are perceived by beginning SETs as being supportive. A large majority of the practices identified by SETs as being supportive to their work were categorized under the leadership domain of developing the organization followed by building relationships and developing people. There was a common sense of community support and positive school environment across school settings. Various structures were in place, although not consistently, that supported collaboration and comradery among peers. Overall, SETs had trusting relationships with their principals. They received constructive feedback, and they reported that they received support related to student discipline and concerns with parents.

Principal practices related to the leadership domain of setting directions was far less noted within this study. Some SETs did share that they felt they had the same philosophy of inclusion as their administrator. This shared vision for inclusion enabled SETs to feel more valued by both administrators and collaborative teachers due to the explicit communication by the administrator. For some of the SETs, the expectation for

collaboration was made clear by principals both with the provision of structures that supported collaboration and the involvement of administrators among collaborative teams.

According to Billingsley (2004), SETs are at greater risk for feeling insignificant or alienated from other teachers. These types of feelings typically result from the fact that SETs are outnumbered by GETs and they commonly serve students across grade levels and content areas (Pugach, Blanton, Correa, McLeskey, & Langley, 2009, p. 27). It is up to the principal to ensure SETs are an “integral part of the school culture” (Pugach, Blanton, Correa, McLeskey, & Langley, 2009, p. 19) rather than left in isolation and in nebulous positions. “Most importantly, they are responsible for creating a school culture that is collaborative” and inclusive “and provides positive working conditions” (Pugach, Blanton, Correa, McLeskey, & Langley, 2009, p 18).

The recommendation to provide explicit documentation and communication division wide is to ensure that a clear vision and goals for serving special education students is shared and understood by all faculty and staff. As outcomes for students with disabilities has continued to stagnate and lag behind that of other groups of students in GCPS, it is imperative that responsibility for addressing the achievement gap and the needs of our most vulnerable students are assumed by the entirety of the faculty. SETs cannot address concerns related to SWD in isolation. Intentionality on the part of all educators is necessary to provide the level of support required to meet the needs of our students with disabilities. Therefore, GCPS as a school division must make their vision, goals, and expectations clear related to inclusion and collaboration and systems must be

in place to provide a balance between teacher supports and accountability in maintaining these high expectations.

Recommendation 3: Create a mentoring program that is specific to the needs of special educators.

All SETs in GCPS, whether current or former, noted the importance of being assigned to a mentor that was a certified special educator. The quality of mentoring and induction programs that beginning teachers receive has a direct effect on the development and performance of the novice teacher (Athanases, Abrams, Jack, Johnson, Kwock, McCurdy, Riley, & Totaro, 2008). According to Smith and Ingersoll (2004), induction programs that had the strongest impacts, such as reduced teacher turnover, were those that provided new teachers with a mentor with a license in the same field and opportunities for collaboration with teachers on instructional issues.

GCPS has a mentor/mentee program currently. It includes a process for identifying mentors, training mentors prior to the start of school, supporting communication early in the school year with the new teacher, and a checklist for monthly meetings between the mentor and mentee. This program has been productive in that positive feedback has been received from mentor pairings. However, the program is not differentiated for special educators. As the role of special education teachers is specialized, so too should their mentoring program.

The following topics should be considered and activities developed in order to create a mentoring program that is personalized to the needs of beginning special educators. These topics are critical to the success of beginning SETs and include:

- IEP development and management,

- data collection,
- facilitation of IEP meetings,
- modifying instruction and assessments, and
- developing collaborative partnerships with general educators.

As beginning SETs self-report the critical nature that support from a mentor provides, the division should ensure that the mentor and the mentoring program being utilized is appropriate for the specific needs of special educators.

Recommendation 4: Assess structures and systems in place for providing supports to SETs in all schools in GCPS to ensure consistency and maximization of resources that positively impact retention.

As previously stated, there are examples of multiple supports that SETs throughout the school division report as helpful to their work. Many of the supports experienced by beginning SETs can be categorized as structures. Spillane (2005) defines structures as an organizational tool or routine which enables and constrains leadership interaction with followers (p. 147). Structures implemented in GCPS by administrators enabled SETs to perform their work and facilitated collaboration with colleagues. It is important to note however, that structures provided to SETs were inconsistent from school to school. The lack of structures supporting SETs and collaboration had tremendous effects on special educators' abilities to complete required tasks effectively, as well as impacts on SETs' self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and program stability and quality.

The recommendation to perform an assessment at each site in GCPS is meant to provide administrators with an opportunity to thoroughly examine the structures in place within their school that support SETs, SWD, and collaboration opportunities for all

teachers. This assessment would also provide principals with a chance to reflect upon their own vision, values, and expectations related to special education and determine if their school structures align with those beliefs. The structure that has perhaps the greatest effect upon all faculty and staff relates to the master schedule. Schedules should be thoroughly reviewed in order to identify opportunities for common planning time among collaborative pairings of SETs and GETs and grade level or content teams. Additional structures to assess include the following:

- collaborative assignments of SETs/GETs,
- class assignments for student placement,
- caseload assignments,
- additional responsibilities of beginning SETs such as duty periods, and
- release time for peer observations of mentoring pairs.

This recommendation aligns with literature related to teacher concerns, attrition, and the specific needs of beginning SETs. It allows for school leaders to reflect upon not only the structures they provide, but the opportunity to make modifications in order to positively influence teacher retention and indirectly, student achievement.

Summary

This chapter discussed four themes and four recommendations for GCPS based on the findings from this study. Themes and recommendations reflected the literature related to teacher concerns, the needs of beginning special educators, and principal leadership practices. Recommendations were developed to positively influence SET retention in GCPS and to specifically address SETs' increased stress related to task concerns involving IEP compliance and collaboration with GETs. Although the special education attrition rate in GCPS is consistent with national averages for GETs, the quality of instruction and growth of students with disabilities comes into question when half of

the special education teaching force in GCPS has less than five years of experience and multiple teachers are underqualified based on emergency certifications and provisional licensure. Enabling novice special educators to develop proficiency as they gain experience through retention should positively influence the quality of services provided to our students with disabilities and their performance outcomes. The final chapter of this capstone project will include action communication products utilized to provide GCPS division leadership with this study's findings and recommendations.

Chapter 6: Action Communications

This chapter will include action communications utilized to share the results of this capstone project with the Greene County Public Schools leadership team. These communication products include a memo for school division leaders and a PowerPoint presentation which summarizes data, findings, and recommendations for improved practices in GCPS. Both the briefing memo and the PowerPoint will outline the problem of practice and research questions which guided this study. The presentation will be delivered to building administrators and division level leadership in a face to face format in order to provide in depth commentary and understanding as well as providing an opportunity for a question and answer session.

Action Communication Product One: Memo to Division Leadership Team

Intended audience. The briefing memo will be shared with members of the division leadership team in advance of a district leadership meeting. District leadership members include all building level principals and central office directors including the superintendent, assistant superintendent, the director of special services, the director of teaching and learning, and the director of human resources.

Purpose. The briefing memo describes the study design and research questions and summarizes the findings and recommendations for GCPS. It is meant to serve as a supplement to the PowerPoint presentation which will be described in the next section.

Format. The briefing memo will be shared in hard copy and electronic forms. The hard copy will be sent to division leaders via interoffice mail in advance of the

leadership meeting. The electronic copy will be shared via Google team drive which is utilized for all agendas and related materials for each leadership meeting.

Briefing for GCPS Leadership Team

Subject: The Principal's Role in Addressing the Concerns of Beginning Special Educators and Enhancing Retention, Findings and Recommendations based on research conducted in the spring of 2019.

Problem of Practice: GCPS enrolls approximately 3,200 students with 13.6% of the population identified as students with disabilities. Across all schools, Greene employs 254 faculty members including 40 special education teachers. For the 2017-2018 school year, GCPS reported a 15% turnover rate for special education teachers. Based on research, it takes three to five years for beginning teachers to become proficient, thus it is incumbent on school leaders to do everything possible to support and retain teachers to ensure students are taught by educators who have learned to teach well. As retained teachers gain proficiency through practice, the quality of services for SWD and student achievement become more likely to improve.

Content Assessment	All Students in GCPS	Students with Disabilities in GCPS	Minimum State Benchmark
Reading	72%	29%	75%
Math	73%	31%	70%
History	77%	33%	70%
Science	78%	38%	70%
Writing	72%	24%	75%
Average	74%	31%	72%

Accreditation data based on VDOE School Quality Report for 2017-2018 school year

Data Collection: A mixed-methods study design was utilized for this capstone project which included a quantitative survey and in-depth, qualitative interviews. An electronic survey was shared with all full time teaching staff excluding WMMS in which 132 responses were received. In phase II, interviews were conducted via a third-party researcher with 6 current probationary special education teachers. Also 3 probationary special education teachers formerly employed by GCPS were interviewed by the researcher.

Key Concept: A developmental stage theory laid the foundation for this study's research design.

Pre-Teaching Stage	Survival Stage	Teaching Tasks Stage	Impact Stage
<i>Non-concern</i>	<i>Concerns for self</i>	<i>Concerns for tasks</i>	<i>Concerns for students</i>
Anticipation	Adequacy of self as teacher	Management of students	Student progress
Apprehension	Adequacy of subject matter knowledge	Management of time	Ability to understand pupils' academic, behavioral, & social needs

Class control/discipline	Management of resources	Impact of teacher on student learning/growth
Evaluative opinions of others		

A Summary of Fuller's Modified Developmental Model of Teachers' Concerns (Fuller & Brown, 1975)

Researcher Hypothesis: As researcher, I hypothesized that the root cause for special education teacher attrition in GCPS is unaddressed or under-addressed concerns of beginning teachers.

Specific Concerns of Special educators in GCPS: Findings within this study demonstrate that beginning special educators and general educators have very similar concerns. What differentiates the concerns of SETs from concerns of GETs relate directly to the additional responsibilities that special educators' roles entail. Types of concerns reported by special education teachers in GCPS that cause the most additional stress to their daily work include:

- legal compliance related to IEPs,
- being accepted in collaborative settings by general education teachers,
- professional knowledge of administrators related to special education,
- being assigned to multiple collaborative teachers and subjects,
- managing time between instruction and case management,
- managing students on caseloads that are not taught directly by the special education teacher, and
- managing student behavior.

Supportive Principal Practices in GCPS: Through this study, it was found that there are many practices in place by current and former principals that special education teachers found supportive to their roles. These practices included:

- constructive feedback from principals on instruction,
- IEP oversight and active participation in IEP meetings,
- having administrators that were visible and available to respond to questions,
- providing support and modeling related to student discipline and classroom management,
- providing resources for instruction,
- supporting the work of SETs in IEP meetings,
- having administrators that had an understanding of special education laws, policies, requirements, and procedures,
- assignment of a mentor certified in special education,
- structures for collaboration such as common planning time, and
- manageable caseload and class assignments.

Special Education Teachers' Intentions for Retention: All nine participants in phase II interviews stated that they had intentions of remaining in education but not necessarily special education or GCPS. Three of the six confirmed their intention to remain in GCPS in their current school while one was uncertain of her intentions. All three participants

that were formerly employed in GCPS did not leave due to working conditions or lack of support from building administration. This finding contradicts the researcher's hypothesis. The following tables detail each special educators' intentions for retention and their reasons supporting their decisions.

Current SETs' intention to remain in GCPS and in SPED and the stated reasons supporting their intention

SET	Intent to Remain in GCPS	Intent to Remain in Special Education	Reasons Supporting Decision
P1a	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Feels welcomed and supported ●Moved family to Greene County
P2b	No	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Distance from home ●Feels confident in knowledge gained in GCPS to change schools
P4d	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Supportive and ethical practices of administrators play role in retention
P5e	Uncertain	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Distance from home ●Positive community & supportive administrators ●Feels valued and respected
P2f	No	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plans to work in education in hospital setting ●Appreciates willingness of administrators to move to SPED to support future plan/goal
P2g	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Feels trusted and supported ●Principal does not overemphasize SOL results or cause additional stress

Former SETs Identified Reasons for Departure & Suggestions for Improvement for Administrators

SET	Reasons for Departure from GCPS	Suggestions for Principal Improvement
Former P2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Got married ●Moved closer to family ●Increased pay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Increase frequency of observations and feedback
Former P3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Work closer to home ●Work in same school district as husband and children ●Increased pay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Hold same expectations and accountability for all teachers
Former P4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Had a child ●Moved closer to family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Increase feedback specific to providing specialized instruction

Recommendations: Four recommendations were made based on the findings and literature base.

Recommendation 1: Provide professional development opportunities for principals in order to increase their knowledge and understanding of special education and students with disabilities.

Recommendation 2: Provide all educators in GCPS with documentation and other forms of communication which explicitly identify expectations related to inclusion and collaboration.

Recommendation 3: Create a mentoring program that is specific to the needs of special educators.

Recommendation 4: Assess structures and systems in place for providing supports to SETs in all schools in GCPS to ensure consistency and maximization of resources that positively impact retention.

Action Communication Product Two: PowerPoint Presentation

Intended Audience. The PowerPoint presentation will be shared with members of the division leadership team at a district leadership meeting. District leadership members include all building level principals and central office directors including the superintendent, assistant superintendent, the director of special services, the director of teaching and learning, and the director of human resources.

Purpose. The PowerPoint presentation will be utilized to provide visuals related to the study design and research questions for my capstone project. It summarizes the findings and recommendations for GCPS school leaders to consider related to practices that affect beginning special educators.

Format. An electronic copy of the presentation will be shared via Google team drive which is utilized for all agendas and related materials for each leadership meeting. The presentation will allow for face to face delivery of the material related to my study and provide division leaders an opportunity to pose questions to the researcher.

Action Communication Product Two: PowerPoint Presentation

The Principal's Role in Addressing Concerns of Beginning Special
Education Teachers and Enhancing Retention

A Review of the Research & Recommendations for GCPS Leadership

Eileen M. Oliver-Eggert

July 5, 2019



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Overview of Capstone Project

- Problem of Practice
- Purpose of Study
- Research Questions
- Key Concepts
- Conceptual Framework

- Research Questions & Findings
- Recommendations

Problem of Practice

- GCPS reported 15% turnover rate for SETs for 2017-2018 school year
- 3-5 years to attain instructional proficiency
- Leaders must do all they can to increase retention of SETs so they have time to gain instructional proficiency
- With increased proficiency of SETs, GCPS will be enabled to positively impact the quality of services & outcomes for SWD

Content Assessment	All Students in GCPS	Students with Disabilities in GCPS	Minimum State Benchmark
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Math	73%	31%	70%
History	77%	33%	70%
Science	78%	38%	70%
Writing	72%	24%	75%
Average	74%	31%	72%

Table 1. Accreditation data based on VDOE School Quality Report for 2017-2018 school year

Purpose of Study

- Identify the specific concerns of beginning SETs in Greene County Schools
- Examine SETs' perceptions of principal practices they identify as being supportive of their needs
- Identify leadership practices which influence special educators' retention

Research Questions

- **Research Question 1:** What do special education teachers (SETs) in GCPS identify as concerns and how do these compare to general education teachers' (GETs) concerns?
- **Research Question 2:** To what extent do SETs in GCPS feel supported by their principals?
 - a) What specific principal practices do SETs identify as supportive?
 - b) What concerns do SETs identify as being met by their principal's practices?
- **Research Question 3:** What leadership practices influence SE teachers' decisions to remain in their current school, GCPS, or the profession?

5



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Key Concepts

Pre-Teaching Stage	Survival Stage	Teaching Tasks Stage	Impact Stage
Non-concern	Concerns for self	Concerns for tasks	Concerns for students
Anticipation	Adequacy of self as teach	Management of students	Student progress
Apprehension	Adequacy of subject matter knowledge	Management of time	Ability to understand pupils' academic, behavioral, & social needs
	Class control/discipline	Management of resources	Impact of teacher on student learning/growth
	Evaluative opinions of others		

A Summary of Fuller's Modified Developmental Model of Teachers' Concerns (Fuller & Brown, 1975)

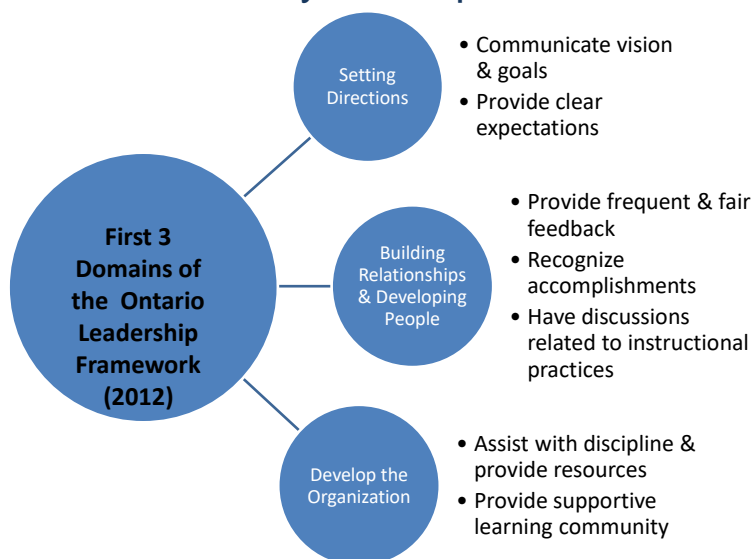
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Key Concepts



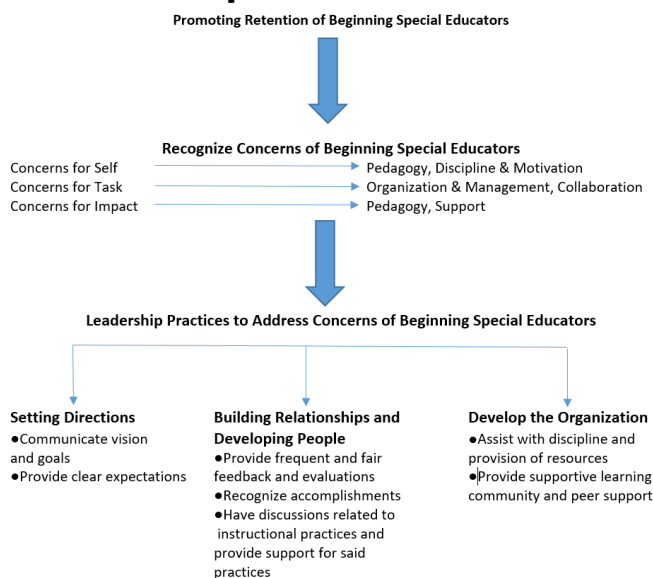
Leithwood, (2012); Billingsley, (2005)

7

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Conceptual Framework



8

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Study Design

- Mixed Methods
 - **Phase I:** Quantitative Survey adapted from Michael Fimian's Teacher Stress Inventory (Billingsley & Tomchin, 1992; Billingsley, 2004; Billingsley, 2005)
 - **Phase II:** Qualitative Semi-Structured Interviews with Probes utilizing a 3rd party interviewer for current employees
- Setting: GCPS (5 of 6 schools)
- Participants: Current & Former SETs & GETs
 - 132/187 participated in survey
 - 6 Current probationary SETs
 - 3 Former probationary SETs

9



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Top 3 Pedagogical Concerns for SETs and GETs

Attribute	All	GETs	SETs
I am able to...			
...provide supports to students with individual needs while meeting the demands of the general education curriculum	3.12	3.29	2.59
...provide assistance to students with complex needs	2.90	3.03	2.48
...address individual student's needs	2.60	2.64	2.48

As it relates to pedagogy, all GETs and SETs' greatest concerns relate to serving SWD.

10



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Top Concerns Related to Organization & Management

Attribute	All	GETs	SETs
I have...			
...adequate time to prepare for my lessons/responsibilities	3.30	3.29	3.30
...time for administrative paperwork in my job	3.01	3.04	2.85
...manageable caseload/class size	2.54	2.69	2.04
...ability to meet demands required by IEPs	2.45	2.44	2.42
...the ability to fulfill legal requirements related to students with disabilities	2.34	2.31	2.46

The utilization of time to manage instructional and administrative tasks is of high concern for both SETs and GETs while legal compliance with IEPs differentiates the two classifications of educators based on level of concern/stress.

11



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Top Collaboration Concerns

Attribute	All	GETs	SETs
I have...			
...time to collaborate with my general education/special education peers	2.77	2.74	2.89
...parents that support my work with students	2.44	2.39	2.59

Collaboration is the only category within the survey in which SETs reported greater levels of stress than that of GETs.

12



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Top Discipline & Motivation Concerns

Attribute	All	GETs	SETs
I feel that my classroom...			
...instruction is impacted by discipline problems	3.26	3.38	3.19
...instruction is affected by students who are poorly motivated	3.00	3.11	2.63
...would be more effective if some students tried harder	2.85	2.94	2.56

Concerns related to student discipline & motivation were reported by both SETs & GETs in GCPS as the most concerning or stressful to their work.

13

Top Support Concerns

Attribute	All	GETs	SETs
I feel...			
...I have control over decisions made about my classroom/school matters	2.29	2.42	1.89
...I have access to needed resources/materials related to my classroom	2.07	2.16	1.78
...supported by administration	1.87	1.93	1.67
...connected to colleagues on the job	1.78	1.82	1.67
...I have opportunities for professional development related to my work	1.77	1.80	1.70

Overall, all teachers in GCPS feel supported by their administrators. Based on the survey data, the least amount of reported stress fell within the category of support.

14

Specific Concerns of SETs in GCPS

- legal compliance related to IEPs,
- being accepted in collaborative settings by general education teachers,
- professional knowledge of administrators related to SPED,
- being assigned to multiple collaborative teachers and subjects,
- managing time between instruction and case management,
- managing students on caseloads that are not taught directly by the SET, and
- managing student behavior.

15



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GCPS Principal Practices Meeting Needs of SETs

SET Concerns Related to Self

- Provide timely feedback related to instruction
- Provide resources for instruction
- Provide opportunities for professional development
- Provide support with student discipline

SET Concerns Related to Task

- Assign a manageable caseload
- Attend & participate in IEP meetings
- Provide support to SETs with parents
- Provide IEP oversight in advance of meetings
- Serve as intermediary between SET & CO

SET Concerns Related to Impact

- Provide a SPED mentor
- Provide common planning time and/or teaming
- Consider collaborative assignments
- Be available & respond to questions/needs
- Listen to feedback from SETs on caseloads and collaborative pairings

16



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Current SETs' Intention for Retention

SET	Intent to Remain in GCPS	Intent to Remain in Special Education	Reasons Supporting Decision
P1a	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Feels welcomed and supported ●Moved family to Greene County
P2b	No	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Distance from home ●Feels confident in knowledge gained in GCPS to change schools
P4d	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Supportive and ethical practices of administrators play role in retention
P5e	Uncertain	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Distance from home ●Positive community & supportive administrators
P2f	No	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Feels valued and respected Plans to work in education in alternate setting ●Appreciates willingness of administrators to move to SPED to support future plan/goal
P2g	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Feels trusted and supported ●Principal does not overemphasize SOL results or cause additional stress

17



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Former SETs' Reasons for Attrition & Suggestions for Improvement

SET	Reasons for Departure from GCPS	Suggestions for Principal Improvement
Former P2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Got married ●Moved closer to family ●Increased pay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Increase frequency of observations and feedback
Former P3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Work closer to home ●Work in same school district as husband and children ●Increased pay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Hold same expectations and accountability for all teachers
Former P4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Had a child ●Moved closer to family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Increase feedback specific to providing specialized instruction

All 3 SETs interviewed departed for familial and monetary reasons. None left due to lack of support from administration.

18



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Recommendation 1

Provide professional development opportunities for principals in order to increase their knowledge and understanding of special education and students with disabilities.

- Encourage principal participation in PD related to special education
- Record trainings offered to SETs for virtual learning for administrators
- Provide summaries of VDOE updates related to changes in SPED laws, policies, etc.
- Increase communication from special services related to concerns with beginning SETs and IEPs

Recommendation 2

Provide all educators in GCPS with documentation and other forms of communication which explicitly identify expectations related to inclusion and collaboration.

- Outcomes for SWD lag behind all other categories of students
- SETs cannot address achievement gaps in isolation
- Responsibility for addressing achievement concerns of our most vulnerable students must be addressed by entire faculty

Recommendation 3

Create a mentoring program that is specific to the needs of special educators.

- Specialized role requires specialized mentoring
- Program considerations should include:
 - IEP development and management
 - Data collection
 - Facilitation of IEP meetings
 - Modifying instruction and assessment
 - Developing collaborative partnerships with GETs

21



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Recommendation 4

Assess structures and systems in place for providing supports to SETs in all schools in GCPS to ensure consistency and maximization of resources that positively impact retention.

- Provide administrators with an opportunity to thoroughly examine the structures in place within their school that support SETs, SWD, and collaboration opportunities for all teachers
- Structures to assess would include:
 - Master schedule
 - Collaborative assignments of SETs/GETs
 - Class assignments for student placement
 - Caseload assignments
 - Additional responsibilities of SETs (ie. Duty periods)
 - Release time for peer observations of mentoring pairs

22



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Questions?

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Appendices

Appendix A: Electronic Survey Questions

Teacher Concerns Inventory

Adapted From: Fimian, M. J. (1988). *Teachers Concerns Inventory*. Retrieved from: <http://www.instructionaltech.net/tsi/>; Billingsley (2005)

Please take a moment to complete this survey. The answers that you provide will inform a research study examining teacher concerns, principal leadership, and retention. Your participation is voluntary and information will be anonymous and confidential. Your privacy will be protected and your name will not be recorded or associated with any of your responses.

The following is a list of possible concerns or stressors applicable to teachers. Please identify the factors that cause stress in your present position. Read each statement carefully and decide if you ever feel this way about your job. Then, indicate how strong the feeling is when you experience it by selecting the appropriate rating on the five-point scale. If you have not experienced this feeling, or if the item is inappropriate for your position, select number “1” (not a concern; no stress). The rating scale is shown below.

	1	2	3	4	5
LEVEL OF CONCERN & STRESS	not a concern, no stress,	slight concern, mild stress,	moderate concern, medium stress	considerable concern, great stress	extreme concern, major stress

Pedagogy					
<i>I am able to...</i>					
1. ...accurately assess student learning.	1	2	3	4	5
2. ...evaluate student progress.	1	2	3	4	5
3. ...address individual student's needs.	1	2	3	4	5
4. ...develop effective lesson plans.	1	2	3	4	5
5. ...utilize effective teaching methods.	1	2	3	4	5
6. ...understand the curriculum I am required to teach.	1	2	3	4	5
7. ...access materials and resources for instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
8. ...provide assistance to students with complex needs.	1	2	3	4	5

9. ...provide support to students with individual needs while meeting the demands of the general education curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5
Organization and Management					
<i>I have...</i>					
10. ...adequate time to prepare for my lessons/responsibilities.					
11. ...clear expectations from school leadership of my role in collaborative classes.	1	2	3	4	5
12. ...clear expectations from district leadership of my role in collaborative classes.	1	2	3	4	5
13. ...a manageable caseload/class size.	1	2	3	4	5
14. ...the ability to meet the demands required by IEPs.	1	2	3	4	5
15. ...time for administrative paperwork in my job.	1	2	3	4	5
16. ...the ability to fulfill legal requirements related to students with disabilities.	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
Collaboration					
<i>I have...</i>					
17. ...time to collaborate with my general education/special education peers.	1	2	3	4	5
18. ...peers that are interested in collaboration.	1	2	3	4	5
19. ...paraprofessionals that are effective in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
20. ...parents that support my work with students.	1	2	3	4	5
Discipline and Motivation					
<i>I feel that my classroom...</i>					
21. ...instruction is impacted by discipline problems.	1	2	3	4	5
22. ...would be more effective if some students tried harder.	1	2	3	4	5
23. ...instruction is affected by students who are poorly motivated.	1	2	3	4	5
24. ...authority is respected by pupils/administration.	1	2	3	4	5
Support					
<i>I feel...</i>					
25. ...supported by administration.	1	2	3	4	5
26. ...I have control over decisions made about classroom/school matters.	1	2	3	4	5

27. ...I am supported by my colleagues/mentor.	1	2	3	4	5
28. ...I have opportunities for professional development related to my work.	1	2	3	4	5
29. ...I have access to needed resources and materials in my classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
30. ...connected to colleagues on the job.	1	2	3	4	5
31. ...I understand the evaluation process.	1	2	3	4	5
32. ...I benefit from the evaluation process.	1	2	3	4	5

Demographic Variables

Number of years you have taught full time including current year: _____

What level students do you teach? (circle the rest of your answers)
Elementary Secondary

Which type of position do you hold?
Special Educator General Educator

Which type of contract do you hold?
Probationary Continuing Contract

Have you ever earned tenure in the Commonwealth of Virginia?
Yes No

Which type of license do you currently hold?
Provisional Professional

Appendix B: Sample Correspondence to GCPS Staff

Dear Colleague:

As you may know, I am the current principal of William Monroe Middle School and also a doctoral candidate in the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia. I am currently researching teacher retention as part of my capstone project. The purpose of this email is to invite you to participate in an electronic survey which is intended for use within my research study. Your participation is completely voluntary and would allow me to research concerns of teachers as they relate to your daily work.

The survey will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete and there is no compensation for completing the survey. All responses will be safely secured and destroyed upon completion of the capstone project. Your responses will be anonymous, therefore, your name will not be included within any reports, documents, or shared within the capstone project or related presentations. You may choose not to answer particular questions or you may discontinue at any time. Additionally, you may choose to withdraw your consent any time following the completion of the survey and I will discontinue use of your responses within my research.

Should you have any questions related to the survey or my research project, please feel free to contact me via email or by phone at (XXX)XXX-XXXX. The link to the survey is below. I greatly appreciate your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Eileen Oliver-Eggert

Appendix C: Interview Questions for Probationary Year 1 SPED Teachers

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today. I am conducting this interview on behalf of an independent researcher with ties to Greene County Public Schools. As a doctoral candidate, the researcher is examining the needs of beginning special educators and she will be using data from this interview in order to complete her capstone project.

I will be recording our conversation and the researcher will be utilizing a transcription service to transcribe our interview. She will utilize data from this interview and others in order to analyze teacher concerns and the supports principals provide novice special educators. Your responses will not be correlated with your identity and will not be included within the study. The researcher is hoping to gain a better understanding of what your experiences have been like, both good and bad, as a beginning teacher, so please feel free to be completely open and honest. There are no right or wrong answers to any of these questions, but it will be helpful if you can share specific examples whenever possible. If at any time you wish to end this interview, please just let me know. Do you have any questions before we begin? I am going to begin recording now.

1. How would you describe your experiences as a beginning special education teacher?
2. What would you identify as your top three concerns as a beginning special educator?
3. How would you describe your experiences with teachers as it relates to meeting your needs as a novice special educator?

Additional Probes:

- Were you assigned a mentor? If, so was that mentor a special educator?
- How many students are on your caseload? Do you consider this to be manageable? Why or why not?
- Can you describe any professional development experiences you have had this year which were specific to special education teachers such as collaboration expectations, development and implementation of IEPs, timelines and procedures for IEPs, etc.?

4. Could you please describe how your principal has provided support to you as a beginning special education teacher?

Additional Probes:

- Can you share any specific experiences you had with your administrator that were particularly encouraging or discouraging?
- Are you able to provide any examples that would demonstrate that your principal understands your role as a special educator?
- Can you describe any specific concerns related to your role as a special educator that your principal was able to address?
- How would you finish this sentence? It would have been better if my administrator ____.

5. Do you feel supported by your principal on a regular basis? In what ways?

Additional Probes:

- How often would you say you interact with your principal and what was the nature of those interactions?
- Do you perceive your principal as a resource for special education teachers? Why or why not?
- What affect has principal evaluation and/or feedback had on you as a professional thus far?
- How have these principal supports affected your practice or feelings about the teaching profession?

6. Looking forward, could you please share whether you're planning to continue working in the teaching profession?

Additional Probes:

- Are you planning to stay in the same school or district?
- Are you planning to remain in special education?

7. How, if at all, did the supports you received from your principal in your first year influence your decision to stay or leave?

8. Is there anything else that you would like to add or share related to your experiences as a special education teacher?

Additional probes for use as needed for any interview questions:

- “Would you explain further?”
- “Can you give me an example?”
- “Would you say more?”
- “Please describe what you mean.”
- “Do you have anything you would like to add?”
- “How is what you just shared different from the expectations you had prior to beginning your teaching career?”

We've come to the end of our interview. Thank you again for your willingness to participate and for sharing your experiences with me. I very much appreciate your time and your insights.

Appendix D: Interview Questions for Probationary Year 2-5 SPED Teachers

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today. I am conducting this interview on behalf of an independent researcher with ties to Greene County Public Schools. As a doctoral candidate, the researcher is examining the needs of beginning special educators and she will be using data from this interview in order to complete her capstone project.

I will be recording our conversation and the researcher will be utilizing a transcription service to transcribe our interview. She will utilize data from this interview and others in order to analyze teacher concerns and the supports principals provide novice special educators. Your responses will not be correlated with your identity and will not be included within the study. The researcher is hoping to gain a better understanding of what your experiences have been like, both good and bad, as a beginning teacher, so please feel free to be completely open and honest. There are no right or wrong answers to any of these questions, but it will be helpful if you can share specific examples whenever possible. If at any time you wish to end this interview, please just let me know. Do you have any questions before we begin? I am going to begin recording now.

1. How would you describe your experiences as a beginning special education teacher?
2. What would you identify as your top three concerns as a beginning special educator?

Additional Probes:

- How do these concerns differ from your first year teaching?
3. How would you describe your experiences with teachers as it relates to meeting your needs as a novice special educator?

Additional Probes:

- Were you assigned a mentor? If, so was that mentor a special educator? Do you still work closely with that mentor?
- How many students are on your caseload? Do you consider this to be manageable? Why or why not?

- Can you describe any professional development experiences you have received since your first year teaching which were specific to special education teachers such as collaboration expectations, development and implementation of IEPs, timelines and procedures for IEPs, etc.?
4. Could you please describe how your principal has provided support to you as a beginning special education teacher?

Additional Probes:

- Can you share any specific experiences you had with your administrator that were particularly encouraging or discouraging?
 - Are you able to provide any examples that would demonstrate that your principal understands your role as a special educator?
 - Can you describe any specific concerns related to your role as a special educator that your principal was able to address?
 - How would you finish this sentence? It would have been better if my administrator ____.
5. Do you feel supported by your principal on a regular basis? In what ways?

Additional Probes:

- How often would you say you interact with your principal and what was the nature of those interactions?
 - Do you perceive your principal as a resource for special education teachers? Why or why not?
 - What affect has principal evaluation and/or feedback had on you as a professional thus far?
 - How have these principal supports affected your practice or feelings about the teaching profession?
6. Looking forward, could you please share whether you're planning to continue working in the teaching profession?

Additional Probes:

- Are you planning to stay in the same school or district?
 - Are you planning to remain in special education?
7. How, if at all, did the supports you received from your principal in your first year influence your decision to stay or leave?

8. Is there anything else that you would like to add or share related to your experiences as a special education teacher?

Additional probes for use as needed for any interview questions:

- “Would you explain further?”
- “Can you give me an example?”
- “Would you say more?”
- “Please describe what you mean.”
- “Do you have anything you would like to add?”
- “How is what you just shared different from the expectations you had prior to beginning your teaching career?”

We’ve come to the end of our interview. Thank you again for your willingness to participate and for sharing your experiences with me. I very much appreciate your time and your insights.

Appendix E: Interview Questions for Former GCPS SETs

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today. As a doctoral candidate, I am researching the concerns of beginning special educators, principal leadership, and the impacts on teacher retention. I will be using data from this interview in order to complete my capstone project.

I will be recording our conversation however all of your responses will be kept confidential and your name and identifying information will not be included in the transcript. I will utilize data from this interview and others in order to analyze teacher concerns and the supports principals provide novice special educators. I am hoping to gain a better understanding of what your experiences have been like, both good and bad, as a beginning special education teacher, so please feel free to be completely open and honest. There are no right or wrong answers to any of these questions, but it will be helpful if you can share specific examples whenever possible. If at any time you wish to end this interview, please just let me know. You may pass on any question that does not apply to you or makes you feel uncomfortable, and you may discontinue your participation at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin? I am going to begin recording now.

1. How would you describe your experiences as a beginning special education teacher in Greene County Schools? How did your experience in Greene compare to your current job?
2. What would you identify as your top three concerns as a beginning special educator in GCPS? Do you share similar concerns in your current job?
3. How would you describe your experiences in GCPS with teachers, both Gen Ed and SPED, as it relates to meeting your needs as a novice special educator?

Additional Probes:

- Were you assigned a mentor? If, so was that mentor a special educator?
- Did you consider your average caseload size to be manageable? Why or why not?
- Can you describe any professional development experiences you had in Greene that were specific to special education teachers such as collaboration expectations, development and implementation of IEPs, timelines and procedures for IEPs, etc.?

4. Could you please describe how your principal provided support to you as a beginning special education teacher while in GCPS?

Additional Probes:

- Are you able to provide any examples that would demonstrate that your principal understands your role as a special educator?
- Can you describe any specific concerns related to your role as a special educator that your principal was able to address?
- How would you finish this sentence? It would have been better if my administrator ____.

5. Did you feel supported by your principal in GCPS on a regular basis? In what ways?

Additional Probes:

- How often would you say you interacted with your principal and what was the nature of those interactions?
- Do you perceive your principal as a resource for special education teachers? Why or why not?
- What affect did principal evaluation and/or feedback had on you as a professional in GCPS?
- How have these principal supports affected your practice or feelings about the teaching profession?

6. Following your departure from GCPS, have you continued to work in special education?

Additional Probes:

- Are you planning to stay in the same school or district?
- Are you planning to remain in special education?

7. Could you identify specific reasons for your departure from GCPS? What impact did your principal have on your decision to leave GCPS if any?

8. Is there anything else that you would like to add or share related to your experiences as a special education teacher either from Greene or another school division?

Additional probes for use as needed for any interview questions:

- “Would you explain further?”
- “Can you give me an example?”

- “Would you say more?”
- “Please describe what you mean.”
- “Do you have anything you would like to add?”
- “How is what you just shared different from the expectations you had prior to beginning your teaching career?”

We’ve come to the end of our interview. Thank you again for your willingness to participate and for sharing your experiences with me. I very much appreciate your time and your insights.

Appendix F: Approval Letter for Capstone Project from GCPS



Greene County Public Schools

P.O. Box 1140, 40 Celt Road
Stanardsville, Virginia 22973

Dr. Andrea Whitmarsh

Superintendent

Office: 434-939-9000

Fax: 434-985-4686

www.greencountyschools.com

Every Child · Every Chance · Every Day

April 13, 2018

University of Virginia IRB-SBS

Suite 500, Morton Bldg.,

One Morton Dr.

P.O. Box 800392

Charlottesville, VA 22908

University of Virginia IRB;

Eileen Oliver-Eggert has requested permission to collect research data from Greene County Public Schools (GCPS). Her research project, "The Principal's Role in Addressing Concerns of Beginning Special Educators and Enhancing Retention" has received conditional approval from the office of the Superintendent. Eileen has informed me of her research purposes and methodology related to her study. I am confident that she can ensure appropriate and ethical data collection and complete her capstone project satisfactorily. I encourage you to approve her capstone study.

I would be glad to answer any questions you may have at (434) 939-9000.

Sincerely,

Dr. Andrea Whitmarsh
Superintendent of Schools



Appendix G: Survey Responses Related to Pedagogy

Pedagogy

I am able to...	SPED Mean (SD)	GenEd Mean (SD)	All Teachers (SD)
...accurately assess student learning	1.70 (.76)	2.00 (.87)	1.93 (.84)
...evaluate student progress	1.93 (.81)	1.90 (.78)	1.91 (.79)
...address individual students' needs	2.48 (1.17)	2.64 (1.01)	2.60 (1.04)
...develop effective lesson plans	1.81 (.9)	1.92 (1.01)	1.89 (.98)
...utilize effective teaching methods	1.85 (1.15)	1.79 (.94)	1.799 (.99)
...understand curriculum I am required to teach	1.56 (.87)	1.36 (.54)	1.40 (.67)
...access materials & resources for instruction	1.85 (.93)	1.36 (.59)	1.97 (1.08)
...provide assistance to students with complex needs	2.48 (1.13)	2.00 (1.17)	2.90 (1.17)
...provide supports to students with individual needs while meeting the demands of the general education curriculum	2.59 (1.31)	3.39 (1.11)	3.12 (1.19)

Appendix H: Survey Responses Related to Organization & Management

Organization & Management

I have...	SPED Mean (SD)	GenEd Mean (SD)	All Teachers (SD)
...adequate time to prepare for my lessons/responsibilities	3.30 (1.12)	3.29 (1.27)	3.30 (1.24)
...clear expectations from school leadership of my role in collaborative classes	1.93 (.81)	1.97 (1.22)	1.95 (1.14)
...clear expectations from district leadership of my role in collaborative classes	2.15 (1.11)	1.98 (1.33)	2.01 (1.28)
...manageable caseload/class size	2.04 (1.10)	2.69 (1.24)	2.54 (1.24)
...ability to meet demands required by IEPs	2.42 (1.08)	2.44 (1.20)	2.45 (1.18)
...time for administrative paperwork in my job	2.85 (1.21)	3.04 (1.31)	3.01 (1.29)
...ability to fulfill legal requirements related to students with disabilities	2.46 (1.05)	2.31 (1.12)	2.34 (1.29)

Appendix I: Survey Responses Related to Collaboration

Collaboration

I have...	SPED Mean (SD)	GenEd Mean (SD)	All Teachers (SD)
...time to collaborate with my GenEd/SPED peers	2.89 (1.07)	2.74 (1.18)	2.77 (1.15)
...peers that are interested in collaboration	1.93 (1.02)	2.07 (1.09)	2.03 (1.07)
...paraprofessionals that are effective in the classroom	1.93 (1.02)	2.05 (1.17)	2.02 (1.13)
...parents that support my work with students	2.59 (1.23)	2.39 (1.09)	2.44 (1.12)

Appendix J: Survey Responses Related to Discipline & Motivation

Discipline & Motivation

I feel that my classroom...	SPED Mean (SD)	GenEd Mean (SD)	All Teachers (SD)
...instruction is impacted by discipline problems	3.19 (1.22)	3.28 (1.28)	3.26 (1.27)
...would be more effective if some students tried harder	2.56 (1.31)	2.94 (1.21)	2.85 (1.25)
...instruction is affected by students who are poorly motivated	2.63 (1.34)	3.11 (1.23)	3.00 (1.27)
...authority is respected by pupils	2.30 (1.24)	2.65 (1.29)	2.57 (1.29)
...authority is respected by administration	1.67 (.98)	2.08 (1.18)	1.98 (1.15)

Appendix K: Survey Responses Related to Support

Support

I feel...	SPED Mean (SD)	GenEd Mean (SD)	All Teachers (SD)
...supported by administration	1.67 (.9)	1.93 (1.17)	1.87 (1.12)
...I have control over decisions made about my classroom/school matters	1.89 (.96)	2.42 (1.21)	2.29 (1.17)
...I am supported by colleagues and/or mentor	1.33 (.61)	1.44 (.76)	1.41 (.73)
...I have opportunities for PD related to my classroom	1.70 (1.01)	1.80 (1.02)	1.77 (1.02)
...I have access to needed resources/ materials related to my classroom	1.78 (.83)	2.16 (1.06)	2.07 (1.02)
...connected to colleagues on the job	1.67 (.86)	1.82 (1.00)	1.78 (.97)
...I understand the evaluation process	1.59 (.78)	1.63 (.93)	1.62 (.90)
...I benefit from the evaluation process	1.74 (.75)	1.81 (1.00)	1.79 (.95)

Appendix L: GCPS Assessment Data for the Past Three Years

Assessment	Reading	Writing	Math	Science	History
ALL Students 2015-2016	75%	76%	75%	81%	84%
SWD 2015-2016	31%	21%	35%	42%	53%
ALL Students 2016-2017	76%	74%	77%	85%	81%
SWD 2016-2017	31%	38%	35%	44%	43%
ALL Students 2017-2018	73%	73%	73%	73%	77%
SWD 2017-2018	29%(-44)	24%(-49)	31%(-40)	38%(-35)	33%(-44)

Retrieved from: <http://schoolquality.virginia.gov/divisions/greene-county-public-schools>

Appendix M: Top Concerns of Current and Former SETs in GCPS

Probationary Status of Current Teacher	Top Concerns as Special Educator in GCPS
P1a	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. legal compliance related to IEPs 2. time constraints for IEP completion 3. acclimating to a new school climate/culture
P2b	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. legal compliance related to IEPs 2. balancing instruction and IEP completion 3. providing support to students in collaborative classrooms
P2f	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. managing paperwork 2. legal compliance 3. serving students on caseload that I do not teach
P2g	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. legal compliance related to IEPs 2. finding resources to support SPED students 3. becoming a proficient teacher
P4d	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. legal compliance 2. identifying appropriate services for students 3. shared goals/expectations of SPED students in collaborative classrooms
P5e	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SPED students passing SOLs 2. collaboration with GETs 3. increasing caseload size

Probationary Status of Former Teacher	Top Concerns as Special Educator in GCPS
Former P2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. balancing time for content and IEPs 2. ability to provide continuum of services 3. legal compliance related to IEPs
Former P3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. inequitable expectations of SPED students by GETs 2. communication with Central Office (CO) related to SPED students/SPED instruction 3. workload for SETs not understood by CO
Former P4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. lack of training for SPED responsibilities 2. assigned to too many collaborative teachers and content 3. managing student behavior