

Knowledge of Special Education Law Among Administrators in a Southern California

Special Education Local Plan Area

A Dissertation by

Suruchi Singh

Brandman University

Irvine, California

School of Education

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Committee in charge:

Myrna Rivera Coté, Ed.D.

Marilou Ryder, Ed.D.

Alan Enomoto, Ed.D.

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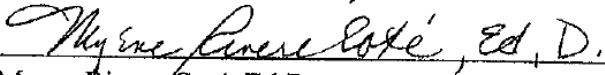
BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY

Chapman University System


Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership


The dissertation of Suruchi Singh is approved.

RESEARCH AND EXAMINING COMMITTEE


_____, Dissertation Chair
Myrna Rivera Coté, Ed.D.


_____, Committee Member
Marilou Ryder, Ed.D.


_____, Committee Member
Alan Enomoto, Ed.D.


_____, Associate Dean
Patricia Clark White

February 2015

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This dissertation is dedicated with humility and reverence to the Almighty God, whose benevolence, blessings, and guidance I seek incessantly to guide my thoughts and actions.

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge of Special Education Law Among Administrators in a Southern California Local Plan Area

by Suruchi Singh

The purpose of this study was (a) to identify the knowledge of special education law among administrators within a SELPA in California and (b) to identify the training needs of administrators; 65 administrators participated in this quantitative study, yielding a response rate of 84%. A survey created on the six principles of IDEA was used with administrators (principals and assistant principals) who serve approximately 42,000 students at 50 public schools. Analysis of data revealed that Hypothesis 1, which projected that 51% or more administrators would perceive their knowledge of special education law as average or better, was supported. Hypothesis 2, which predicted that 51% or more administrators would not be able to attain the 70% criterion of basic knowledge on the survey of knowledge of special education law, was supported by the findings of the study. Hypothesis 3, which anticipated a positive gap between perceived and actual knowledge of special education law for administrators, was supported. Hypothesis 4, which predicted a positive relationship between administrators' education level, position, years of experience as an administrator, and their actual knowledge of special education law, had partial support. A positive significant correlation was found between participants' current position and their total knowledge of special education law. Hypothesis 5, which anticipated a positive gap between the administrators' training needs and their actual assessed knowledge of special education law, was supported. Training areas of IDEA principles that require expanded emphasis include LRE, procedural safeguards, FAPE, evaluation, and parental participation. The results of this study will

guide administrators to proactively and eagerly embrace the need to expand their knowledge, experiences, and professional acuity in special education. As for future research, effective communication and collaboration between administrators and parents should be studied in light of its impact on litigation. Additionally, a similar study, using the same survey, should be conducted with district superintendents and the results studied in light of their respective special education programs. Lastly, the field may benefit from a Delphi study utilizing a panel of experts to study and support the need for administrative training in special education.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background.....	3
Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).....	3
Legal and Fiscal Challenges.....	5
Role of Administrators.....	7
Statement of the Research Problem.....	8
Purpose Statement.....	13
Research Questions and Hypotheses.....	13
Research Questions.....	13
Hypotheses.....	14
Significance of the Problem.....	15
Definitions of Terms.....	17
Delimitations.....	20
Organization of the Study.....	21
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	22
History of Special Education.....	22
Civil Rights and Early History.....	23
PL 94-142/EAHCA.....	25
Legal Mandates.....	27
Zero Reject.....	30
Nondiscriminatory Evaluation.....	31
Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).....	32
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).....	33
Procedural Safeguards/Due Process.....	35
Parental Participation.....	36
Additional Aspects of IDEA.....	37
Fiscal Challenges.....	40
Cost of Litigation.....	41
Due Process Filings.....	42
Role of Administrators.....	44
Challenges of the Role.....	44
Need for Professional Development.....	46
Summary.....	51
Synthesis Matrix.....	51
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY.....	52
Overview.....	52
Purpose Statement.....	52
Research Questions and Hypotheses.....	52
Research Design.....	56
Population.....	58
Sample.....	63
Instrumentation.....	63

Data Collection	66
Request for District Approval	66
Procedure for Data Collection	67
Data Analysis	67
Ethical Considerations	69
Limitations	69
Summary	70
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS.....	71
Purpose Statement.....	72
Research Questions and Hypotheses	72
Research Questions	72
Hypotheses	73
Methodology.....	74
Population and Sample	75
Presentation of the Data	75
Hypothesis 1.....	76
Hypothesis 2.....	78
Hypothesis 3.....	84
Hypothesis 4.....	85
Hypothesis 5.....	87
Summary	90
CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	93
Overview.....	93
Summary.....	93
Purpose Statement.....	95
Research Questions and Hypotheses	96
Research questions.....	96
Hypotheses.....	96
Methodology.....	98
Population and Sample	98
Major Findings.....	99
Hypothesis 1.....	99
Hypothesis 2.....	100
Hypothesis 3.....	101
Hypothesis 4.....	103
Hypothesis 5.....	103
Performance Based on the Six Principles of IDEA (2004).....	104
Zero reject.....	104
Nondiscriminatory evaluation.....	105
Free and appropriate public education (FAPE)	106
Least restrictive environment (LRE)	107
Procedural safeguards/due process.....	107
Parental participation	108
Comparative Analysis With Original Study	110

Conclusions.....	110
Implications for Action.....	112
Policy Focus.....	113
Practitioner Focus.....	114
Recommendations for Further Research.....	117
Concluding Remarks and Reflections.....	119
REFERENCES.....	122
APPENDICES.....	133

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. IDEA Principles Addressed and Key Concepts of Survey Questions.....	55
Table 2. Matrix Aligning Research Questions With Items on the Survey.....	56
Table 3. Service and Experience of Administrators	59
Table 4. Education Level of Administrators.....	60
Table 5. Ethnicity of Administrators	61
Table 6. Average Numbers of Students per Administrator.....	62
Table 7. Range of Correct Responses and Percentage Needed for Each Proficiency Level Descriptor	66
Table 8. Frequency Counts for Selected Variables Regarding Perceived Knowledge	76
Table 9. Descriptive Statistics for Additional Ratings of Self-Perceived Knowledge of Special Education Law	77
Table 10. Frequency Counts for Perception of Special Education Law and Procedures	78
Table 11. Percentage of Correct Answers for Individual Items on Survey Sorted by Highest Percentage.....	79
Table 12. Frequency Counts for Actual Knowledge of Special Education Law and Procedures	84
Table 13. Category Scores Based on Actual Knowledge Level	85
Table 14. Frequency Counts for Selected Variables.....	86
Table 15. Spearman Correlations for Selected Variables With Total Actual Knowledge	87
Table 16. Descriptive Statistics for the Idea Principle Knowledge Scores.....	88
Table 17. Frequency Counts for Scoring of Knowledge for the IDEA Principles	89
Table 18. Comparative Analysis of Relevant Results Between Overturf's Study and the Researcher's Study.....	110

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

There is a higher court than courts of justice and that is the court of conscience. It supersedes all other courts.

—Mahatma Gandhi

Administrators' leadership relevant to all programs within a school district, inclusive of special education, is considered a key variable of effective schools. Their role is critical for securing improved outcomes for students with disabilities, which can be achieved through an administrator's comprehensive knowledge of special education policy, procedures, laws, and practice (Cooner, Tochtermann, & Garrison-Wade, 2005). While general education and special education are the conjoined responsibilities of an administrator, the task of administering and supervising special education can be sometimes daunting. Boscardin, Kealy, and Mainzer (2010) identified administration in school districts as being situated at the intersection of three disciplines: special education, general education, and educational administration. While they found that administrators must be proficient in all three areas, they conceded that the field of administration needs a higher level of competency and expertise, in general, especially due to the special education responsibilities.

Statistics published by the National Center for Education Statistics (2013) reflect that the total number of elementary and secondary public school students in the nation rose to 49.5 million in 2010. The percentage of these students served by federally supported special education programs increased from approximately 8% in 1977 to 13% in 2010. With 13% of the students participating in special education programs nationwide, having a basic knowledge of special education becomes fundamental to an

administrator's ability to supervise special education programs (Jacobs, Tonnsen, & Baker, 2004).

Administrators, who are entrusted with the sometimes overwhelming task of administering and supervising special education programs at their campuses, must ensure compliance with all state and federal mandates, assure conformity with special education's ever-changing legal requirements, and secure successful outcomes for all students. Special education law may appear nebulous to administrators who have limited understanding and knowledge of this discipline; however, noncompliance with the regulations and mandates can result in calamitous consequences for the school districts. Administrators are repeatedly being compelled to make decisions about special education based on an evolving set of policies and procedures (Hirth & Valesky, 1989).

The role of an administrator does not require a law degree, yet it most definitely requires a basic knowledge of special education law due to the litigious landscape of special education. It is imperative that administrators have a clear understanding of federal laws to provide oversight and guidance to special education programs they supervise. The information on special education laws empowers them with the necessary tools to ensure compliance of all programs with the written regulations (Sage & Burello, 1994). Additionally, an administrator with limited knowledge in special education law is often viewed as an opponent, not as an advocate, for students with disabilities (Sage & Burello, 1994). For the purpose of this study, an administrator refers to principals and assistant principals serving public school districts.

It should be noted that school districts across the nation are facing the compelling reality of financial burden imposed by the cost of due process litigation. As posited by

Mueller (2009), school districts spend more than \$90 million a year in conflict resolution costs and face fiscal crises due to these conflicts. Resolving these disputes has proven to be extremely costly and adversarial. A recurrent theme in literature highlights that the field of special education is becoming rampant with due process filings. As concluded by Mueller (2009), due process hearing cases can cost as much as \$60,000 to \$100,000 if they reach the federal appeals court. This puts a financial drain on the limited budgets of school districts, and special education is stigmatized as an encroachment program with several unfunded mandates.

Goor, Schwenn, and Boyer (1997) surmised that having a basic knowledge of special education law is fundamental to an administrator's ability to supervise special education programs. Therefore, it is incumbent upon all administrators to have a working knowledge of special education policies, procedures, and overarching laws, since legal consequences may result when decisions are not in compliance with federal and state mandates. With respect to adhering to procedural safeguards and remaining compliant with legislative statutes, an administrator's role is crucial, prompting cardinal questions regarding the extent to which administrative credential programs are preparing their students, how much knowledge administrators truly have with respect to special education law, what their true professional development needs are, and whether or not any demographic factors influence the knowledge of special education laws.

Background

Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975, previously known as PL 94-142, was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

(IDEA) in 1990. As noted by R. Turnbull and Turnbull (2003), EAHCA was the congressional outcome of the total exclusion of some students with disabilities, the inadequate education of others, and the segregation of those in school from their nondisabled peers. IDEA was most recently reauthorized in 2004 and additional protections were added for both parents and school districts. Congress has clearly stated that the purpose of IDEA (1990) is to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free and appropriate public education, which includes special education and related services designed to meet the unique needs of the student. IDEA also ensures that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents are protected, assists states and school districts to provide for the education of all children with disabilities, and assesses and assures the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities (IDEA, 1990). Additionally IDEA is the federal funding mechanism that regulates disbursements to states based on their compliance with the law.

IDEA has been calibrated finely to ensure substantive rights for students with disabilities and their parents. The passage of IDEA is considered a culmination of the efforts of advocates, multiple stakeholders, and all proponents of providing equitable education for students with disabilities. Crockett and Kauffman (1999) identified IDEA as a federal mandate, which is a reflection of a contemporary American problem regarding the successful integration of historically excluded and disparate groups.

A study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education concluded that in 2003-2004, 96% of students with disabilities were being educated in regular education schools. A deduction that can be made from this statistic is that in order to effectively implement all legal statutes and mandates that govern special education programming,

administrators need to stay abreast with IDEA. This overarching law of special education has had a profound influence on what takes place in schools throughout the United States and has changed the roles and responsibilities of administrators in the educational process (Milligan, Neal, & Singleton, 2012). Much scholarly attention has been directed at administrators who have the responsibility of overseeing and implementing all aspects of special education law and compliance monitoring for both federal and state laws (Valesky & Hirth, 1992). As posited by Boscardin (2005), since the passage of the historic federal legislation, the role of an administrator has evolved from that of being a child advocate to being a compliance monitor and legal counsel. Indisputably clear from a review of IDEA is the fact that an understanding of special education law is fundamental in the effective rendering of an administrator's professional responsibilities. This notion is indubitably advanced by Davidson and Algozzine (2002) who concluded that a lack of special education knowledge in administrative decisions results in judicial consequences.

Legal and Fiscal Challenges

Legal compliance and an astute understanding of special education law are vital for school districts to meet their fiduciary responsibility, compliance mandates, and remain out of program improvement. Litigation in education is riddled with both financial and emotional costs. Special education is guided and navigated by the legal system, and as articulated by O'Dell (2003), this field faces the most litigation, which can be convoluted and expensive. Yell (1998) contended that constitutional law, statutory law, regulatory law, and case law prescribe special education authority. This, in turn, has led to special education being a results-oriented and compliance accountability model.

As noted by Zirkel (2012), the majority of the litigation under IDEA centers on the issues of Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), tuition reimbursement, and compensatory education. In addition, Zirkel (2013a) identified that special education advocacy groups and legal commentators dominated the discussions that occurred in Congress and in the courts regarding the obligations of school districts under IDEA. This information is significant for administrators, as they must view this from the context of school district resources, roles, and responsibilities.

Due process rights are safeguards that are cemented in legislation as a protection for the rights of students in special education and their parents. These due process rights ensure that in the event that there is disagreement between the school district and the parents, either party can initiate a due process hearing. This litigation costs school districts billions of dollars and has an inverse effect on the relationships between the home and school personnel as originally envisioned during the creation of IDEA (Mueller, 2009). Since the time that the option of litigation was guaranteed under IDEA, the special education field has seen a significant increase in the number of due process hearings between parents of children with disabilities and school districts. The California Department of Education (CDE) collects quarterly data on the number of filings through the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH). For the third quarter of 2012-2013 school year, there were 2,200 cases that were filed with OAH, in comparison to 2,558 cases being filed for the 2013-2014 third quarters. If the average cost of a due process hearing case is \$60,000.00 as researched by Mueller (2009), the financial drain on the already shrinking school district resources can be devastating.

The special education field has undergone dramatic changes with the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, and it continues to evolve as advocacy groups, attorneys, advocates, and parents advance concerns about the rights of students with disabilities. Accordingly, the roles and responsibilities of administrators have dramatically changed as they attempt to survive in the changing and litigious special education landscape. As postulated by Lashley (2007), an administrator's limited involvement in special education is no longer an option. Administrators need to be decisively trained not only to decipher and implement the law, but also to astutely comprehend the impact of court case rulings on policy and practices. Katsiyannis and Herbst (2003) corroborated that if parents are successful in pursuing their complaints against school districts, it entitles them to a wide array of remedies, which include, but are not limited to, compensatory education, legal fees, and reimbursement for residential treatment center placements and related services. These remedies have been widely viewed by different level courts as adequate means to safeguard the student's right to FAPE, thereby ensuring that a student with a disability has educational benefit from an education that is provided at no cost to the parent. In addition to these remedies, some courts have also awarded punitive monetary damages to parents under denial of FAPE. An administrator's role hence becomes vital and crucial in complying with the procedural safeguards and remaining compliant with the legislative statutes.

Role of Administrators

Pazey and Cole (2013) validated that over the span of the history of education in the United States, special education has emerged as one of the most litigious issues that school administrators confront in their daily practice. Administrators are the lead

individuals in ensuring that students' rights are protected and that educational opportunities are made available to all students. Administrators also make decisions that substantively impact the lives of students with disabilities and their families. Herein lays the importance of understanding the law and leading with ethics along with an emphasis on social justice. As espoused by Voltz and Collins (2010), administrators need training tools to develop the competencies in order to effectively fulfill their responsibilities. As posited by Boscardin et al. (2010), the preparation of administrators has been dominated by assumptions, resulting in gaps in knowledge of the discipline of special education, which, in turn, has led to insufficient preparation of administrators for today's needs. Boscardin (2007) concluded that administering and overseeing special education programs has evolved into a specialized field because of its complicated and comprehensive laws and the need for a distinct knowledge base in the discipline in conjunction with professional experiences that are essential to ensure compliance with the law and implementation of best practices.

A study conducted by Katsiyannis, Zhang, and Frye (2002) stressed the importance of administrators' adherence to procedural safeguards as outlined in IDEA as these constitute the most common complaints and any violations may constitute a denial of an appropriate education for students with disabilities. Yell, Katsiyannis, Ryan, and McDuffie (2009) recommended that with the increase in special education litigation, school districts need to be more vigilant and prepared.

Statement of the Research Problem

Congress has made an ongoing commitment to the legal rights of students with disabilities by expanding and broadening the scope of the original EAHCA law of 1975.

Along those lines, with improved identification tools, there has been an increase in the number of students identified for special education and related services. The CDE reported 705,308 special education students as of December 2013, which is an increase of 10,135 students in one year when compared to the CDE reporting of 695,173 students in December 2012. In light of this upsurge, the roles and responsibilities of administrators have changed drastically. Valesky and Hurth's (1992) study found that administrators have very limited knowledge regarding special education. Bateman and Bateman (2001) concurred that the responsibilities of the school administrator have increased acutely, further adding that almost no state mandates administrators to be trained in special education in order to receive their credentialing. Literature points toward the importance of studying the knowledge base of administrators relevant to special education to determine whether or not they possess the necessary legal knowledge and experience to create environments that foster success for students with disabilities (Crockett, 2002; Jacobs et al., 2004; Protz, 2005).

A study conducted by the Council for Exceptional Children (2012) confirmed that administrators find themselves in situations where they are asked to be arbitrators on matters that they are unfamiliar with (i.e., Individualized Education Plan [IEP] meetings, due process hearings and compliance mandates). Hence, there is an imperative need to determine the knowledge base of administrators relevant to special education law and subsequently train them to ensure accurate implementation of the laws. Additionally, in consideration of the rising identification rates of students with disabilities and limited funding at the state and federal levels, existing education systems are struggling to respond to the educational needs of these students in a comprehensive manner. The

successful preparation of administrators to supervise and administer special education for their schools thereby becomes the key factor in (a) ensuring a successful program for students, (b) effectively problem solving litigious situations, and (c) working effectively with all stakeholders. This preparation and leadership will not happen by accident or organically. An extensive review of the literature leads the researcher to believe that there needs to be a purposeful, organized, and systematic effort to enhance the capacity of administrators and empower them with the tools that will make them successful within the special education landscape.

As stated earlier, the responsibilities of administrators have evolved over recent years (Searby, 2010), and the administrative credential and preparatory programs may not have prepared new or veteran administrators for the role of administering programs for students with disabilities (McHatton, Boyer, Shaunessy, & Terry, 2010). Jacobson, Jacobson, and Hilton (2006) also called attention to the heightened challenges faced by administrators with reference to special education and the need for more intense training programs in this discipline. A recurrent theme in literature, as noted by Short (2004), reveals that if special education decisions made by administrators are not aligned with the overarching mandates, the resulting consequences can be extremely costly for school districts. Conjointly, if educational preparatory programs for aspiring and current administrators provide limited information regarding the complex and litigious field of special education, administrators and school districts will be left vulnerable in the midst of ensuing litigation.

A brief review of the administrative credential programs in the state of California reveals that there is no uniformity in the incorporation of special education topics within

the courses of study. Crockett (2002) lent support by reflecting that special education content is lacking in administrative preparatory programs. The policy standards for administrators as outlined on California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) website, and noted below, identify the key leadership areas that provide a roadmap to expected professional standards for administrators.

STANDARD 1: DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A SHARED VISION

Education leaders facilitate the development and implementation of a shared vision of learning and growth of all students. . . .

STANDARD 2: INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Education leaders shape a collaborative culture of teaching and learning informed by professional standards and focused on student and professional growth. . . .

STANDARD 3: MANAGEMENT AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Education leaders manage the organization to cultivate a safe and productive learning and working environment. . . .

STANDARD 4: FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Education leaders collaborate with families and other stakeholders to address diverse student and community interests and mobilize community resources. . . .

STANDARD 5: ETHICS AND INTEGRITY

Education leaders make decisions, model, and behave in ways that demonstrate professionalism, ethics, integrity, justice, and equity and hold staff to the same standard. . . .

STANDARD 6: EXTERNAL CONTEXT AND POLICY

Education leaders influence political, social, economic, legal and cultural contexts affecting education to improve education policies and practices. (CCTC, 2014, pp. 4-10)

The California school administrator standards take lead from and mirror the national Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards. These descriptors for practice emphasize the national and state focus on addressing the needs of “all students.” Consequently, this approach of addressing the needs of all students can be traced back to the obligation of administrators to be knowledgeable about students in special education and the laws that oversee the education for this group of students. The school administrator standards form the benchmarks for professional excellence, the yardstick for professional expectations, and are tied to licensure throughout the state of California.

Regardless of the format and curriculum of administrative preparation programs within the state, all graduates of these programs are expected to demonstrate a basic knowledge and application of special education law in their daily responsibilities, when they assume the role of an administrator. A failure to understand and implement special education laws by administrators can lead to expensive litigation and a fiduciary crisis for school districts.

An interesting point of view has been advanced by A. P. Turnbull and Turnbull (2003) who believed that the majority of the problems in special education arise from a failure of schools to adhere fully with the law. To comply with these rules and regulations that envelop the field of special education, it is fundamental for

administrators to have knowledge and understanding of these mandates. Since a lack of knowledge and not understanding the law is no excuse for violating it, an administrator's knowledge in special education law is a prerequisite for its proper implementation.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative study was to identify the knowledge of special education law among administrators within a Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) in California. Additionally, it was the purpose of this study to identify the training needs of administrators.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Through a nonexperimental survey, this study determined the level of special education law knowledge among administrators in a SELPA in California, identified their training needs, and determined if demographic factors influence special education law knowledge. This study's research questions along with the hypotheses are presented as follows:

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What do administrators in a SELPA in California perceive as their level of knowledge of special education law?
2. What percentage of administrators in a SELPA in California have the fundamental legal knowledge of special education law needed to comply with special education law as determined by 70% criterion for basic knowledge on a survey of the knowledge of special education law?

3. What is the difference between these administrators' perceived knowledge of special education law and their actual level of knowledge of special education law?
4. Is there a relationship between the administrators' education level, position, or years of experience as an administrator and their actual knowledge of special education law?
5. What are the training needs of administrators as determined by their actual assessed knowledge of special education law (performance below 70% criterion for basic knowledge)?

Hypotheses

The above questions correspond to the hypotheses that were tested during the course of this study. The null and alternative versions of the hypotheses are as follows:

- H1₀. Fifty-one percent or more administrators will perceive that their knowledge of special education law is less than average.
- H1_a. Fifty-one percent or more administrators will perceive that their knowledge of special education law is average or better.
- H2₀. Fifty-one percent or more administrators will be able to attain or surpass the 70% criterion of basic knowledge on the survey of knowledge of special education law.
- H2_a. Fifty-one percent or more administrators will not be able to attain the 70% criterion of basic knowledge on the survey of knowledge of special education law.
- H3₀. There will be no gap between perceived and actual knowledge of special education law for administrators.
- H3_a. There will be a positive gap between perceived and actual knowledge of special education law for administrators.

H4₀. There will be no relationship between these administrators' education level, position, or years of experience as an administrator and their actual knowledge of special education law.

H4_a. There will be a positive relationship between administrators' education level, position, or years of experience as an administrator and their actual knowledge of special education law.

H5₀. There will be no gap between the administrators' training needs and their actual assessed knowledge of special education law.

H5_a. There will be a positive gap between the administrators' training needs and their actual assessed knowledge of special education law.

Significance of the Problem

Training relative to knowledge and laws in special education is paramount to the efficient and effective operation of special education programs for administrators (Jacobs et al., 2004). Literature does not provide enough evidence to ascertain the basic knowledge of administrators relevant to special education; hence, this research studied administrators' knowledge of the operational procedures and the legal requirements in administering programs for students with disabilities.

Since several scholarly studies have identified the reciprocal relationship between litigation and legislation, this research studied the perceived and actual knowledge of administrators relevant to special education law. These data were used to identify their subsequent professional development needs. Pazez and Cole (2013) clearly articulated in their study that special education content and special education law have been ignored and overlooked in the context of administrator preparation programs and have also been

missing in discussions related to the development of administrator preparation programs that embrace a social justice model of leadership. Jacobs et al. (2004) supported the stance that it is important to determine administrators' knowledge of laws in special education, which, in turn, will lead to understanding the type of professional development training they need, thereby leading to the efficient and effective operation of special education programs. By clearly identifying the knowledge, understanding, and application of special education law among administrators, this study provided the guidance to institutions of higher learning dedicated to the preparation and training of future educational leaders as they led the way in embedding special education content into their course designs. This information will also assist the California Credentialing Board in embracing best practice by infusing skill acquisition, training, and competencies in special education as a prerequisite for administrative credentials and all preparatory programs. Boscardin (2007) identified special education as a very specialized field with detailed laws that requires a specific knowledge base coupled with extensive professional experiences within the discipline in order to ensure that best practices are being followed.

Individuals aspiring to embrace the field of K-12 administration may find this study beneficial as a guide to understanding special education law and programs, ultimately resulting in improved practice in the field. University credentialing and preparation programs may use the information derived from this study as a tool for reforming their special education coursework for school administrators. Additionally, this study will assist districts in refining, redefining, and informing their hiring practices by including knowledge of special education law as a prerequisite for position

consideration. This study provides suggestions for alternate/novel ways for school districts to administer and oversee their special education programs.

Definitions of Terms

Administrators. For the purpose of the study, the term administrators refers to principals and assistant principals in school districts. Administrators are educational leaders ensuring compliance with laws and successful educational outcomes for all students.

Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA (1992) went into effect on July 26, 1992. Among other things, it prohibits discrimination against qualified individuals with a disability because of that person's disability with respect to job application procedures, the hiring, advancement or discharge of employees, employee compensation, job training, and other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment.

Due process complaint. "A document filed by a parent or a public agency to initiate an impartial due process hearing on matters relating to the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of a child with a disability, or the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to the child" (IDEA, 2004).

Due process hearing. Under IDEA, a due process hearing is a process a parent can request if they are not satisfied with the procedures used or with the educational services provided to their child with a disability. It is a legal avenue that affords parents the right to challenge a school district (IDEA, 2004).

Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHC). Public Law 94-142 passed by Congress in 1975, requiring that a FAPE be provided to qualifying children with disabilities (IDEA, 2004).

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). The term “free appropriate public education” means special education and related services that (a) have been provided at public expense, under public and direction, and without charge; (b) meet the standards of the State educational agency; (c) include an appropriate preschool, elementary school, or secondary school education in the state involved; and (d) are provided in conformity with the individualized education program required under section 614(d). (Chambers, 2008, para. 2)

Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This is the federal law that that guarantees a FAPE for all eligible children with disabilities. It includes special education and related services and provides procedural safeguards for the students and their parents. The reauthorized IDEA was signed into law on December 3, 2004, by President George W. Bush. The final regulations were published on August 14, 2006 (CDE, 2014c).

Individualized Educational Program (IEP). “The term ‘individualized education program,’ refers to a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with IDEA” (Overturf, 2007, p. 14).

Least restrictive environment (LRE). To the maximum extent appropriate children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature and severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of

supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], n.d., § 300.114)

Local educational agency (LEA). The term “local educational agency” means a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a state for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a state, or for such combination of school districts or counties as are recognized in a state as an administrative agency for its public elementary schools or secondary schools. (USDE, n.d., § 300.28)

Professional development. A comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach designed to improve teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement (NCLB, 2002).

Related services. The term “related services” means transportation, and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services (including speech-language pathology and audiology services, interpreting services, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, including therapeutic recreation, social work services, school nurse services designed to enable a child with a disability to receive a free appropriate public education as described in the individualized education program of the child, counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling, orientation and mobility services, and medical services, except that such medical services shall be for diagnostic and evaluation purposes only) as may be required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special

education, and includes the early identification and assessment of disabling conditions in children. (USDE, n.d., § 300.34)

SELPA. In 1977, all school districts and county school offices were mandated to form consortiums in geographical regions of sufficient size and scope to provide for all special education service needs of children residing within the region boundaries. Each region, SELPA, developed a local plan describing how it would provide special education services (CDE, 2014a).

Special education. This refers to specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including—(a) instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings; (b) instruction in physical education. USDE, n.d., § 300.39)

Delimitations

1. The subjects in the study were limited to administrators in a selected SELPA.
2. Although there are several laws governing special education, this research used an instrument that studied administrators' knowledge only on IDEA.
3. The researcher assumed that the subjects complied with the directions of the survey regarding completing it independently; however, the researcher cannot make declaration that the subjects completed the survey without assistance from any live or printed source.
4. Some administrators may have had more exposure and experience with special education, which may influence a participant's knowledge of special education law.

Organization of the Study

The remainder of the study is organized into four chapters, references, and appendices. Chapter II presents the historical overview of special education, the legal mandates guiding special education, fiscal challenges related to special education, and the role of administrators in the field of special education. Chapter III explains the research design and methodology of the study. This chapter includes an explanation of the population, sample, and data gathering procedures as well as the procedures used to analyze the collected data. Chapter IV presents, analyzes, and provides a discussion of the findings of the study. Chapter V contains the summary, findings, conclusions, and recommendations for action and further research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical inception of special education, the legal framework that sustains special education, the fiscal challenges that school districts face because of special education, and how the legislation and the mandates impact administrators in relation to special education. This chapter begins with an analysis of how the civil rights movement and early regulatory laws led to the formalization of special education. It continues with a study of the legislation and legal mandates and their impact on special education. This chapter further explores the challenges that are associated with implementing the provisions of the laws governing special education. Lastly, this chapter discusses the role of school administrators and their professional development needs relevant to special education.

History of Special Education

Historically children in special education were referred to as undesirable, insane, subnormal, dumb, idiotic, feeble minded, and mentally defective. Students with disabilities were placed in mental asylums, and during the 1800s, college educated men, in their attempt to train these children, coined these terms to describe them (Osgood, 2008). Osgood (2008) believed that at the conclusion of World War II, residential institutions experienced rapid growth and increasing criticism as the American public gained greater exposure to the issues related to disabilities and the presence of disabled individuals in the midst of society.

Limited educational reform in the 19th and early 20th centuries universally excluded populations with handicapping conditions. If a person was identified as having

a cognitive or physical disability, he or she was most likely institutionalized. The early 20th century brought a group known as the progressives, who looked at people with disabilities as one part of its social reform agenda and made them a key target for progressive reform. However, despite the reform movement, individuals with disabilities continued to be institutionalized or kept away from the general population by confining them to the homes until the mid-1960s. The rationale for this movement was that by isolating disabled individuals, society was addressing the needs of those who were disabled and protecting those who were “normal” (Shuran & Roblyer, 2012).

Civil Rights and Early History

In addition to the civil rights movement, which inadvertently became the guiding light for advocates to obtain equity for individuals with disabilities (Huefner, 2006), society’s perspective toward individuals with disabilities underwent a shift and renewal during the 1940s and 1950s. Wounded, injured, and disabled veterans of World Wars I and II returned to their communities and were accepted and welcomed with respect and dignity. This was another historic societal landmark where disabilities became integrated into the conventional social fabric (Colarusso & O’Rourke, 2005).

Before the 1970s, there were no substantive federal laws that specifically protected the civil or constitutional rights of Americans with disabilities. Public policies were generally directed at veterans with disabilities returning home from two world wars. Addressing segregation and discrimination in America can also be traced back to the Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). As posited by Hulett (2009), this ruling secured the foundation of America’s future in education by establishing the equal protection clause of the Constitution of the United States as the

very foundation for educating the country. The 1960s civil rights movement led to a major shift in the advancement of the disability rights movement from one primarily focused on social and therapeutic services to one focused on political and civil rights (Aron & Loprest, 2012). The civil rights movement jolted the nation and individuals with disabilities were identified as being among those that had been discriminated against. Hence, the movement began to also secure equal rights and opportunities for individuals with disabilities who had been segregated and removed from accessing public education exclusively because of their disability.

Kemerer and Sansom (2009) postulated that the 1972 landmark decisions of *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* and *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* were the forerunners in the reform movement for special education programs in the District of Columbia and Pennsylvania public schools. Weber (2009) contended that these two 1972 monumental and seminal federal court decisions closed the inequity in parental involvement, representation, and decision making, while ensuring educational access for students with disabilities. Alexander and Alexander (2005) also lent support when they stated that with the ruling in these two cases, the foundation had been laid for future federal legislation to assure the rights of education for children with disabilities. *PARC* challenged and contested the law that denied education and services to students who had not attained a mental age of 5. These cases prompted monumental decisions whereby the District of Columbia and Pennsylvania public schools were court ordered to provide a free public education to all students, regardless of their mental, physical, and/or emotional disability. The *Mills* suit based its claim on the Fourteenth Amendment and

charged that students were improperly excluded from their education without due process of law (Yell, 2006). The ruling in this case was that since segregation was unconstitutional, the exclusion of students with disabilities had the same negative effects and was thereby determined to be unconstitutional as well. With the *PARC* and *Mills* rulings, a precedent was established across the country for similar suits, with 46 additional “right to education” cases filed on behalf of students with disabilities in 28 states (Yell, 2006). Despite these favorable rulings for students with disabilities, in 1974, over 1.75 million students with disabilities were still not provided any educational services and 2.5 million students were in programs that did not meet their needs (Kemerer & Sansom, 2009; Weber, 2009). As a result of the negative history of special education and the adverse experiences of individuals with disabilities, IDEA was adopted by Congress and became a congressionally mandated act in 1975.

PL 94-142/EAHCA

In an historic act, President Ford signed PL 94-142 into effect in November 1975. The purpose of this law was to enforce the equal rights protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Education for All Handicapped Children (EAHCA) was the amalgamation of the education bill of rights along with the promise of federal dollars. EAHCA was renamed in 1990 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). With the renaming of the law, some of the language also changed. Previously used EAHCA terminology “handicap” was replaced by “disability.” This was not only softer language but also the entire focus turned to people-first language. For example, instead of using the phraseology a “disabled student,” the new diction used the vocabulary “student with disabilities”; hence, making it a person-first language (Snow, 2013).

Additionally, autism and traumatic brain injury were added as eligible categories within the law as was transition planning for students who were 16 years of age and older. In 2004, IDEA was reenacted as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) when President Bush signed IDEIA into law. In August 2006, the U.S. Department of Education issued the regulations that would implement IDEIA 2004 (USDE, n.d.). The change in this terminology was a precursor to the student-centered and person-first philosophy of the law (IDEA, 2004).

Although amended and reauthorized, IDEA has been calibrated finely to ensure substantive rights for students with disabilities and their parents. IDEA is considered the federal blueprint for policy, law, and practice. The passage of this law is considered to be the door opener of public education for students with disabilities, a culmination of the efforts of advocates, multiple stakeholders, and all proponents of providing equitable education for students with disabilities. Before the passage of IDEA, in excess of one million children had no access to the public school system and were educated in state institutions with minimal to nonexistent educational or rehabilitation services. The 3.5 million children with disabilities, who were attending the public school system, faced segregation with no access to effective instruction (Aron & Loprest, 2012). Crockett and Kauffman (1999) identified IDEA as a challenging law and a difficult federal mandate. They further substantiated that this law is a reflection of a contemporary American problem that addresses the successful integration of historically excluded and disparate groups.

IDEA landmark legislation guaranteed and ensured a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to address the unique needs

of students with disabilities, secured due process rights, and mandated individualized educational programs (IEPs). It is highlighted as the legislation whose intent directly ensured meaningful educational opportunity for students with disabilities, while assuring them equity of access. It is the cornerstone that changed the face of education. Congress has since reauthorized and amended PL. 94-142 five times (Crockett & Kauffman, 1999; Kemerer & Sansom, 2009; Milligan et al., 2012). Since the passage of the memorable legislation in 1975, the landscape of special education has been defined and molded through litigation, legislation, and policies.

Legal Mandates

Law has always permeated the education of students with disabilities. At one point in the educational history of the United States, law excluded from school those students who were deemed either unable to learn or merely considered disturbing to others. Significant legal reform has led to augmentation and awareness of circumstances; however, several legal and philosophical controversies continue to permeate this legal debate relevant to the education of students with disabilities (Weber, 2009). Although not crafted within the context of public education in the United States, the Fifth and the Fourteenth Amendments in the U.S. Constitution have had a significant impact on public education with their equal protection and due process clauses (H. R. Turnbull, Stowe, & Huerta, 2007).

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, as amended on January 1, 2009, protects special education students. ADA ensures that students in special education are not discriminated against because of their disabilities. Failure to adhere to the accountabilities guaranteed through ADA could lead to lawsuits, which is considered a

violation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 mandates that no institution receiving federal monies is allowed to deny, exclude, or subject any special education student to discriminatory practices. This was the first time a federal law stated that excluding an individual with disabilities constituted discrimination. Since almost all public schools are recipients of federal funds, this law applies to them as well. The law entitles children to a public education comparable to that provided to children who do not have disabilities. Section 504 and the ADA define disability as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of an individual, a record of such impairment, or being regarded as having such an impairment. The ADA Amendments Act passed in 2008 and effective January 1, 2009, unequivocally disapproves the two major Supreme Court cases limiting the coverage of the ADA, and by extension, Section 504. This translates into the new law being momentous with respect to expanding the protections and coverage for elementary and secondary students (Weber, 2010). Whereas Section 504 helped establish greater access to an education by removing both intentional and unintentional barriers, a more proactive law protecting the educational rights of children with disabilities came 2 years later with the passage in 1975 of IDEA (Aron & Loprest, 2012).

As posited by Aron and Loprest (2012), IDEA established the right of children with disabilities to attend public schools, to receive services designed to meet their needs free of charge, and to the greatest extent possible, to receive instruction in regular education classrooms alongside nondisabled children. These nuclear and substantive rights at the heart of IDEA are embodied in the phrase “a free, appropriate, public education in the least restrictive environment.” Part A of the law contains the definitions

and general provisions. It also explains the purpose of the act. The law has a two-pronged eligibility standard—children must have at least one of a list of specific impairments, and they must need special education and related services by reason of such impairments. Part B of IDEA authorizes federal grants to states to cover some of the costs of special education services for preschool and school-aged children aged 3 to 21. Part C of IDEA was established in 1986 as a federal grant program that focuses on younger children with disabilities ranging from age birth through 2. The goal of Part C is to enhance and support the development of infants and toddlers with disabilities, reduce educational costs associated by minimizing the future need for special education, maximize the prospect of independent living in adulthood, and enhance the capacity of families to meet the needs of their children. Part C also provides federal monies to states to develop and administer a comprehensive statewide system of early intervention services for any child under age 3 who has a disability or significant delay in development (Aron & Loprest, 2012). Part D of the act includes the requirements in place for national activities, which are designed to improve the education of children with disabilities.

Yell et al. (2009) noted that the changes in IDEA 2004 and its 2006 regulations are considered sweeping and important. These changes, in conjunction with the existing mandates of IDEA, require that administrators know and understand their duties and obligations under the law. Cope-Kasten (2013) commented that IDEA outlines the 13 categories of disabilities for students and governs the education of roughly 6.5 million children, making it the preeminent special education law in the United States. There are six key principles of this law: zero reject, nondiscriminatory evaluation, FAPE, LRE,

procedural due process, and parent and student participation. IDEA, which is a comparatively young law, embodies some basic concepts.

Zero Reject

Zero reject, the first principle, is based on the premise that all children, irrespective of their disabling condition, must receive an appropriate education (Yell, 2006). There are no students who are uneducable, and hence, not entitled to IDEA's protection as perceived and stipulated by Congress. This mandate requires states and local education agencies (LEAs) to actively locate, identify, and evaluate all children with disabilities between the ages of 3 and 21. Yell (2006) interpreted the zero reject principle as having two criteria for students to meet eligibility: First that the student has a disability that is covered by IDEA, and second, that because of this disability the student is in need of special education and related services. Nothing is clearer in IDEA than the intent of Congress to include all children with disabilities in school and the requirement that all state agencies follow a policy of zero reject. IDEA obligates states to actively search and serve children with disabilities ages 3 to 21 and to ensure that special education and related services are offered and rendered. Irrespective of their physical location, children in state custody, prisons or juvenile justice, private schools, religious schools, and charter schools, are all required to receive services through the IDEA provisions. Local or state education agencies cannot terminate the educational program of a student with a disability who has been disciplined through exclusionary measures in excess of 10 days, even in the event of a violation of the rules surrounding guns, drugs, and serious bodily injury (H. R. Turnbull, 2009). Additionally, those students who present with behavioral challenges cannot be removed or excluded from public education

indefinitely. IDEA (2004) “prohibits exclusion, allows for discipline, addresses the disparate impact of exclusion on students with disabilities, and thereby carries out the zero reject principle” (Turnbull et al., 2007, p. 86).

Nondiscriminatory Evaluation

The second principle of IDEA is the protections afforded in evaluations (Yell, 2006). A state educational agency, other state agency, or local educational agency shall conduct a full and individual initial evaluation before the initial provision of special education and related services to a child with a disability is offered under this Subchapter 20 U.S.C. 1414(A). According to H. R. Turnbull et al. (2007), “IDEA requires a multidisciplinary, multifaceted, nonbiased evaluation of a child before classifying and providing special education for that child” (p. 120). The test materials used to assess students for their eligibility for special education must be nondiscriminatory and technically sound instruments and must be administered to the student in his or her native language or mode of communication. School districts have the requirement to assess students in all areas of suspected disability and must use a variety of assessment tools and strategies to ascertain the educational needs of a student and whether or not there is a disability. Yell, Katsiyannis, Ryan, McDuffie, and Mattocks (2008) identified two major purposes of an assessment: first, as a means of establishing a student’s eligibility for special education, and second, as the basis for establishing a student’s educational program. It is also important that all areas of need, academic and functional, are assessed during this process (Yell et al., 2008). IDEA (2004) specifies standards of nondiscriminatory evaluation of students relating to cultural bias, standards relating to the tests’ validity and administration, and standards related to the exclusionary criteria, which

specifies that the team may not determine that a student has a disability if it is determined there is/was a lack of instruction in reading, a lack of instruction in math, or limited English proficiency (H. R. Turnbull et al., 2007). Collectively this constitutes the nondiscriminatory evaluation principle under IDEA (2004).

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

The concept of FAPE is the third principle of IDEA and reflects the obligation of the local education agency to adapt education to the needs of students with disabilities (Yell, 2006). FAPE is considered to be the cornerstone of IDEA as documented in a student's IEP. FAPE, which includes the high-stakes remedies of tuition reimbursement and compensatory education, accounts for the vast majority of the litigation under IDEA (Zirkel, 2012). Educational services must be provided to the student free of charge at no cost to the parent. These services must be deemed appropriate on a case-by-case basis, meet the standards of the state educational agency, and conform to what is outlined in the student's IEP. FAPE specifically stipulates the following:

To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (IDEA, 2004, § 1412)

A student's special education services and placement must be a results-oriented program. To ensure educational benefit from special education and related services, it

becomes the obligation of IEP teams to “ensure that programs are (a) based on student needs, (b) meaningful and contain measurable annual goals, (c) grounded in scientifically based practices, and (d) measured on an ongoing basis to ensure that students make progress” (Yell, 2006, p. 243).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

The fourth principle of IDEA is that of the LRE, which mandates that children with disabilities must be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with children who do not have disabilities (Yell, 2006). The premise and guiding thought behind this principle is consideration of special education as a service and not a place where students are sent. IDEA (2004) requires that,

To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in the regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (§ 1412)

The LRE mandate hence provides a clear preference for educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms while allowing separate class services in certain instances when such a placement was deemed more effective or better met the student’s needs (Crockett & Kauffman, 1999). Both special educators and advocates have embraced LRE; however, controversy exists in its intent. Active debate persists whether or not excessive emphasis has been placed on educating students in general

education settings with less emphasis on student outcomes. McLeskey, Landers, Williamson, and Hoppey (2012) elaborated that beginning in 2006, reporting definitions were changed to reflect the extent to which students were educated in general education, which is one of the performance measures developed to measure school districts progress toward meeting the LRE provision of IDEA. Targets and corresponding benchmarks have been established for this performance measure in the State Performance Plan (SPP) for IDEA (2004). LRE, as defined in the SPP, is the amount of time students ages 6 to 22 receive their special education or services in settings apart from their nondisabled peers.

There are three measures relative to the LRE analysis:

1. Inside the regular class 80% or more of the day.
2. Inside the regular class less than 40% of the day.
3. In separate schools, residential facilities, or homebound/hospital placements (USDE, n.d.)

Through the LRE mandate, federal government required schools to establish a clear continuum of alternative placements and encouraged IEP teams to include students with disabilities in the general education environment. When considering a removal of a student with a disability from the general education setting because of the severity of the student's disability, it is the responsibility of the administrator to ensure that all supplementary services, accommodations, and modifications have been carefully considered in an attempt to include the student. This requirement forces the schools to judiciously and carefully decide a student's placement. The law establishes that schools must make significant efforts to ensure that a student is educated in the least restrictive environment possible (Rozalski, Stewart, & Miller, 2010).

Procedural Safeguards/Due Process

Procedural safeguards and due process right is the fifth principle of IDEA, which requires schools to provide parents with notices containing a full explanation of the procedural safeguards available under the IDEA and the IDEA regulations (Yell, 2006). A copy of this notice is provided to the parents once a year and also when the following occurs:

- The first time the parent or the school district asks for a special education evaluation.
- The parent asks for a copy of procedural safeguards.
- The first time in a school year when parents request a due process hearing or file a state complaint.
- A decision is made to take a disciplinary action against a child that constitutes a change in placement. (CDE, 2014b)

The procedural safeguards notice must include a full explanation of all of the following procedural safeguards available under the IDEA regulations:

- 34 CFR 300.148 Unilateral Placements
- 34 CFR 300.151 through 300.153 State Complaint Procedures
- 34 CFR 300.9, 34 CFR 300.300 Parental Consent
- 34 CFR 300.502 through 300.503 Independent Educational Evaluation and Prior Written Notice
- 34 CFR 300.505 through 300.518 Other procedural safeguards, mediation, resolution process, impartial due process hearing
- 34 CFR 300.530 through 300.536 Discipline procedures

- 34 CFR 300.610 through 300.625 Confidentiality of Information. (CDE, 2014b)

IDEA 2004 safeguards create checks and balances, establish shared parental and district decision making, and help guarantee that the student benefits from being in school. It also ensures that the school is providing the services and placements pursuant to the other principles (H. R. Turnbull, Wilcox, Turnbull, Sailor, & Wickham, 2001). These procedural safeguards ensure the due process rights of the students with disabilities and their parents and provide remedies for any violations of the same.

Parental Participation

The sixth principle of IDEA is parental participation rights, which includes notice and involvement in decisions about their child's education. School districts must take steps to ensure that one or both of the parents of a child with a disability are able to participate in their child's IEP team meeting (Yell, 2006). As clarified by Yell (2006), parental participation includes providing parents with sufficient information, in a timely manner, for them to fully participate in educational decisions relevant to their child. Parent involvement in special education is formally acknowledged through legislation. IDEA grants "rights to parents to participate in the processes whereby decisions are made about their children's education" (H. R. Turnbull et al., 2007, p. 115). Special education law explicitly recognizes the importance of parental participation in all educational decisions and accordingly students cannot be placed in special education without parental consent. In accordance with IDEA, parents are supposed to receive written notification of their rights and safeguards through the document titled "Parents' Rights and Procedural Safeguards." Federal law specifies that parents' rights documents must

contain certain information, including a detailed explanation of parents' and students' rights related to the evaluation and special education process (IDEA, 2004).

IDEA (2004) effectively made absolute the parent's right to refuse consent for initial special education services. Effective on December 31, 2008, the revised regulations provided parents with the unilateral right to revoke consent for special education services and eliminated the school district's option to challenge the matter via a due process hearing (USDE, n.d., §§ 300.9 & 300.300). Prior to the amendment to IDEA, school districts had the option to file for an impartial hearing to request that the hearing officer override the parents' lack of consent. To ensure parental participation, Section 1415 of IDEA mandates that school districts make available to parents all their child's information; secure their participation in all meetings regarding the child's identification, evaluation, and placement; provide written notice whenever the state proposes to take any action regarding the child's program or placement; and provide a copy of the procedural safeguards to all parents with a full explanation of those procedures. Section 1415 also makes available to parents administrative and judicial remedies if they disagree with the decisions of the school district with reference to their child, if they are unhappy with the results, or for some other reason are dissatisfied with the process.

Additional Aspects of IDEA

A review of IDEA's historical background is fundamental to examining the evolution of special education and its profound impact on policy, practice, and programs. In addition to the six principles defining IDEA, it is extremely important to recognize that it is also the federal funding mechanism that regulates disbursements to states based on

their compliance with the law. The requirement for school districts to provide equitable access and educational opportunities for students with disabilities was hence sealed in law and cemented through the equal protection clause of Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The six principles of IDEA are the foundational schema that should be guiding all decisions relevant to special education.

Pazey and Cole (2013) validated that over the span of the history of education in the United States, special education has emerged as one of the most litigious issues that school administrators confront in their daily practice. As noted by Zirkel (2012), the majority of the litigation under IDEA centers on the issues of FAPE, tuition reimbursement, and compensatory education. In addition Zirkel (2013b) identified that special education advocacy groups and legal commentators dominate the discussions that occur in Congress and in the courts regarding the obligations of school districts under IDEA. This information is significant for administrators as it is their obligation to view IDEA from the context of district resources, roles, and responsibilities. Special education is guided and navigated by the legal system. Yell (1998) posited that constitutional law, statutory law, regulatory law, and case law uniquely prescribe special education authority. This, in turn, has led to special education being a results-oriented and compliance accountability model.

Pazey and Cole (2013), reflecting on the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data, identified almost 6.6 million students being educated under the special education umbrella. With the federal government funding special education at only 17% (as opposed to the promised 40% of the cost), educating students with disabilities under IDEA is an enormous undertaking for schools as they struggle to comply with providing

FAPE regardless of cost mandate. Pazez and Cole (2013) clarified that the federal requirements under IDEA and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) have enormous ramifications for the roles and responsibilities of administrators overseeing special education.

Students in special education are educated under the umbrella of a federally protected program that affords them extensive rights and protections. IDEA, which provides federal safeguards to students with disabilities and their parents, has been deliberated in courtrooms and boardrooms. Much scholarly attention has been directed at administrators who have the responsibility of overseeing and implementing all aspects of special education law, monitoring compliance issues for both federal and state laws, and facilitating transformational issues necessary for promoting the success of not just general education students but also students with disabilities (Valesky & Hirth, 1992).

Legal compliance and an astute understanding of special education law are vital for school district personnel to meet their fiduciary responsibility, compliance mandates, and remain out of program improvement. As part of a state accountability system, a school district enters program improvement status if it fails to meet specific indicators of progress as identified by the state accountability system, mandated by NCLB. The legal battles relevant to compliance have gone all the way to the Supreme Court. A study conducted by Thune (1997) subscribed to the belief that the number of mandates, and the litigation that surrounds these mandates, has exponentially increased in the area of special education and should be guiding all practice in the field. Short (2004) concurred and maintained that special education mandates, due process, and judicial proceedings need to drive special education decisions and not doing so can result in devastating

consequences for school districts. Also as noted by Boscardin et al. (2010), IDEA raised the bar by including accountability for performance results, high standards, and the right to educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

As affirmed by Wagner and Katsiyannis (2010), providing students with disabilities FAPE has been an incessant struggle for school districts. In light of all the legal and case law developments, schools are required to ensure that rights of students with disabilities are protected and that they receive substantive educational benefits.

Fiscal Challenges

The aftermath of legislation and litigation in special education has been the empowerment of parents, guardians, advocates, and attorneys of students with disabilities. Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, The Education for All Handicapped Children's Act of 1975, and IDEA (2004) all offer guidelines for programs that serve students with disabilities while concurrently providing a route for parents to explore and utilize legal remedies in the event of a school district's violation of the safeguards set forth.

Although Part B of IDEA authorized the federal government to fund special education up to 40% of the annual per pupil expenditure, the U.S Department of Education statistics highlight that by 2002-2003, federal support had only reached 17.1% of the annual per pupil expenditure. Culves (2013) noted that despite the staggering and overwhelming procedural and substantive requirements under federal IDEA, the average federal funding received per student with a disability is only \$1,767.00, which falls well below the cost of serving students with disabilities and most certainly below the expense of defending legal challenges associated with them. She further elaborated on the high

stakes relevant to educating students with disabilities, which includes but is not limited to attorney's fees, disabled children's rights, exorbitant private services, and the sympathetic media (Culves, 2013).

As articulated by O'Dell (2003), the field of special education is most litigated, and litigation involving special education can be convoluted and expensive. Katsiyannis et al. (2002) stressed the importance of adhering to procedural safeguards as these constitute the most common complaints and any violations may constitute a denial of an appropriate education for students with disabilities. With the increase in special education litigation, school districts need to be more vigilant in offering appropriate programming (Yell et al., 2009).

Cost of Litigation

As researched by DeNisco (2013), school districts across the country spend over \$90 million per year to resolve conflict, and the majority of this money is spent on issues and cases relevant to special education. The cost of one due process hearing could reach as much as \$60,000 to \$100,000 if the cases reach the federal appeals court (Mueller, 2009). As part of IDEA, procedural safeguards provide attorneys' fees to parents who prevail in court. This procedural safeguard came into effect because of concerns expressed by parents and advocates and Congress's belief that in contrast to school districts, parents did not have the financial resources to challenge the substantial resources of the educational system. Congress therefore included the legal fee remedy as part of the procedural protections.

Due Process Filings

CDE collects quarterly data on the number of filings through the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH). For fiscal year 2013-2014, which runs from July 2013 to June 2014, the data reported on the OAH website reflect that 2,558 cases had been filed up to March 2014. OAH received a total of 3,194 case filings in special education for the 2012-2013 fiscal year and 3,114 case filings for the 2011-2012 fiscal year. These numbers and the associated costs with these filings are significant from a fiduciary perspective. An interesting study by Zirkel and Scala (2010) found that California ranks among the top five states with the highest number of adjudicated hearings in the year 2008-2009.

Congress's intent with the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 and 2004 was to make the special education process between school districts and parents less combative and antagonistic. Toward this end, the process of mediation and resolution is a collaborative opportunity for both parties (parents and school districts) to resolve their disagreements in a collaborative and solution-focused manner. Accordingly, there exists a provision for optional mediation (a confidential and voluntary process), and the provision for required resolution meetings (mandatory meeting, unless waived by both parties in writing) between parties, which was added in 2004 (USDE, n.d., § § 300.506, 300.510). Mediation is voluntary for parties, is confidential, and should be scheduled in a timely manner and held in a location convenient for both parties. Congress cautions against using mediation as an attempt to delay or deny parents' right for a due process hearing (USDE, n.d., § 300.506). A resolution session meeting is required and must be held within 15 days of the district receiving notice of parents' due process complaint (USDE,

n.d., § 300.510). The purpose of a resolution session meeting is to provide an opportunity for the parents and the district to discuss and possibly resolve the due process complaint. The resolution session meeting must include parents, a district representative, and relevant IEP team members (USDE, n.d., § 300.510). Although resolution session meetings and mediations are far more cost effective, thousands of disagreements continue to be heard at the formal hearing level (Zirkel & Scala, 2010).

The Fourteenth Amendment includes equal protection and due process clauses that provide extensive provisions for students with disabilities. Culves (2013) reflected that parents of students with disabilities, who are frustrated and do not receive satisfactory outcomes for damages under IDEA, are increasingly resorting to filing claims under the American with Disabilities Act, Section 504, Section 1983, and so forth. Due process hearings and litigation are extremely draining on finances and human resources for any school district. All personnel involved in any level of litigation, spend countless hours in preparation and testimony rendering them unable to fulfill their regular duties. Another point of view has been advanced by Cope-Kasten (2013) who reflects that due process fails to consistently secure a good outcome for students and is a process where both the parents and school districts feel unfairly treated. Katsiyannis and Herbst (2003) asserted that any due process hearing where the parents prevail can result in extensive monetary injunctions against the district, which can include but not be limited to legal fees for the parent's counsel, residential placements both in and out of state, and compensatory education expenditures.

A recent study by Cope-Kasten (2013) advances the notion that in the highly regulated world of special education, rules direct which procedures must be followed but

also which people must be following these rules. A due process hearing becomes the most sought out method of resolving disputes that arise when parents feel school districts are not following these rules. Adversarialism becomes the dominant trait inherent to due process hearings because the hearings pit two parties against each other to name a winner and a loser (Cope-Kasten, 2013).

Zirkel (2013a), in his analysis of the outcomes of due process hearing cases, reflected that in FAPE cases, parents frequently raise a variety of procedural and substantive challenges that require school districts to undertake extensive fact finding, which includes human capital and financial strain. These cases also include the application of blurry standards of prejudicial effect and reasonable benefit.

Administrators who oversee the procedural and substantive compliance of special education laws are directly and indirectly involved in these litigation cases.

Role of Administrators

The challenges for school administrators are greater in California than in other states because of the disproportionate number of California students who need extra support and because California has some of the highest student-administrator ratios in the country (Darling-Hammond & Orphanos, 2007).

Challenges of the Role

Special education is considered a law-driven field, which is often viewed as a world within its own. It is fraught with various laws, timelines, forms, tests, expenditures, limitations, and complicated procedures as well as with mandates that can be intimidating and baffling to those overseeing the administration of the same (Wellner, 2012). Lasky and Karge (2006) lent support for this perspective through their study that

surveyed 205 Southern California administrators who shared that they spent a weekly average of 19.5 hours of their time dealing with special education issues. Of the administrators surveyed, the majority had no experience dealing with special education students and 80% of those administrators felt that their university education did not prepare them to support special education teachers. The study concluded that administrators should receive special education training prior to beginning an administrative assignment at a site level and that ongoing training for administrators supervising special education programs was needed (Lasky & Karge, 2006).

Administrators are the lead professionals in ensuring that students' rights are protected and that educational opportunities result in a quality education. Special education administrators make decisions at meetings that substantively impact the lives of children with disabilities and their families, through the placement and services they provide for students. Highlighting and acknowledging this burden and obligation, the Council for Exceptional Children and National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001) determined school leadership as a major force behind successfully implementing IDEA requirements. Additionally, findings from a study conducted by Scheffel, Rude, and Bole (2005) identified a lack of sincerity and/or interest by school administrators as one of the leading reasons for parents to initiate a due process filing. The acknowledgements through these studies regarding the role of school administrators become the authority and support of the premise that administrators should be equipped with an understanding of special education law and monitor their projective attitudes toward parents especially in emotionally charged situations.

Need for Professional Development

Despite the importance of administrators' knowledge and training with regard to the implementation of educational programs, McHatton et al. (2010) in their research identified a disconnect between the activities school administrators engage in regularly with reference to special education and the emphasis placed on those activities in their preparatory programs. Voltz and Collins (2010) affirmed the findings by McHatton et al. (2010) by substantiating the need for administrators to be equipped with training tools in order to rise to the challenge of providing leadership for students with disabilities. Since administrators supervise programs for students in special education, it becomes imperative for them to develop the competencies in order to fulfill this responsibility. Although there appears to be consensus in research regarding the need to train administrators in the arena of special education, there is no identified gap analysis to study the specific areas of need and training for these administrators.

The reality in today's educational landscape is that administrators have to be equipped to handle students who are eligible for special education under the 13 categories in the law inclusive of students with emotional disturbance, autism, learning disabilities, multiple disabilities, and health impairments. Administrators need to be knowledgeable about students' disabilities and the impact on their behavior because they are called upon to provide feedback, draft, and implement behavior management strategies for students with disabilities. As noted by Cooner et al. (2005) in their study, administrators' lack of knowledge about students' disabilities and the special education law can significantly impair their effectiveness as administrators and school leaders. Additionally, administrators tend to rely heavily on district-level administration for programming

advice, without taking the time to personally understand the needs of students with disabilities within the context of their school (Cooner et al., 2005). These poor leadership practices could potentially impact an administrator's credibility with staff and parents. Culves (2013) substantiated the importance of strong leadership in special education by stating that IDEA is replete with procedural requirements, which are guaranteed to plague the most seasoned administrators. Research highlights a discrepancy between administrative preparation and practice, especially regarding students with disabilities (Lasky & Karge, 2006; McHatton et al., 2010).

The special education field has undergone some dramatic changes with the introduction of the 2004 IDEA legislation, and it continues to evolve as advocacy groups, attorneys, advocates, and parents continue to advance concerns about the rights of students with disabilities. Accordingly, the roles and responsibilities of administrators have dramatically changed as they attempt to survive in the changing and litigious special education landscape, while also balancing their responsibilities to establish and secure successful student outcomes for students with disabilities. As postulated by Lashley (2007), an administrator's limited involvement in special education is no longer an option.

Thomas's (2007) analysis of nationwide and California statistics projected a continual shortage in educational administration. Consequently, hiring the most qualified and knowledgeable administrators to oversee special education programs became critical to student achievement (Council for Exceptional Children, 2012). Ensuring that all students receive appropriate instructional programs and placement on the continuum of instructional programming is another role that is one of the primary responsibilities of

administrators. Developing the intuitiveness to accurately perceive the changing demographics and educational environments required of the current student population is a prerequisite for effective administration of special education programming.

Populations and student needs, along with judicial direction received from case law is forever evolving, hence, the need to effectively predict and plan for the same. Program development through an understanding of laws and organization of resources becomes a predictor of student achievement and thereby becomes a primary focus for the school administrator (Council for Exceptional Children, 2009).

As posited by Boscardin et al. (2010), the preparation of administrators has been dominated by assumptions, resulting in gaps in knowledge of the discipline of special education, which in turn, has led to insufficient preparation of administrators for today's needs. Findlay (2007) supported this finding with his analysis that administrators' ignorance of or lack of interest in acquiring knowledge related to special education case law and statutes may spur litigation through their poor decision making. Culver (2013) advocated for a proactive approach where administrators' training needs are identified and they are properly trained as the front line of defense to successfully navigating IDEA.

Boscardin (2007) concluded that administering and overseeing special education programs has evolved into a specialized field because of its complicated and comprehensive laws and the need for a distinct knowledge base in the discipline in conjunction with professional experiences that are essential to ensure compliance with the law and implementation of best practices. Corresponding to this study is the research by Katsiyannis, Losinski, and Prince (2012) that identifies the need for administrators to be thoroughly familiar with legislative provisions as well as with the latest developments

involving case law in order to effectively perform their duties. Current responsibilities of administrators have been expanded with the enactment of IDEA (2004). Cope-Kasten (2013) discredited due process hearings and noted that they offer parents vindication rather than a sustainable and long-term remedy for anger and resentment between parents and districts. Further identified in this research is the hypothesis that a failure to communicate and cooperate is the leading cause of the breakdown of trust between school districts and parents, which leads to high due process filings. Another viewpoint advanced in this research is the fact that 50% of the relationships between the district and parents are damaged beyond repair through the due process hearing, and parents and districts that have experienced due process once are more likely to resort to this procedure again in the future. If the conflict is not addressed or is addressed inappropriately, parent-school district relationships often become adversarial in both verbal and nonverbal exchanges. Communication becomes further strained, and it is difficult to find common ground on which the dispute can be resolved. Herein lies one of the areas that can lead to improved outcomes for districts and students. Implicit in the notion of effective communication and relationship building is the capacity for administrators to understand the laws that steer special education and leadership that is guided by political and emotional intelligence.

Wakeman et al. (2006) found that administrators without specialization in special education tend to learn about special education on the job. Additionally, this study highlighted and elaborated the complexities of serving as an administrator in school districts. Administrators perceive special education law as complicated, constantly changing, and frustrating (Webb, Bessette, Smith, & Tubbs, 2010). Administrators

surveyed showed a strong willingness to ensure the educational rights of all students; yet, 92% of those surveyed reported having received no formal training in special education. Garrison-Wade, Sobel, and Fulmer (2007) in their study with graduates of administrative preparation programs found that of those surveyed, 40% reported a lack special education law knowledge, 28% reported a lack of confidence in their abilities to mentor and support special education staff, and 28% reported a lack of confidence in their abilities to manage special education programs. There was a general consensus in this surveyed group of graduates regarding the need for education relevant to special education law, special education program management, and characteristics of students with disabilities (Garrison-Wade et al., 2007). It is interesting to note that despite administrators' lack of confidence in special education identified in the study by Garrison-Wade et al. (2007), a study by Lasky and Karge (2006) that surveyed 205 administrators revealed that 75% of administrators stated that they spent more time involved in special education tasks than in previous years.

With the upsurge in special education responsibilities, accountability, and fiscal ramifications, it becomes increasingly crucial to identify the specific training needs of administrators and to provide targeted interventions and supports to improve student and district outcomes. DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2003) eloquently summarized this impending need by reflecting that without capable administrators, all reform efforts within the school system will fail. In order to achieve the goal of school reform relevant to students with disabilities, effective leadership preparation should become a national priority.

Summary

The Review of the Literature as presented in Chapter II discussed the issues of historical background, legal mandates, fiscal challenges, and the role of administrators in the field of special education. In addition, there was an investigation of administrators' understanding of special education law and its impact on following compliance mandates and improving student and school district outcomes. An examination into the administrators' understanding of special education law found that it is critical for administrators to not only understand special education law but also to have the ability and skills to interpret the implications of case law and mandates on special education practice and the programs they oversee. Consequently, administrators need extensive training in special education law to build administrative competencies, improve their decision-making skills, reduce costly and emotionally draining litigation, and improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

Synthesis Matrix

The synthesis matrix provides a conceptual framework in a grid format enabling the researcher to get a quick overview of data related to a research variable. This matrix allowed the researcher to organize the sources used in the literature review and integrate the relevant information to create the foundation of the study. Additionally, this synthesis matrix assisted the researcher to draw conclusions about relationships that exist between entries on the table. The synthesis matrix used by the researcher to organize study variables presented in the review of the literature is included as Appendix A.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter describes the methods and procedures that were used to assess the knowledge of special education law and subsequent training needs of administrators within a Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) in California. The actual knowledge of special education law and training needs of administrators were determined through the administration of a special education law survey that assessed administrators' understanding, knowledge, and application of the six principles of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The results of the survey were studied to determine if any demographic factors impacted the knowledge of special education law among administrators. The balance of this chapter restates the nature of the problem studied; presents the purpose statement, research questions, and hypotheses; describes the population, sample, and instrumentation; outlines the methodology for obtaining the data to test the hypotheses; sets forth the analytical methods used in conducting the hypothesis tests; and delineates the limitations of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative study was to identify the knowledge of special education law among administrators within a SELPA in California. Additionally, it was the purpose of this study to identify the training needs of administrators.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Through a nonexperimental survey, this study determined the level of special education law knowledge among administrators in a SELPA in California, identified their training needs, and determined if the demographic factors of education level, position,

and years of experience as an administrator influence special education law knowledge. According to Creswell (2002), quantitative studies should have hypotheses and research questions and should examine the relationship between variables, which is crucial to answering the research questions and confirming hypotheses. Following are this study's research questions and hypotheses:

1. What do administrators in a SELPA in California perceive as their level of knowledge of special education law?
2. What percentage of administrators in a SELPA in California have the fundamental legal knowledge of special education law needed to comply with special education law as determined by 70% criterion for basic knowledge on a survey of the knowledge of special education law?
3. What is the difference between these administrators' perceived knowledge of special education law and their actual level of knowledge of special education law?
4. Is there a relationship between the administrators' education level, position, or years of experience as an administrator and their actual knowledge of special education law?
5. What are the training needs of administrators as determined by their actual assessed knowledge of special education law (performance below 70% criterion for basic knowledge)?

The research questions correspond to the hypotheses that were tested during the course of this study. The following are the null and alternative versions of the hypotheses:

H₁₀. Fifty-one percent or more administrators will perceive that their knowledge of special education law is less than average.

- H1_a. Fifty-one percent or more administrators will perceive that their knowledge of special education law is average or better.
- H2₀. Fifty-one percent or more administrators will be able to attain or surpass the 70% criterion of basic knowledge on the survey of knowledge of special education law.
- H2_a. Fifty-one percent or more administrators will not be able to attain the 70% criterion of basic knowledge on the survey of knowledge of special education law.
- H3₀. There will be no gap between perceived and actual knowledge of special education law for administrators.
- H3_a. There will be a positive gap between perceived and actual knowledge of special education law for administrators.
- H4₀. There will be no relationship between these administrators' education level, position, or years of experience as an administrator and their actual knowledge of special education law.
- H4_a. There will be a positive relationship between administrators' education level, position, or years of experience as an administrator and their actual knowledge of special education law.
- H5₀. There will be no gap between the administrators' training needs and their actual assessed knowledge of special education law.
- H5_a. There will be a positive gap between the administrators' training needs and their actual assessed knowledge of special education law.

The researcher used an item-by-item analysis of the research questions and aligned them with the key concepts and six principles of IDEA as reflected in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1

IDEA Principles Addressed and Key Concepts of Survey Questions

Survey question	Key concept	IDEA principle
6	No cost special education services	FAPE
7	Disability vs. need for special education	FAPE
8	Parental revocation of placement	Procedural safeguards
9	Parental request for reevaluation	Evaluation
10	IEP team makeup	LRE
11	Consideration of LRE	LRE
12	Need for related services (transportation)	LRE
13	Appropriate documentation of accommodations	FAPE
14	Delivery of special education services	FAPE
15	Best possible vs. floor of opportunity	FAPE
16	Timelines for IEP	Procedural safeguards
17	Out of state transfer students	Procedural safeguards
18	Medical charges associated with determination	FAPE
19	Timelines for IEP meeting	Procedural safeguards
20	Continuum of services	Zero reject
21	Reporting progress to parents	Parental participation
22	Parental notification of referral	Procedural safeguards
23	Acronym for Free Appropriate Public Education	FAPE
24	Parental notice for additional testing	Evaluation
25	Medical services provided by a physician	FAPE
26	Placement during mediation	Procedural safeguards
27	Timelines for evaluation	Evaluation
28	Outside referral for special education	Evaluation
29	Extended school year guidelines	FAPE
30	Extended school year guidelines	FAPE
31	Annual notice of placement	Procedural safeguards
32	Independent educational evaluations	Evaluation
33	IEP transition requirements	FAPE
34	Transfer of rights to adult student	Parental participation
35	Multiple forms of evaluation	Evaluation
36	IEP timelines	Procedural safeguards
37	School's knowledge of disability	FAPE
38	Suspensions not constituting change of placement	FAPE
39	Suspensions constituting change of placement	FAPE
40	Suspensions constituting change of placement	FAPE
41	Suspensions constituting change of placement	FAPE
42	Discipline of special education students	FAPE
43	Need for manifestation determination	FAPE
44	Limits in consecutive days suspended	Procedural safeguards
45	Suspensions constituting change of placement	FAPE
46	Expulsion of special education students	FAPE
47	Discipline of special education students	FAPE

Note. IEP = individualized education plan; LRE = least restrictive environment; FAPE = free and appropriate public education.

Table 2

Matrix Aligning Research Questions With Items on the Survey

Research question	Alignment with survey questions
1. What do administrators in a SELPA in California perceive as their level of knowledge of special education law?	Perceived knowledge items: 1, 2, 3
2. What percentage of administrators in a SELPA in California have the fundamental legal knowledge of special education law needed to comply with special education law as determined by 70% criterion for basic knowledge on a survey of the knowledge of special education law?	Actual knowledge items: 6-47
3. What is the difference between these administrators' perceived knowledge of special education law and their actual level of knowledge of special education law?	Perceived knowledge items: 1-3 Actual knowledge items: 6-47
4. Is there a relationship between administrators' education level, position, years of experience as an administrator, and their actual knowledge of special education law?	Education item: 48 Position item: 49 Experience item: 50 Actual knowledge items: 6-47
5. What are the training needs of administrators as determined by their actual assessed knowledge of special education law (performance below 70% criterion for basic knowledge)?	Zero reject item: 20 Nondiscriminatory evaluation items: 9, 24, 27, 28, 32, 35 FAPE items: 6, 7, 13, 14, 15, 18, 23, 25, 29, 30, 33, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 46, 47 LRE items: 10, 11, 12 Procedural safeguards items: 8, 16, 17, 19, 22, 26, 31, 36, 44 Parental participation items: 21, 34

Research Design

This study used a quantitative, nonexperimental survey design as described by McMillan and Schumacher (2010) in their publication *Research in Education: Evidence Based Inquiry*. The survey design was an appropriate design for this study as its purpose is to obtain “information about a large number of people (the population) that can be inferred from the responses obtained from a smaller group of subjects (the sample)”

(McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 23). The survey research design is very useful in studying an array of educational problems and gathering information on relevant topics. Quantitative strategies, as identified by Creswell (2003), involved “complex experiments with many variables and treatments and included elaborate structural equation models that incorporated causal paths and the identification of the collective strength of multiple variables” (p. 13). Creswell (1994) defined quantitative research as an inquiry method used to analyze trends and explain relationships between variables. Additionally, Creswell (2008) opined that quantitative research methods consist of unbiased data collection and evaluation of data collected from the instrument used in the research. Quantitative research attempts to examine research problems and identify a relationship between variables. Quantitative research is undertaken with forms, surveys, and experiments, and the data are then interpreted by the researcher to study statistical significance.

In accordance with Muijas (2004), this study utilized survey research, which is the most common form of nonexperimental quantitative methodology. Quantitative research allows educational researchers to examine problems in the education system, understand why these problems are occurring, and determine how educators can prevent the problems from occurring in the future (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). The survey in this study used a cross-sectional design, which allowed the researcher to collect the necessary information in a short period of time. According to Creswell (2003), surveys are administered to the sample population in order to assess a specified set of characteristics such as attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or knowledge. Responses are received from the population on quantitative scales using questionnaires or interviews. These data are then

statistically analyzed to ascertain the answers to various factors like the levels and variability of responses to questions and to test research questions or hypotheses. Researchers utilizing the survey method do not necessarily manipulate the conditions to which subjects are exposed but instead attempt to assess and study the population in their natural state; hence, as postulated by Reaves (1992), surveys establish cause and effect rather than merely describing trends.

Based on the advantages of this type of research, a survey created on the six principles of IDEA was utilized to study the scope of administrators' knowledge of special education law, their understanding of procedures and mandates relevant to special education, and their resultant training needs.

Population

As defined by McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a population is a group of individuals conforming to certain criteria to which the researcher intends to generalize the results of the research. The population of this study consisted of administrators (principals and assistant principals) serving the five public school districts located in a SELPA in California. At the time of the study, the districts within the SELPA served approximately 42,000 students at 50 public schools, which included 35 elementary schools, seven middle schools, six high schools, one continuation school, and one alternative high school. Although district-level administrators also served the five SELPA districts, the subset of administrators who participated in the study were principals and assistant principals, not the district administrators. Jimenez, Graf, and Rose (2007) found that assistant principals and principals have direct contact with students with disabilities and their involvement is integral in creating an accepting and

inclusive environment for them. This sampling decision was based on a review of literature that revealed that assistant principals and principals are on the front lines of education and bear the responsibility of ensuring the implementation of appropriate education for students with disabilities (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Jimenez et al., 2007; Katsiyannis, 1994).

Table 3 through Table 6 identify some key characteristics of administrators at the SELPA, county, and state levels for the years 2012-2013, as gathered from the California Department of Education (CDE) website. When reviewing data from multiple sources that may not share a common baseline, percentages are useful for comparing information, as it allows the researcher to convert different data into readily comparable percentages (University of Leicester, 2009). Percentage figures presented in Tables 3 through 6 are in conjunction with the base figures on which the percentages were calculated. When comparing the percentage figures of the SELPA with those of the county and state in the tables, it should be noted that base figures in the SELPA were 7.5% of county and .48% of state figures, and base figures in the county were 6.4% of those in the state.

Table 3

Service and Experience of Administrators

Study area	SELPA	County	California state
Average years of service and experience	22	18	18
Average years of service and experience in the current district	12	13	13

Note. Adapted from CDE data file containing characteristics of administrators, 2012-2013; retrieved from <ftp://ftp.cde.ca.gov/demo/staffclass/staffdemo12.txt>

As noted from Table 3, the average number of years of service and experience for administrators within the target SELPA was 22 years and within the county and the state was 18 years. The average number of years of experience of administrators within the SELPA, though marginally higher, was generally aligned with the average years of experience administrators had within the county and statewide. Additionally, the average number of years of service in the district, which can be identified and coined as the stability index, was similar in the SELPA (12 years), county (13 years), and state of California (13 years); hence, the SELPA administrators were reflective of the population of administrators in the county and throughout the state of California.

Table 4

Education Level of Administrators

Education level	SELPA	County	California State
Doctorate	15 (13%)	162 (11%)	1,672 (7%)
Special degree (Juris Doctor)	0	0	12 (.05%)
Master's degree+ 30	59 (51%)	350 (23%)	7,726 (32%)
Master's degree	41 (36%)	793 (52%)	9,273 (39%)
Master's and higher	115 (100%)	1,305 (86%)	18,683 (78%)
Total including other degrees/none reported	115	1,519	23,843

Note. Adapted from CDE data file containing characteristics of administrators, 2012-2013; retrieved from <ftp://ftp.cde.ca.gov/demo/staffclass/staffdemo12.txt>

As noted from Table 4, the percentage of SELPA administrators who possessed a master's level degree or higher was 100%. The percentage of administrators in the county with a master's degree or higher was 86%. Throughout the state of California, 78% of administrators had a master's degree or higher. The education level of administrators in the SELPA was marginally higher as compared to the county and state,

but considering that SELPA administrators constituted a comparatively smaller portion of the overall administrator population, the data can be considered reflective of the population of administrators in the county and state.

Table 5 captures the ethnicities of administrators as gathered from the CDE database. The three largest ethnicities of White, Hispanic, and African American administrators combined constituted 93% of total administrators in the SELPA, which was similar to the 94% in the county and 91% in the state of California. Even when taken individually, percentages of administrators falling under these ethnicities were similar in the SELPA, county, and state. White administrators made up 73% of administrators in the SELPA, 77.5% in the county, and 62.5% in the state. Fifteen percent of the SELPA administrators, 14.5% of the county administrators, and 21% of the

Table 5

Ethnicity of Administrators

Ethnicity	SELPA	County	California State
Hispanic	17 (15.0%)	218 (14.5%)	4,965 (21.0%)
American Indian/Alaska Native	0	6 (0.4%)	125 (0.5%)
Asian not Hispanic	8 (7.0%)	60 (4.0%)	838 (3.5%)
Pacific Islander not Hispanic	0	1 (0.1%)	54 (0.2%)
Filipino not Hispanic	0	4 (0.3%)	197 (0.8%)
African American not Hispanic	6 (5.0%)	35 (2.0%)	1,789 (7.5%)
White not Hispanic	84 (73.0%)	1,176(77.5%)	14,931 (62.5%)
Two or more races not Hispanic	0	2 (0.2%)	169 (1.0%)
No response	0	17 (1.0%)	775 (3.0%)
Total	115	1,519	23,843

Note. Adapted from CDE data file containing characteristics of administrators, 2012-2013; retrieved from <ftp://ftp.cde.ca.gov/demo/staffclass/staffdemo12.txt>

state administrators were Hispanic. African American administrators made up 5% of administrators in the SELPA, 2% in the county, and 7.5% in the state. The data in Table 5 clearly indicate that ethnicities of administrators in the SELPA were reflective of the ethnic population distribution of administrators in the county and the state of California.

Table 6 captures the average number of students that administrators served. This number was calculated by dividing the total number of students by the total number of administrators. The SELPA average number of students served per administrator was 365, the county average was 330, and the state average was 261. The administrator-to-student ratio was a little higher in the SELPA and the county when compared to the state, indicative of marginally higher workloads at the SELPA and county levels. On the other hand, marginally higher education and experience levels of SELPA and county administrators empower them to handle this workload.

Table 6

Average Numbers of Students per Administrator

Study area	SELPA	County	California State
Total administrators	115	1,519	23,843
Total students	42,000	50,1801	6,226,989
Average number of students served by one administrator	365	330	261

Note. From CDE data file containing characteristics of administrators, 2012-2013; retrieved from <ftp://ftp.cde.ca.gov/demo/staffclass/staffdemo12.txt>

In summation, a comprehensive analysis of Table 3 through Table 6 revealed similarities in administrators’ education levels, experience, ethnicities, and administrator-to-student ratios, which allowed the researcher to positively conclude that the study’s target population of administrators within the five school districts in a SELPA in

California was reflective of the population of administrators not just in the county but throughout the state of California. Hence, the findings and recommendations of this study can be generalized to the population of administrators not only in the county but also throughout the state of California.

Sample

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined a sample as a group of individuals from whom data are collected. Public records retrieved from the CDE website reflected that 77 administrators served the 50 public schools within the SELPA. For the purpose of this study, nonprobability sampling was used to survey 77 administrators from the five SELPA school districts. McMillan and Schumacher identified nonprobability sampling as the most common, efficient, and inexpensive type of sampling used in educational research.

In order to achieve a 95% probability that the proportions of responses to each question were within 5% of the true proportions in the population of 77 administrators, a sample of 64 participants was needed as determined by the online survey system calculator (Creative Survey Systems, 2014). The survey was e-mailed to all 77 administrators. The researcher received 65 responses, which resulted in an 84% response rate. All 65 responses were included in the study.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument was drafted based on the following six guiding principles of IDEA 2004: zero reject, nondiscriminatory evaluation, free and appropriate public education (FAPE), least restrictive environment (LRE), procedural safeguards, and parental participation. The survey method is broadly used and efficient to study problems

in realistic settings. Survey use in the educational community has grown significantly as a method to collect data and present evidence in high-stakes decisions (Derrington, 2009). (See Appendix B for the survey instrument.)

According to Creswell (2005), instruments utilized in existing studies can be used in their original form or modified as long as permission is granted from the author. The survey for this study, which was designed by Overturf (2007) for a similar study with Wisconsin public school principals, was adapted with permission of the author for the purpose of this study. The intent of the survey was to determine the knowledge of special education law through a survey design that covered 42 scenarios created by Overturf that represented legal issues relevant to IDEA. Any scenarios relevant only to the state of Wisconsin, where the survey was originally used by Overturf, were adapted and modified to comply with California's state laws relevant to special education. (See Appendix C for author consent.)

As noted by McMillan and Schumacher (2010), informed consent includes providing subjects an opportunity to terminate their participation at any time with no penalty. Accordingly, all participants provided informed consent to participate in this study. The first page of the survey provided the informed consent verbiage and required the users to click an "accept" button prior to proceeding with the survey. (See Appendix D for the informed consent form.) The survey was electronically administered and disseminated through Survey Monkey, a secure online survey provider. An introductory information e-mail explained the voluntary nature of the survey, noted the strict confidentiality that would be maintained with all responses, and clarified that no identifying information would be linked to participant responses. (See Appendix E for

introductory information e-mail.) All participants were asked to complete five Likert-style questions asking them to rate their perceptions about their knowledge of special education law and the trainings that they felt they needed relevant to this knowledge. This section of the survey concluded with the participants' rating their own knowledge of special education law as it related to their roles as administrators.

The next section of the survey included the 42-question assessment, created in closed format with forced responses. The last section of the survey gathered demographic characteristics of the participants, which included information on educational background, years of experience, and position. The survey concluded with a participant comment section. Participants had the option of receiving the correct answers of the survey.

Overturf (2007) ensured the validity of the survey instrument through expert judgment from a panel of three school psychologists and one director of special education. Each of the individuals on the panel had in excess of 20 years of experience. The panel was asked to review and provide feedback on the survey and include any additional comments or concerns. The suggestions from this panel were used for revisions. The survey with revisions from the expert panel was sent for another review to a special education team consultant at the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) who had been involved with special education monitoring for over 15 years. The suggestions made by this consultant were incorporated into the survey. The survey was additionally piloted by Overturf (2007) on a group of doctoral-level school administrators. Feedback from this group was used as the basis for the final revisions to the survey (Overturf,

2007). The range for proficiency in special education knowledge used by Overturf as described in Table 7 was retained by the researcher of this study.

Table 7

Range of Correct Responses and Percentage Needed for Each Proficiency Level Descriptor

Descriptor	Range of number of correct responses (42 possible)	Range of % scores
Below prerequisite knowledge	Below 21	Below 50
Minimal level of knowledge	21-29	50-69
Basic level of knowledge	30-33	70-79
Proficient level of knowledge	34-37	80-89
Advanced level of knowledge	38-42	90-100

Data Collection

The Institutional Review Board of Brandman University, Irvine, California, first approved the survey before it was sent to participants and data were collected to ensure that risk of harm to human subjects was minimized. Participants completed the survey voluntarily, with consent, and anonymously.

Request for District Approval

The researcher engaged in a series of requests and approvals from superintendents of each of the member districts within the SELPA. A letter requesting permission to conduct the study was given to each superintendent. The letter informed the superintendents of pertinent information such as the purpose of the researcher's study and data collection plan. (See Appendix F for permission letter.)

Procedure for Data Collection

The study began after written approval was received from the Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix G for IRB approval). The study was based on a quantitative research design and disseminated electronically to administrators in the SELPA. The entire population of 77 administrators was contacted to participate in the study through an e-mail. E-mail addresses of participants were obtained through each school district's website and/or district central office. The e-mail assured participants of the anonymity of their responses in the study. Participants were assured that no evaluation measures were attached to the survey. Participants were informed that responses to all surveys would be elicited using Survey Monkey and participants were provided the option to opt out of the survey. Two follow-up reminder e-mails were sent after the initial e-mail to increase participation rate. The survey closed at the end of the 21st day.

Data Analysis

According to Creswell (2005), the goal of survey research is to examine the trends in the data collected in a population. The data obtained from participant responses were downloaded into Excel with any identifying information of participants permanently deleted from the database. The data were transferred into and analyzed through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive and inferential statistics formed the basis of all data analysis. Overturf's (2007) data analysis used three different types of internal consistency calculations: split-half (odd-even) correlation; Cronbach's coefficient alpha (α); and Kuder-Richardson (KR-20). Internal consistency for the instrument was measured and $\alpha = 0.79$, split-half was 0.64, and KR-20 = 0.79.

Hypothesis 1 was tested and reported as frequencies and percentages as determined by 51% or more of the administrators receiving a rating of average (score of 4) or above on the knowledge of special education law survey. Hypothesis 2 was tested and reported as frequencies and percentages as determined by 51% or more of the administrators receiving a 70% criterion for basic knowledge on the special education law survey. Hypothesis 3 (perceived versus actual knowledge) was tested and reported as frequencies and percentages. Additionally, for Hypothesis 3, perceived knowledge was dichotomized into “below average (ratings of 1.00 to 3.99)” versus “above average (ratings of 4.00 to 7.00).” Actual knowledge was also dichotomized so that respondents who scored less than 70% were considered “below criterion” and those who scored at 70% or above were categorized as “at or above criterion.” Hypothesis 4 was tested and reported as frequencies and percentages and Spearman correlation was used, which included finding a relationship between administrators’ experience, position, and education level, and their actual knowledge of special education law. Hypothesis 5 was tested and reported as frequencies and percentages and mean/standard deviation. To test Hypothesis 5 (training needs), knowledge questions were categorized in the six principles (zero reject, nondiscriminatory evaluation, FAPE, LRE, procedural safeguards and parental participation) and scored based on the percentage of correct answers. An acceptable level of knowledge in each principle was defined at 70% correct or higher. Training needs were identified as those topics where the respondents had less than the criterion for basic knowledge (70% or higher).

Ethical Considerations

Participation in this study was completely voluntary. The researcher did not engage in any deceptive or covert practices. The confidentiality of the participants was maintained and protected during all phases of data collection, analysis, and reporting. The data were analyzed using SPSS, which was password protected. The researcher promised to destroy all electronic survey data one year after completion of the study. There will be no records maintained with reference to who completed and who did not complete the survey. The researcher did not anticipate any risks to the participants. The researcher was guided by a Brandman University dissertation chair and dissertation mentors to make sure risks to the participants in this research study were minimal. There were no physical, psychological, or privacy risks involved in this research. The risks of breaching participant confidentiality were minimal because the participants' identities were kept confidential to guarantee complete anonymity. All data gathered from this study were secure and were kept confidential.

Limitations

Research designs inherently have limitations. The special education law survey covered a limited scope of the rules and regulations that govern the special education landscape. The exposure that administrators have to special education law could have been impacted by the size of the special education study body on their campuses and any previous training in this particular area. Administrators may have completed the survey with assistance. Survey methodology was the sole instrument used to gather information from the administrators. The target population was limited to a subset of administrators from five school districts within a SELPA.

Summary

In summation, Chapter III included a discussion of the proposed quantitative method and design of the study. Additionally a comprehensive analysis of administrators' education levels, experience, ethnicity, and administrator-to-student ratio allowed the researcher to positively conclude that the study's target population of administrators within the five school districts in a SELPA in California is reflective of the population of administrators not just in county but throughout the state of California. The findings and recommendations from this study can hence be generalized for the population of administrators, not only in the county but also throughout the state of California.

The study determined the special education law knowledge among administrators in a SELPA in California. In addition to ascertaining the special education law knowledge, the study also identified the training needs of administrators and determined if any demographic factors impacted the special education law knowledge among administrators. Discussion included in this chapter identified the appropriateness of research method and design, the research questions and hypotheses, the population, sample size determination and rationale for the same, the data collection process and rationale, the development of the proposed instrumentation and associated requirements, the validation of the content of the survey instrument, and the data analysis and associated software tools.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Over the span of the history of education in the United States, special education has emerged as one of the most litigious issues that school administrators confront in their daily practice (Pazey & Cole, 2013). The special education field has undergone dramatic changes with the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, and it continues to evolve as advocacy groups, attorneys, advocates, and parents advance concerns about the rights of students with disabilities. Accordingly, the roles and responsibilities of administrators have dramatically changed as they attempt to survive in the changing and litigious special education landscape. Although the position of an administrator does not require a law degree, it clearly requires a basic knowledge of special education law due to legal requirements in this area of education. A study by Turnbull and Turnbull (2003) articulates that the rules, regulations, and laws that envelop the field of special education mandate that administrators possess a fundamental knowledge and understanding of laws governing special education. As postulated by Overturf (2007), a lack of knowledge and understanding of the law is no excuse for violating it; an administrator's knowledge of special education law is a prerequisite for its proper implementation.

This chapter begins by first restating the purpose statement of the study. It then identifies the research questions and hypotheses that were tested during the study; and finally, it provides a brief overview of the methodology, population, and sample. Thereafter, the chapter proceeds with the presentation of the results of the survey and the study's five hypotheses.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative study was to identify the knowledge of special education law among administrators within a Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) in California. Additionally, it was the purpose of this study to identify the training needs of administrators.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Through a nonexperimental survey, this study determined the level of special education law knowledge among administrators in a SELPA in California, identified their training needs, and determined if demographic factors influence special education law knowledge. This study's research questions along with the hypotheses are presented as follows.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What do administrators in a SELPA in California perceive as their level of knowledge of special education law?
2. What percentage of administrators in a SELPA in California have the fundamental legal knowledge of special education law needed to comply with special education law as determined by 70% criterion for basic knowledge on a survey of the knowledge of special education law?
3. What is the difference between these administrators' perceived knowledge of special education law and their actual level of knowledge of special education law?
4. Is there a relationship between the administrators' education level, position, or years of experience as an administrator and their actual knowledge of special education law?

5. What are the training needs of administrators as determined by their actual assessed knowledge of special education law (performance below 70% criterion for basic knowledge)?

Hypotheses

The above questions correspond to the hypotheses that were tested during the course of this study. The null and alternative versions of the hypotheses are as follows:

H1₀. Fifty-one percent or more administrators will perceive that their knowledge of special education law is less than average.

H1_a. Fifty-one percent or more administrators will perceive that their knowledge of special education law is average or better.

H2₀. Fifty-one percent or more administrators will be able to attain or surpass the 70% criterion of basic knowledge on the survey of knowledge of special education law.

H2_a. Fifty-one percent or more administrators will not be able to attain the 70% criterion of basic knowledge on the survey of knowledge of special education law.

H3₀. There will be no gap between perceived and actual knowledge of special education law for administrators.

H3_a. There will be a positive gap between perceived and actual knowledge of special education law for administrators.

H4₀. There will be no relationship between these administrators' education level, position, or years of experience as an administrator and their actual knowledge of special education law.

H4_a. There will be a positive relationship between administrators' education level, position, or years of experience as an administrator and their actual knowledge of special education law.

H5₀. There will be no gap between the administrators' training needs and their actual assessed knowledge of special education law.

H5_a. There will be a positive gap between the administrators' training needs and their actual assessed knowledge of special education law.

Methodology

This study used quantitative, nonexperimental survey design as described by McMillan and Schumacher (2010) in their publication *Research in Education*.

Quantitative research allows educational researchers to examine problems in the education system, understand why these problems are occurring, and determine how they can prevent the problems from occurring in the future (Gay et al., 2006). The survey used a cross-sectional design, which allowed the researcher to collect the necessary information in a short period of time.

The survey was crafted on the six principles of IDEA by Overturf (2007) and was utilized by the researcher to study the scope of administrators' knowledge of special education law and their understanding of procedures and mandates relevant to special education and their resultant training needs. The following six guiding principles of IDEA 2004 were included in the survey: zero reject, nondiscriminatory evaluation, free and appropriate public education (FAPE), least restrictive environment (LRE), procedural safeguards, and parental participation.

Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of administrators serving five public school districts located in a SELPA in California. The districts within the SELPA serve approximately 42,000 students at 50 public schools, which include 35 elementary schools, seven middle schools, six high schools, one continuation school, and one alternative high school. In order to achieve a 95% probability that the proportions to each question are within 5% of the true proportions in the population of 77 administrators, a sample of 64 participants was needed as determined by the online survey system calculator (Creative Research System, 2014). The survey was sent electronically to the population of 77 administrators; 65 administrators responded to the survey, resulting in a response rate of 84%. All 65 responses were included in the study.

The researcher additionally conducted a comprehensive analysis of administrators' education levels, experience, ethnicity, administrator-to-student ratio and stability index within the SELPA, county, and state of California. This allowed the researcher to positively conclude that the study's target population of administrators within the five school districts in a SELPA in California is reflective of the population of administrators in California. The findings and recommendations from this study can hence be generalized for the population of administrators, not only in the county but also throughout the state of California.

Presentation of the Data

An analysis of the data in accordance with the study's hypotheses is presented in the following sections. Data are organized for each hypothesis consecutively beginning with Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 predicted that 51% or more administrators will perceive their knowledge of special education law to be average or better as it relates to their responsibilities as an administrator. During the course of this study, the researcher studied administrators' self-perception of special education law and procedures knowledge along with the source of this perceived knowledge.

Table 8 displays the frequency counts for selected variables regarding the perceived knowledge of the participants. The majority of the participants believed they possessed average or above average knowledge of special education law (93.8%). Participants further indicated their perception of the source of their knowledge of special education law and procedures. Most of the knowledge that the participants believed they possessed came from sources outside their administrative coursework (58.5%) or both administrative courses and outside sources (36.9%).

Table 8

Frequency Counts for Selected Variables Regarding Perceived Knowledge

Variable	Category	N	%
Perception of knowledge	Below average	4	6.2
	Average or above	61	93.8
Majority of knowledge from ^a	Administrative coursework	6	9.2
	Sources outside administrative coursework	38	58.5
	Both administrative courses and outside sources	24	36.9
Respondent's belief that he/she possesses sufficient knowledge of law	No	5	7.7
	Yes	60	92.3

Note. N = 65.

^aMultiple responses allowed.

In response to whether or not the participants perceived that they possessed sufficient knowledge of special education law and procedures to comply with the requirements of the law as it related to their role as administrators, the majority of the participants (92.3%) believed they possessed sufficient knowledge of the law (Table 8). This lends support to Hypothesis 1 whereby administrators perceived their special education law knowledge to be average or better.

Table 9 displays the descriptive statistics for additional ratings of self-knowledge of special education law. These ratings were given on 7-point scales. Concerning the perception of knowledge of special education law procedures, the mean was 4.95. The participants' current need for additional training had a mean of 3.97. The rating of the program to learn special education law and procedure had a mean of 3.63 (Table 9). Although self-perception of knowledge has a higher than average mean, participants also rated their training needs as higher than average.

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics for Additional Ratings of Self-Perceived Knowledge of Special Education Law

Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Low	High
Perception of knowledge of special education law and procedures	4.95	1.14	2.00	7.00
Current need for additional training in special education	3.97	1.47	1.00	7.00
Rating of program to learn special education law and procedures	3.63	1.29	2.00	7.00

Note. *N* = 65.

Table 10 captures the self-perception of special education law and procedures knowledge among administrators. Data reveal that 93.8 % of the participants believed that their knowledge of special education law was average or better. Hence, Hypothesis 1 is supported (Table 10).

Table 10

Frequency Counts for Perception of Special Education Law and Procedures

Variable	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Perception of knowledge of special education law and procedures	Below average	4	6.2
	Adequate or better	61	93.8

Note. *N* = 65.

In summation, Hypothesis 1 was supported as the majority of the participants (61 of the 65 participants) perceived that their knowledge of special education law was average or better.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 predicted that 51% or more of administrators will not be able to attain the 70% criterion of basic knowledge on the survey of knowledge of special education law. Hypothesis 2 was tested through the administration of a special education law survey to participants of the study. Accordingly, Table 11 displays the percentage of correct answers for individual knowledge items on this special education law survey. It is sorted sequentially by the highest percentage of correct responses to the lowest percentage of correct responses. Statements that were most understood were (a) special education services for children with disabilities are provided at no cost to their parents (96.9%), (b) report cards are issued to regular education students on a quarterly basis (90.8%), and (c) continued placement in special education (90.8%). The least understood statements were (a) school districts only need to provide an annual written notice to the parents for the continued placement of their child in special education (13.8%), and (b) at least one of the child’s general education teachers is required to attend the IEP team meeting if the child is or may be participating in the general education environment (4.6%; Table 11).

Table 11

Percentage of Correct Answers for Individual Items on Survey Sorted by Highest Percentage

Statement	IDEA principle	N	%
6. Special education services for children with disabilities are provided at no cost to their parents.	FAPE	63	96.9
21. Report cards are issued to regular education students on a quarterly basis. Therefore, the special education teacher needs to report progress to the parents of a child in special education on at a least a quarterly basis.	Parental participation	59	90.8
26. At the IEP team meeting to discuss the continued placement in special education of a child with a disability, the majority of the team feels that the child no longer qualifies as a child with disabilities under the criteria for learning disabilities.	Procedural safeguards	59	90.8
14. At an IEP team meeting it was determined that a child with an emotional disability (ED) who is in special education should receive services from mild/moderate teacher in a mild/moderate classroom rather than the ED teacher in ED.	FAPE	52	80.0
24. When a child is being reevaluated for continued placement in special education and additional testing is being recommended, which of the following must occur?	Evaluation	52	80.0
20. The IEP team may determine that the least restrictive environment for a particular child with special educational needs is a residential setting.	Zero reject	51	78.5
35. The determination of some disabilities is complex and may require that multiple tests or evaluation procedures be used. However, there are times when a single evaluation method is appropriate such as a child who receives a score of 50 on an IQ test.	Evaluation	50	76.9
11. Parents of a child with a severe cognitive disability as well as significant physical disabilities request that their child receive services in the general education classroom, which the parents believe would be the least restrictive environment for the child.	LRE	50	76.9
12. Parents of a ninth-grade student with learning disabilities in the area of reading, with no behavioral issues have moved into your district from another district.	LRE	47	72.3

Table 11—*continued*

Statement	IDEA principle	n	%
44. Suspensions from school are limited to 5 consecutive school days unless a notice of expulsion has been sent.	Procedural safeguards	47	72.3
38. A principal is within the scope of the law to authorize a series of suspensions for a child with disabilities for up to 10 cumulative school days in a school year for violations of school conduct rules when necessary and appropriate to the circumstance.	FAPE	46	70.8
30. Because a school district offers a complete summer school program, extended school year (ESY) services are not required in the district if students with disabilities have access to summer school services.	FAPE	46	70.8
33. At the annual IEP of a 17-year-old student with identified special education needs in the area of learning disabilities, it was determined that transition needs didn't need to be considered as this child receives all instruction in general education.	FAPE	46	70.8
17. A child with a disability who is receiving special education services in Georgia moves to California. The California school district has a copy of the child's IEP and the current IEP will be expiring in less than 30 days.	Procedural safeguards	45	69.2
43. A manifestation determination is required with any disciplinary change of placement.	FAPE	45	69.2
45. Any student in special education suspended for more than 10 consecutive days in a school year, whose alleged misconduct is a manifestation of his/her disability is entitled to an FBA and a BIP.	FAPE	44	67.7
42. If a student is placed in special education due to an emotional disability, inappropriate behaviors are usually the result of the child's disability. Therefore, traditional disciplinary interventions cannot be used.	FAPE	42	64.6
41. A student in special education is sent home early on a day when he is not following school rules. The administrator does not suspend the student; however, the student does not receive services delineated in his IEP.	FAPE	41	63.1

Table 11—*continued*

Statement	IDEA principle	n	%
32. At an initial IEP team meeting for a student who was referred for a suspected specific learning disability (SLD), the IEP team determined that the child did not meet the eligibility criteria for SLD. The parents disagreed and obtained an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE).	Evaluation	38	58.5
23. The law requires that all children in special education be reevaluated at least once every 3 years. This reevaluation also is known as FAPE—Functional Analysis Program Evaluation and is one way of assuring that the child’s placement and program meets their educational needs.	FAPE	38	58.5
34. Unless guardianship has been transferred to the parent or another adult, when the special education child reaches age 18, all rights under special education law go to the adult pupil and the school district is required to notify both the adult pupil and parents of transfer of rights.	Parental participation	36	55.4
40. Under what circumstances must in-school suspensions involving a student with a disability need to be counted when determining whether a series of suspensions results in a significant change of placement?	FAPE	34	52.3
18. At an initial IEP team meeting for a child referred for attention and learning concerns, the team decides that in order to determine eligibility, more information is required from a physician and recommends that parents consult a physician.	FAPE	33	50.8
29. The purpose of Extended School Year (ESY) programs for children with special education needs is to maximize their educational benefit.	FAPE	31	47.7
22. The school nurse is screening a child and suspects the child may have a special education need. The nurse decides to initiate a referral. The school nurse is obligated by law to inform the parent that she is making a referral for a special education evaluation.	Procedural safeguards	28	43.1
27. On May 22, 2014, the principal receives a written request from a parent for a special education evaluation of their child. School ends on May 30, 2014, and starts again on August 7, 2014. What should the principal do?	Evaluation	27	41.5

Table 11—*continued*

Statement	IDEA principle	n	%
13. At an IEP meeting for a student with learning disabilities the team agreed that the student often needs extra time on tests and assignments. The IEP agreed that the student did not always need extra time; therefore, on the IEP, the accommodation was stated “as needed.” Is this appropriate?	FAPE	24	36.9
39. Short-term suspensions from the bus for a special education child are counted when determining whether a series of suspensions result in a change of placement if the child has no other means of getting to school, and therefore, does not receive services during suspension.	FAPE	24	36.9
16. Six weeks prior to the ending date of an IEP for a child with disabilities, the special education teacher makes several attempts to contact the parents to arrange an IEP meeting. The teacher has detailed records of all attempted communication with the parents to schedule the meeting.	Procedural safeguards	22	33.8
19. On April 22, 2013, an IEP team developed an IEP for the student, effective from August 25, 2013, to June 6, 2014. On May 26, 2014, the IEP team met to review/revise the student’s IEP. The district met the required timelines as May 26, 2014, was within the year period prior to expiration of the IEP.	Procedural safeguards	20	30.8
7. The law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), specifies that all children with impairments, such as intellectual disability, autism, specific learning disability, or blindness, require special education services designed to meet their individualized educational needs.	FAPE	17	26.2
46. School personnel may remove a student to an IAES for no more than 30 days, without regard to whether the student’s behavior is a manifestation of the child’s disability, if the student carries/ possesses a weapon, possesses/uses illegal drugs, or inflicts serious bodily injury on someone while at school.	FAPE	17	26.2

Table 11—*continued*

Statement	IDEA principle	n	%
37. An 11th-grade general education student is being considered for expulsion for bringing a weapon (3-inch blade) to school. Previously teachers had brought forth concerns about this child to the Campus Student Intervention Team. No formal referral has been initiated.	FAPE	15	23.1
9. Parents of a child in special education are concerned that their child is not making significant progress in special education. The child was reevaluated 18 months ago with a complete and comprehensive battery of tests. The principal denied the request for reevaluation.	Evaluation	14	21.5
47. The IEP team needs to decide what educational services will be provided to a child with disabilities during any disciplinary removal.	FAPE	13	20.0
28. The principal receives a call from a local physician indicating that she was contacting the district on behalf of the parents of a student who recently enrolled in the school district. The physician feels that the student needs special education service.	Evaluation	13	20.0
36. It is permissible to file for an extension for an annual IEP meeting if requested by the parents.	Procedural safeguards	13	20.0
25. If a school health service is necessary for the child with a disability to attend school, and must be provided by a physician, the school is obligated to provide for and assume the cost of the service.	FAPE	12	18.5
8. Parents of a child with a disability who has been in special education for 3 years decide that they no longer want special education services for their child. The parents may revoke consent for special education placement if they put this in writing.	Procedural safeguards	10	15.4
31. School districts only need to provide an annual written notice to parents for the continued placement of their child in special education.	Procedural safeguards	9	13.8
10. At least one of the child's general education teachers is required to attend the IEP team meeting if the child is or may be participating in the general education environment.	LRE	3	4.6

An analysis of Table 11 data further reveals that there were 42 questions on the knowledge of special education law survey. Participants scored below the 70% criterion for basic knowledge on 28 questions and scored at or above the 70% criterion on only 14 questions. This lends support to Hypothesis 2, whereby 51% or more administrators did not attain the 70% criterion of basic knowledge on the survey.

Table 12 shows that 90.8% of the participants fell below the criterion for basic knowledge on the survey. This provides further support for Hypothesis 2.

Table 12

Frequency Counts for Actual Knowledge of Special Education Law and Procedures

Variable/category	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Actual knowledge level	Below criterion	59	90.8
	At or above criterion	6	9.2

Note. *N* = 65.

In summary, Hypothesis 2, which predicted that the majority of administrators would fail to meet the basic 70% standard of adequacy on the survey of knowledge of special education law, was supported through the study. This further highlights that the IDEA principles of LRE, procedural safeguards, FAPE, evaluation, and parental participation require added emphasis during administrative training sessions.

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 stated that there will be a positive gap between self-perceived and actual knowledge of special education law among administrators. Inspection of Table 12 found that 59 of the 65 participants were below the criterion (70% correct) for actual knowledge. This was ascertained through their performance on the special education law

survey. As evidenced from Table 13, of those 59 respondents, 93.2% erroneously thought that they had adequate knowledge. This provides support for Hypothesis 3.

Table 13

Category Scores Based on Actual Knowledge Level

Category	Perceived proficiency level	Actual knowledge level			
		Below criterion		At or above criterion	
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Perception of knowledge of special education law and procedures	Below average	4	6.8	0	0.0
	Adequate or better	55	93.2	6	100.0

Note. *N* = 65.

In summation, Hypothesis 3, which reflected a positive gap between the self-perceived and actual knowledge of administrators, was supported through this study.

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 predicted a positive relationship between administrators' education level, position, years of experience as an administrator, and their actual knowledge of special education law.

Table 14 displays the frequency counts for selected variables. Regarding education level, the majority of the participants (61.6%) had a master's degree plus 30 additional units. Their current position was as either a site principal (55.4%) or a site assistant principal (44.6%). The average amount of administrative experience among the participants ranged from less than 1 year to 40 years. It will be noted that 96% of the administrators' administrative experience ranged from 0-19 years, including almost 70% who had been administrators for 5 to 19 years ($M = 9.67$, $SD = 7.00$; see Table 14).

Table 14

Frequency Counts for Selected Variables

Variable	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Education level	Master's degree	19	29.2
	Master's degree + 30	40	61.6
	Doctorate	6	9.2
Current position	Site principal	36	55.4
	Site assistant principal	29	44.6
Years of experience ^a	0-4	16	24.6
	5-10	24	36.9
	11-19	21	32.3
	20-40	4	6.2

Note. *N* = 65.

^a*M* = 9.67, *SD* = 7.00

Table 15 shows a positive, significant correlation between the participants' current position and their total knowledge of the special education law ($r_s = .47, p < .001$) with site assistant principals having higher actual knowledge. Additional descriptive statistics were completed to study this correlation between position and actual knowledge. On the survey of special education law knowledge, principals had an overall mean percentage correct of 46.68 ($SD = 12.7$) compared to a mean of 59.97 ($SD = 13.8$) for the assistant principals. However, there was no significant correlation between participants' total actual knowledge of the special education law and the education level of the participants ($r_s = .15, p = .22$) or their number of years of experience ($r_s = -.03, p = .81$). This combination of findings provides partial acceptance of Hypothesis 4 (Table 15).

Table 15

Spearman Correlations for Selected Variables With Total Actual Knowledge

Variable	Actual knowledge
Education level	.15
Current position ^a	.47****
Years of experience as an administrator	-.03

Note. $N = 65$.

**** $p < .001$.

^aPosition: 1 = site principal; 2 = site assistant principal.

In summation, Hypothesis 4 was partially supported, as participants' current position appeared to have a significant correlation with the knowledge of special education law. Assistant principals fared better on the survey as compared to principals; however, there was no significant correlation between administrators' education level and years of experience and their knowledge of special education law.

Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 5 projected a positive relationship between administrators' training needs and their assessed knowledge of special education law.

Table 16 shows that the average overall actual knowledge of the laws had a mean score of 52.61% correct. This is significantly lower than the established 70% criterion of basic knowledge, thereby pointing to significant training needs. The highest knowledge of the laws for the participants was their knowledge of the zero reject laws ($M = 78.46$). The lowest knowledge of the laws for the participants was their knowledge of procedural safeguards ($M = 46.15$). Select knowledge variables were further dissected to determine the actual percentages of knowledge of the participants. This finding aligns with Table 9, wherein almost 57% of the participants identified a need for additional training in special

education law and procedures despite unrealistic high self-perception of special education law.

Table 16

Descriptive Statistics for the Idea Principle Knowledge Scores

Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Low	High
Total actual knowledge	52.61	14.76	17	83
Knowledge of evaluation	49.74	21.55	0	100
Knowledge of FAPE	51.94	18.36	14	90
Knowledge of LRE	51.28	20.48	0	100
Knowledge of parental participation	73.08	29.42	0	100
Knowledge of procedural safeguards	46.15	16.08	13	75
Knowledge of zero reject	78.46	41.43	0	100

Note. *N* = 65; Scores based on the percentage of correct answers.

Table 17 divides the actual knowledge of each of the six IDEA principles into five categories:

- Below prerequisite knowledge (below 50% correct)
- Minimal level of knowledge (50-69%)
- Basic level of knowledge (70-79%)
- Proficient level of knowledge (80-89%)
- Advanced level of knowledge (90% or more)

The criterion for an acceptable basic level of knowledge was set at 70% or more correct answers. Overall, six of the respondents (9.2%) had a total actual knowledge score at or above criterion of 70% or more correct answers (Table 12). Among the six individual IDEA principles, the principle that had the highest percentage of knowledgeable participants was knowledge of zero reject (78.5%), while the principles with the lowest percentage of knowledgeable participants were knowledge of procedural

safeguards, evaluation, FAPE and LRE (0% to 1.6%; Table 17). This combination of findings provided support for Hypothesis 5, cementing a positive relationship between administrators' training needs and their assessed knowledge of special education law.

Table 17

Frequency Counts for Scoring of Knowledge for the IDEA Principles

IDEA principle	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Total knowledge	Below (< 50%)	27	41.5
	Minimal (50-69%)	32	49.2
	Basic (70-79%)	5	7.7
	Proficient (80-89%)	1	1.6
	Advanced (90-100%)	0	0.0
Evaluation	Below (< 50%)	19	29.2
	Minimal (50-69%)	39	60.0
	Basic (70-79%)	0	0.0
	Proficient (80-89%)	6	9.2
	Advanced (90-100%)	1	1.6
FAPE	Below (< 50%)	30	46.1
	Minimal (50-69%)	20	30.8
	Basic (70-79%)	12	18.5
	Proficient (80-89%)	2	3.0
	Advanced (90-100%)	1	1.6
LRE	Below (< 50%)	28	43.0
	Minimal (50-69%)	36	55.4
	Basic (70-79%)	0	0.0
	Proficient (80-89%)	0	0.0
	Advanced (90-100%)	1	1.6
Parental participation	Below (< 50%)	3	4.6
	Minimal (50-69%)	29	44.6
	Basic (70-79%)	0	0.0
	Proficient (80-89%)	0	0.0
	Advanced (90-100%)	33	50.8
Procedural safeguards	Below (< 50%)	32	49.2
	Minimal (50-69%)	26	40.0
	Basic (70-79%)	7	10.8
	Proficient (80-89%)	0	0.0
	Advanced (90-100%)	0	0.0
Zero reject	Below (< 50%)	14	21.5
	Minimal (50-69%)	0	0.0
	Basic (70-79%)	0	0.0
	Proficient (80-89%)	0	0.0
	Advanced (90-100%)	51	78.5

Note. *N* = 65.

In summation, Hypothesis 5 was supported through a positive relationship between administrators' training needs and their assessed knowledge of special education law. Principles of IDEA requiring the most review include LRE, procedural safeguards, FAPE, evaluation, and parental participation.

Summary

This study disseminated a special education law survey to 77 administrators in a SELPA in California. A sample of 64 participants was needed for the study; 65 administrators responded to the survey resulting in a response rate of 84%. All 65 responses were included in the study. The researcher conducted a comprehensive comparative analysis of SELPA, county, and California state-level administrators' education levels, experience, ethnicity, administrator-to-student ratio, and stability index, which allowed the researcher to positively conclude that the study's target population of administrators within the five school districts in a SELPA in California is reflective of the population of administrators not just in the county but also throughout the state of California. The results of this study can hence be generalized to a larger population of administrators within the state of California.

The survey was used to (a) identify the knowledge of special education law among administrators within the SELPA and (b) identify the training needs of administrators.

Hypothesis 1, which projected that 51% or more administrators would perceive their knowledge of special education law as average or better (self-perceived knowledge) was supported (Tables 8, 9, and 10).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that 51% or more administrators would not be able to attain the 70% criterion of basic knowledge on the survey of knowledge of special education law (actual knowledge) was supported by the findings of the study (Tables 11 and 12).

Hypothesis 3, which anticipated a positive gap between perceived and actual knowledge of special education law for administrators (difference between self-perceived and actual knowledge) was supported (Table 13).

Hypothesis 4, which predicted a positive relationship between administrators' education level, position, years of experience as an administrator, and their actual knowledge of special education law (demographics and actual knowledge) had partial support. There emerged a positive, significant correlation between the participants' current position and their total knowledge of the special education law, with assistant principals having higher assessed knowledge than principals; however, there was no significant correlation between participants' total actual knowledge of the special education law and the education level of the participants or their number of years of experience (Tables 14 and 15).

Hypothesis 5, which anticipated a positive gap between the administrators' training needs and their actual assessed knowledge of special education law (training needs) was supported (Tables 9, 12, 16, and 17). Training areas of IDEA principles that require expanded emphasis include LRE, procedural safeguards, FAPE, evaluation, and parental participation.

In summary, this study surveyed administrators from a SELPA in California to identify their knowledge of special education law and their subsequent training needs.

Hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 5 were fully supported by the findings; however, Hypothesis 4 had partial support. In the final chapter of this study, these findings are compared to the literature, conclusions and implications are drawn, and a series of recommendations are suggested.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

Chapter I of this study provided background about special education and introduced the research study. Chapter II presented a review of literature on the history of special education, the legal mandates and fiscal challenges guiding this field, and studied the role of administrators within special education. Chapter III discussed the research design and methodology used, and included a review of the research questions and hypotheses that guided the study. Additionally, this chapter examined the population, sample, instrumentation, and data collection procedures and analyses amidst the ethical considerations and limitations of the study. Chapter IV presented the data collected during the study with the backdrop of the research design, methodology, population, and sample. This chapter reports on each of the hypotheses, which were either supported or not supported through data analysis. Chapter V presents a summary of the study, compares the relevant findings with the findings of Overturf (2007), who was the author of the survey. The chapter further reports on the major findings and concludes with implications for action, recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks and reflections from the researcher.

Summary

Amidst the backdrop of the legal system that has played an integral role in the realm of education of students with disabilities, this study examined the knowledge of special education law among administrators within a Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) in California and ascertained their training needs.

Special education is considered a law-driven field, which is often viewed as a world within its own. It is fraught with various laws, timelines, forms, tests, expenditures, limitations, complicated procedures, and mandates that can be intimidating and baffling to those overseeing the administration of the same (Wellner, 2012). The Council for Exceptional Children (2001) identified school leadership as a major force behind successfully implementing IDEA requirements. As noted by Cooner et al. (2005), administrators' lack of knowledge about students' disabilities and the special education law can significantly impair their effectiveness as administrators and school leaders. Overturf (2007) eloquently stated that ignorance of the law is not an excuse for violating the laws that protect the rights of students with disabilities. Culves (2013) substantiated the importance of strong leadership in special education by stating that IDEA is replete with procedural requirements, which are guaranteed to plague the most seasoned administrators. A proactive approach is advocated by Culves (2013) where administrators' training needs are identified and proper training is provided for them as the front line of defense to successfully navigating IDEA. A preceding study by Katsiyannis et al. (2012) also noted the need for administrators to be thoroughly familiar with legislative provisions as well as with the latest developments involving case law in order to effectively perform their duties. Seltzer (2011) succinctly summarized this paradox by positing that the road for an administrator includes little preparation, yet it involves both grave responsibilities for what is not clearly understood as well as expectations that are undermined by the lack of knowledge and corresponding skills to address the unique needs of students with disabilities.

The study was conducted with administrators (principals and assistant principals) serving five public school districts located in a SELPA in California. Upon completing a comprehensive analysis of administrators' education levels, experience, ethnicity, administrator-to-student ratio, and stability index, the researcher positively concluded that the study's population of administrators in the target SELPA was reflective of the population of administrators in the county and throughout the state of California. The findings and recommendations from this study can hence be generalized to the population of administrators not only in the county but also in the state of California.

The data analysis and research procedures for this study were designed to assist the researcher in assessing administrators' knowledge of special education law and identify their subsequent training needs. A survey created by Overturf (2007) in Wisconsin based on the six principles of IDEA was utilized, with the author's permission, to study the scope of administrators' knowledge of special education law and their understanding of procedures and mandates relevant to special education as well as to subsequently identify their resultant training needs. Data gathered for the study were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics to respond to the research hypotheses for the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative study was to identify the knowledge of special education law among administrators within a Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) in California. Additionally, it was the purpose of this study to identify the training needs of administrators.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Through a nonexperimental survey, this study determined the level of special education law knowledge among administrators in a SELPA in California, identified their training needs, and determined if demographic factors influence special education law knowledge. This study's research questions along with the hypotheses are presented as follows.

Research questions. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What do administrators in a SELPA in California perceive as their level of knowledge of special education law?
2. What percentage of administrators in a SELPA in California have the fundamental legal knowledge of special education law needed to comply with special education law as determined by 70% criterion for basic knowledge on a survey of the knowledge of special education law?
3. What is the difference between these administrators' perceived knowledge of special education law and their actual level of knowledge of special education law?
4. Is there a relationship between the administrators' education level, position, or years of experience as an administrator and their actual knowledge of special education law?
5. What are the training needs of administrators as determined by their actual assessed knowledge of special education law (performance below 70% criterion for basic knowledge)?

Hypotheses. The research questions correspond to the hypotheses that were tested during the course of this study. The null and alternative versions of the hypotheses are as follows:

- H1₀. Fifty-one percent or more administrators will perceive that their knowledge of special education law is less than average.
- H1_a. Fifty-one percent or more administrators will perceive that their knowledge of special education law is average or better.
- H2₀. Fifty-one percent or more administrators will be able to attain or surpass the 70% criterion of basic knowledge on the survey of knowledge of special education law.
- H2_a. Fifty-one percent or more administrators will not be able to attain the 70% criterion of basic knowledge on the survey of knowledge of special education law.
- H3₀. There will be no gap between perceived and actual knowledge of special education law for administrators.
- H3_a. There will be a positive gap between perceived and actual knowledge of special education law for administrators.
- H4₀. There will be no relationship between these administrators' education level, position, or years of experience as an administrator and their actual knowledge of special education law.
- H4_a. There will be a positive relationship between administrators' education level, position, or years of experience as an administrator and their actual knowledge of special education law.
- H5₀. There will be no gap between the administrators' training needs and their actual assessed knowledge of special education law.
- H5_a. There will be a positive gap between the administrators' training needs and their actual assessed knowledge of special education law.

Methodology

This study used quantitative, nonexperimental survey design as described by McMillan and Schumacher (2010) in their publication *Research in Education*.

Quantitative research allows educational researchers to examine problems in the education system, understand why these problems are occurring, and determine how educators can prevent the problems from occurring in the future (Gay et al., 2006). The survey used a cross-sectional design, which allowed the researcher to collect the necessary information in a short period of time.

The survey was based on the six principles of IDEA and was utilized to study the scope of administrators' knowledge of special education law and their understanding of procedures and mandates relevant to special education and their resultant training needs. The following six guiding principles of IDEA 2004 were included in the survey: zero reject, nondiscriminatory evaluation, free and appropriate public education (FAPE), least restrictive environment (LRE), procedural safeguards, and parental participation.

Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of administrators serving five public school districts located in a SELPA in California. The districts within the SELPA serve approximately 42,000 students at 50 public schools, which include 35 elementary schools, seven middle schools, six high schools, one continuation school, and one alternative high school. In order to achieve a 95% probability that the proportions to each question are within 5% of the true proportions in the population of 77 administrators, a sample of 64 participants was needed as determined by the online survey system

calculator (Creative Research Systems, 2014). The researcher received 65 responses for a response rate of 84%. All 65 participant responses were included in the study.

Major Findings

Findings related to each of the research hypotheses are presented sequentially, beginning with Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 1

Fifty-one percent or more administrators will perceive their knowledge of special education law as average or better. The data analysis revealed that 61 of the total 65 participants of the study (93.8%) rated their knowledge of special education law as average or higher; and only four participants, accounting for 6.2%, perceived their special education law knowledge to be below average. It can be concluded that the participants had a highly unrealistic self-perception of special education knowledge.

When delving further into this perceived knowledge as it related to complying with special education law in light of their professional responsibilities, 92.3% of participants believed they possessed sufficient knowledge of the law as it related to their role as administrators. It can be concluded that administrators erroneously believed that they had sufficient knowledge of special education law.

Additionally, the data analysis revealed that 58.5% of the participants believed that the majority of their special education knowledge came from sources outside their administrative preparation coursework. Only 9.2% of the participants believed this knowledge came from administrative preparation coursework. These data point to the much-needed special education emphasis in administrative preparation coursework. This finding also supports literature that stresses the importance and need for special and

general education to work as a unified system, with conjoined trainings in both disciplines being embedded in administrative preparatory coursework (Boscardin, 2005; Boscardin et al., 2010; Cooner et al., 2005; DiPaola & Walter-Thomas, 2003; McHatton et al., 2010; Lasky & Karge, 2006). Some of the responses provided by the participants reflected that the majority of their special education knowledge comes from district professional development, on-the-job experiences, special education meetings, and attendance at IEP meetings. Universities should seriously examine this feedback from the participants, as they look to embed legal knowledge relevant to special education into their preparatory programs.

Hypothesis 2

Fifty-one percent or more administrators will not be able to attain the 70% criterion of basic knowledge on the survey of knowledge of special education law. There were 42 questions on the knowledge of special education law survey that assessed the actual level of participants' knowledge. Participants were able to score at or above the basic criterion of 70% on 14 out of the 42 items. Participants scored below the 70% criterion for basic knowledge on 28 of the 42 items. Statements that were most understood were (a) special education services for children with disabilities are provided at no cost to their parents (96.9%), (b) report cards are issued to regular education students on a quarterly basis (90.8%), and (c) continued placement in special education (90.8%). The least understood statements were (a) school districts only need to provide an annual written notice to the parents for the continued placement of their child in special education (13.8%), and (b) at least one of the child's general education teachers is required to attend the IEP team meeting if the child is or may be participating in the

general education environment (4.6%). IDEA principles that emerged as requiring substantial training were LRE, procedural safeguards, FAPE, nondiscriminatory evaluation, and parental participation.

Only six of the 65 participants scored at or above the 70% criterion for basic knowledge, declaring that 9.2% of administrators attained or surpassed this basic criterion. Of the 65 (90.8%) administrators, 59 did not meet the 70% criterion of basic knowledge.

These findings are germane to the impetus for professional development of administrators with regard to special education and the need for this professional development to become an established organizational practice. Research has demonstrated that knowledge of special education laws and mandates is pivotal to the success of administrators (Council for Exceptional Children, 2001; Katsiyannis et al, 2012; Lasky & Karge, 2006; Voltz & Collins, 2010). This gap in knowledge may be leading to lost opportunities where administrators knowledgeable about special education can make decisions within the scope of the law at the school sites, are aware of the multiple possibilities within those boundaries, and hence, are able to assist their teams in creative and novel solutions to issues that may arise.

Hypothesis 3

There will be a positive gap between perceived and actual knowledge of special education law for administrators. An analysis of the data for Hypothesis 3 revealed a significant gap between participants' perceived and actual knowledge of special education law. Specifically, 93.2% of participants self-reported average or above average knowledge of special education law in comparison to only 9.2% of participants who truly

met or surpassed the 70% criterion for basic knowledge as assessed by their performance on the survey.

This is reflective of a significant gap between administrators' self-perceived and actual knowledge. The findings of this study can precipitate some challenges in the administrators' willingness to participate in continuing education and professional development in the field of special education. This perception or self-deception may lead to established institutional habits, cognitive inertia, and taint an administrator's willingness to proactively participate and embrace continuing education and professional development in this area. Although there is value in autonomy, it is equally important for administrators to be self-confident and willing to reach out to district-level staff for assistance. Actively seeking and welcoming this support requires shaping the administrators' personal judgment of worthiness. On a philosophical level, this flawed and exaggerated self-knowledge perception speaks to a core human need for competence, which should be proactively and positively harnessed for both personal and organizational benefit. If left alone and not shaped through structures imposed by ongoing professional development, this distorted self-knowledge perception could potentially lead to some egregious and unconscionable errors and fiscal ramifications for school districts.

A realignment of priorities may require a commitment from administrators and school districts to willingly participate in internal and external professional development and coaching opportunities. An annual self-assessment of competencies and skills in the arena of special education may also bridge the gap between perceived and actual knowledge.

Hypothesis 4

There will be a positive relationship between administrators' education level, position, years of experience as an administrator, and their actual knowledge of special education law. While studying the impact of demographic factors on knowledge of special education law, it was noted that 61.6% of the participants had a master's degree plus 30 additional units. There was, however, no significant correlation noted between participants' education level and their knowledge of special education law.

The average amount of administrative experience among the participants ranged from less than 1 year to 40 years. It was noted that 96% of administrators' administrative experience ranged from 0-19 years, including almost 70% who had been administrators for 5 to 19 years. The data analysis did not reveal any significant correlation between years of administrative experience and knowledge of special education law.

The data analysis revealed that 55.4 % of the participants held the position of a site principal and 44.6% of participants held the position of site assistant principal. A positive, significant correlation was found between the participants' current position and their total knowledge of the special education law, with site assistant principals (59.97% correct on survey) having higher actual knowledge than principals (46.68% correct on survey). This correlation can be linked to its possible causality if studied in light of the personnel, financial, instructional leadership, political, and legal demands placed on the principals in this era of educational compliance and accountability.

Hypothesis 5

There will be a positive gap between the administrators' training needs and their actual assessed knowledge of special education law. The criterion for an acceptable

basic level of knowledge on the survey was set at 70% or more correct answers.

Participant responses on the 42 knowledge questions on the survey were categorized into four categories based on percentage of correct responses to each of the questions.

- Below prerequisite knowledge (below 50% correct)
- Minimal level of knowledge (50-69%)
- Basic level of knowledge (70-79%)
- Proficient level of knowledge (80-89%)
- Advanced level of knowledge (90% or more)

There was one participant who was at the proficiency level in special education law knowledge, accounting for 1.6% of the administrators. Only five of the 65 participants met the basic level of knowledge on the survey. This accounted for 7.7% of administrators making the basic knowledge mark of 70%. There were 32 participants who scored at the minimal level of knowledge criterion accounting for 49.2% of the administrators. Twenty-seven participants scored at the below prerequisite mark, accounting for 41.5% of the administrators.

Performance Based on the Six Principles of IDEA (2004)

The participants' performance on the six principles of IDEA (2004), which define the field of special education, are discussed. Since laws and mandates primarily govern special education, an understanding of the six principles of IDEA (2004) will ensure the rights of students with disabilities, ensure compliance, and potentially reduce and eliminate litigation in the field.

Zero reject. The principle of zero reject is based on the premise that all children, irrespective of their disabling condition, must receive an appropriate education. Nothing

is clearer in IDEA than the intent of Congress to include all children with disabilities in school and the requirement that all state agencies follow a policy of zero reject. Fourteen participants scored at the below prerequisite knowledge on this principle, with 51 participants scoring in the advanced range. Participant performance on this principle led the researcher to conclude that the majority of administrators have a strong grasp of the concept of zero reject and that school districts are meeting their obligation to actively search and serve students with disabilities within their jurisdiction.

Nondiscriminatory evaluation. School districts have the requirement to conduct an individualized assessment of students in all areas of suspected disability and must use a variety of assessment tools and strategies to ascertain the educational needs of a student and whether or not there is a disability.

Through an analysis of the collected data, it was determined that 19 participants scored below 50%, resulting in 29.2% of the administrators falling in the below prerequisite level. Thirty-nine participants scored between the 50%-69% knowledge, resulting in 60% of the participants scoring in the minimal knowledge category. Only six participants were in the 80%-90% proficient range; consequently, only 9.2% of the participants reached the proficient level category in this principle. One participant scored in the advanced range, culminating in 1.6% of the participants who scored advanced in this principle of IDEA (2004).

This picture has significant implications for current administrators and their respective districts. Reflecting specifically on the nondiscriminatory evaluation principle of IDEA (2004), as an example, administrators with a thorough understanding of the law would be able to think outside the box when assisting their teams in determining areas of

suspected disability and be able to understand that nonacademic areas may be a trigger for a student, and hence, prompt their teams to undertake a close examination during assessment. An administrator with special education competence may be able to avoid some of the potential legal exposure that comes with failing to assess in all areas of suspected disability, not observing a student during the assessment process, incomplete protocols, and using instruments outside of the age range. In the absence of this special education acumen, administrators may not be able to prevent loss of educational benefit for students and meet their fiduciary responsibility toward the school district.

Free and appropriate public education (FAPE). FAPE reflects the obligation of the school district to adapt education to the needs of students with disabilities (Yell, 2006). FAPE is considered to be the cornerstone of IDEA, as documented in a student's IEP, includes the high-stakes remedies of tuition reimbursement and compensatory education, and accounts for the vast majority of the litigation under IDEA (Zirkel, 2013a).

Interestingly, 30 participants, in other words, 46.1% of the participants scored below 50% on this principle. The minimal level of knowledge category had 20 participants, specifically 30.8% of the participants who scored between the 50%-69% level of knowledge category. There were 12 participants (18.5%) who scored in the 70%-79% range, hence possessing basic knowledge. There were two participants who scored in the 80%-90% proficient range; therefore, only 3% of the participants reached the proficient level category for this principle. The assessment of this principle concluded with only one participant scoring in the advanced range, resulting in 1.6% of the participants who scored advanced in this principle of IDEA (2004).

As established from the findings above, the majority of the administrators do not have a strong grasp of the concept of FAPE, which lies at the heart and soul of special education. As succinctly summarized by Zirkel (2013a), the majority of the litigation under IDEA revolves around the act's central pillar of the obligations of school districts to provide FAPE to students with disabilities. Mastering this concept of FAPE by administrators will avoid far-reaching legal and fiscal ramifications for school districts.

Least restrictive environment (LRE). The LRE mandate provides a clear preference for educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms while allowing separate class services in certain instances when such a placement was deemed more effective or better to meet the student's needs (Crockett & Kauffman, 1999).

Interpretative analysis of the data revealed that 28 participants, accounting for 43% of the administrators, scored at the below prerequisite knowledge level. Thirty-six participants, accounting for 55.4% of the administrators, scored at the minimal knowledge level, and only one participant scored in the advanced range, amounting to only 1.6% of the administrators who had advanced knowledge in this principle.

Given the preceding context, it is important to note that the percentage of students with disabilities being educated in general education classrooms for 80% or more of the school day has increased from 34% in 1990 to 61% in 2011 (McLeskey et al., 2012). This dramatic increase unequivocally speaks to the compelling need for administrators to have the foundational legal knowledge to serve this integral group of students.

Procedural safeguards/due process. Procedural safeguards explain to parents their rights and safeguards under IDEA (2004) and are distributed to parents as part of this mandate. These safeguards create checks and balances, establish shared parental and

district decision making, and help guarantee that the student benefits from being in school. These procedural safeguards also ensure the due process rights of the students with disabilities and their parents and provide remedies for any violations of the same.

The results of the survey under this principle reveal that 32 participants, for a total of 49.2% administrators, scored below the prerequisite knowledge range. Additionally, 26 participants scored in the minimal knowledge range, accounting for 40% of the administrators who had minimal knowledge under this principle. Seven participants performed in the basic knowledge range, amounting to 10.8% of administrators with the basic level of knowledge.

With parental rights being ensured by IDEA (2004), the option of filing for due process hearings and complaints against school districts becomes a commonly explored avenue when any violations of procedural and/or substantive rights ensured under this act occur. The cost of one due process hearing could reach as much as \$60,000 to \$100,000 (Mueller, 2009). As part of IDEA, procedural safeguards provide attorneys' fees to parents who prevail in court. The findings from this study authoritatively lend support to the need for administrators to be equipped with an understanding of special education law in fulfilling their ethical and fiduciary responsibilities.

Parental participation. Special education law explicitly recognizes the importance of parental participation in all educational decisions. To ensure parental participation, Section 1415 of IDEA (2004) makes available to parents administrative and judicial remedies if they disagree with the decisions of the school district with reference to their child, if they are unhappy with the results, or if they, for some other reason, are dissatisfied with the process.

The results of this study revealed that three participants scored below the prerequisite range, resulting in 4.6% of administrators scoring in this performance category. Twenty-nine participants, for a total of 44.6% administrators, scored in the minimal knowledge range and 33 administrators, amounting to 50.8% of administrators, scored in the advanced knowledge range under this principle.

Parent-school district relationships can be positively cemented through administrators' understanding of the rights guaranteed to parents of students with disabilities. In studying the importance of parental participation in the special education process, Cope-Kasten (2013) noted the failure to communicate and cooperate as the leading cause of the breakdown of trust between school districts and parents, which can lead to high due process filings. The researcher believes that implicit in the notion of effective communication and relationship building is the capacity for administrators to understand the laws that steer special education in addition to leadership that is guided by political and emotional intelligence. In the absence of mastery in this area, conflict cannot be addressed proactively and no common ground can be sought on which disputes can be resolved. Administrators with communicative competencies and the above-mentioned skills might be able to involve parents as partners and build reciprocity of trust through their responsiveness to parental concerns.

In summary, the results of this study amplify the need for additional training and professional development for administrators. Indisputably clear from the outcome of this study is the need for professional development for administrators in the areas of nondiscriminatory evaluation, FAPE, LRE, procedural safeguards/due process, and parental participation.

Comparative Analysis With Original Study

With the author's permission, the researcher used a survey created by Overturf (2007) for a similar study in Wisconsin. Table 18 provides a comparative analysis of the relevant findings from the two studies.

Table 18

Comparative Analysis of Relevant Results Between Overturf's Study and the Researcher's Study

No.	Comparative Point	Overturf	Researcher
1.	Participants of survey	Recently licensed principals in Wisconsin	Administrators (assistant principals and principals) in a SELPA in California
2.	Years of experience	41% of participants had 0 to 4 years of experience as an administrator. The study was conducted with recently licensed principals.	96% of the administrators' administrative experience ranged between 0-19 years, including almost 70% who had been administrators for 5 to 19 years. The study's participants included a majority of veteran assistant principals and principals.
3.	Percentage of participants who self-perceived their special education law and procedures knowledge to be average or higher	76%	93.8%
4.	Percentage of participants whose special education knowledge came from administrative preparation coursework	16%	9.2%
5.	Self-perception of special education law relevant to administration of professional responsibilities	59.84% of participants felt that they had adequate knowledge of special education law to fulfill their professional responsibilities.	92.3% of participants believed they had sufficient knowledge of special education law to fulfill their professional responsibilities.
6.	Percentage of participants who self-projected an average need for additional training in special education law and procedures	31%	57%
7.	Actual knowledge as assessed on the Knowledge of Special Education Law Survey	56% of the participants performed at basic level or above (70% or more correct).	9.2% of the participants had a total actual knowledge score at or above criterion of 70% or more correct.
8.	Response rate of survey	25.5%	84.45%

Conclusions

Accountability in special education is two pronged, the first prong being procedural, and the second prong being substantive. Administrators need to understand the legal framework of special education and the protections afforded to this diverse group of students with disabilities and their parents. Understanding that students and parents are entitled to protections and safeguards under special education laws may help administrators steer clear of cookie-cutter approaches. Although special education practices may vary from district to district, the core principles as stipulated under IDEA, which is a federal law, remain the same, and consequently, need to be followed.

Balancing an understanding of special education laws along with leading the instructional and operational aspects of a school may be challenging for administrators. Although the role of administrators is multifaceted; an expanded leadership approach, including expertise in both general and special education, is the call of the hour, amidst the diverse and high-stakes educational landscape. An administrator's leadership provides systematic direction and shapes the culture of the school; hence, as a leader, the administrator needs to model shared responsibility for ALL students, providing an integrated approach to the complementary disciplines of special and general education, and ultimately, eliminate the antiquity of special education isolation.

The significant actual knowledge gaps that emerged under the principles of nondiscriminatory evaluation, FAPE, LRE, procedural safeguards/due process, and parental participation, align with the significant fiduciary impact of lack of knowledge in these areas, and strengthen the argument for administrators to remain current with the

requirements of IDEA to maintain their competency and sustainability as administrators. What emerges from this research is a stark rationale for ongoing professional development since administrators cannot be expected to succeed in uncharted waters without adequate knowledge and training.

Implications for Action

The researcher believes that the results of this study will guide administrators to proactively and eagerly embrace the need to expand their knowledge and experiences in special education. In order for administrators to be reliable and authentic sources of information for their staffs, they need to enhance their professional acuity in the areas they oversee. Based on the findings of this study, several implications for action/recommendations are presented for consideration to state and local education agencies. In addition, recommendations regarding future research are included. These are organized under the subheadings of policy focus and practitioner focus. The researcher conducted a meticulous and comprehensive comparative analysis on the administrators' education levels, experience, ethnicity, administrator-to-student ratio, and stability index within the SELPA, county, and state of California, which allowed the researcher to positively conclude that the study's target population of administrators within the five school districts in a SELPA in California is reflective of the population of administrators in California. Consequently, the recommendations and implications for action from this study can be generalized for the population of administrators, not only in the county but also throughout the state of California. Policy focus is based on macrolevel implications for action/recommendations, and practitioner focus is based on microlevel implications for action/recommendations:

Policy Focus

1. Successful completion of special education law coursework through a university program should be required of all aspiring administrators. Veteran administrators should be required to either demonstrate proficiency through an annual assessment or be required to take the special education law course as a requirement for renewing their credential periodically. Administrative preparation programs that have functioned in silos need to embed special education coursework as part of all administrative preparatory coursework and reflect the philosophy of including special education as part of the general education fabric.
2. The California Credentialing Board should include competencies relevant to special education law as part of the credentialing requirements for all administrators, especially in light of the increase in due process filings and research that points to administrators as the frontline people dealing with the litigious challenges in special education. Building the competency of administrators may be a viable option to avoid situations that render school districts vulnerable for due process filings, especially when the cost of one due process hearing could reach as much as \$60,000 to \$100,000 (Mueller, 2009).
3. School districts within a county should explore a collaborative countywide administrative cohort-training model with university partners, in order to ensure that trained and experienced administrators with the necessary background knowledge of special education are leading public schools.
4. Administrative evaluation tools need to include proficiency in special education law as one of the evaluation focus areas that administrators are evaluated on annually.

Consistency of expectation for proficiency in special education law from employers will establish clear goals and proficiency expectations for all administrators.

Practitioner Focus

1. New and veteran administrators may need to be paired up in mentoring and coaching roles to improve practices in the field of special education.

2. The importance of well-designed professional development cannot be overstated.

Districts should promote a culture and community of continuous inquiry and improvement and establish the expectation that channelizes administrators to continuously seek and share special education knowledge and experiences.

Knowledge, skill building, and sharing should become the norm in school districts.

There is a dire need for improved understanding of the laws and mandates that guide special education, which may translate into improved student outcomes in classrooms.

Additionally, training in special education law may provide administrators with the competency, knowledge, and skill base to understand and embrace this section of the student population and may positively shape administrative responses to parents in legally and emotionally charged situations. Incidentally, this system support model may also bring longevity to administrative roles in public schools and may attract and retain qualified administrators.

3. In conjunction with organized professional development, it is critical that administrators continue to self-educate on the overarching umbrella of IDEA.

Additionally, administrators should keep abreast with the local and national issues relevant to special education in order for them to truly understand the intricacies of the strictly regulated world of special education. This may include signing up for monthly

Office of Administrative Hearings email notifications for special education legal decisions, which form the basis for determining best practices.

4. Those with special education background knowledge and a credential in special education should be recruited as administrators. Advanced knowledge of special education laws in conjunction with intensive and ongoing professional development in the field may be the ideal combination to ensure improved student and district outcomes in special education.
5. Districts should revisit their hiring practices and ensure that competencies relevant to special education law are embedded in their formal interview and screening processes for school administrators. The recruitment process should include actual scenario questions, the responses to which would provide districts with valuable insight on the applicant's special education competency.
6. Districts may wish to consider realignment of their administrative responsibilities, where some administrators who have the knowledge base and experience in special education have the exclusive responsibility of attending IEPs and overseeing special education programs. It is the researcher's belief that dispersion of special education responsibility weakens special education programming and response. This may require a paradigm shift relevant to personnel placement and alignment; however, in the interim, until all administrators have the basic level of skill adequacy with special education, school districts may avoid the fiduciary burden of due process filings through this skill-concentrated model.
7. Another aspect to consider with regard to personnel alignment is to ensure that no novice administrator is assigned to oversee special education at a campus. This

recommendation for policy focus is based on the findings from a study by Johnson (2003), who found that from a risk management perspective, special education disputes generate far more litigation than employment-related claims, tort claims, or commercial claims, hence, elevating special education compliance issues to a big-ticket item.

8. School districts may also consider utilizing the facilitated IEP approach, where a skilled, trained, and capable facilitator assists the team in developing the IEP while tactfully and precisely addressing the disagreements and conflicts that may arise during the course of the meeting. The costs associated with facilitated IEPs will be far less than the cost of proceedings associated with due process filings. Additionally, the emotional and personnel drain associated with due process hearings for all members involved may be mitigated through this process.
9. In order to avoid having attorneys at IEP meetings, administrators and their teams need to plan proactively. The school-based teams led by administrators need to be vigilant of any procedural or substantive violations through staffing meetings and rectify any and all errors with due diligence.
10. In light of the rising litigation costs associated with special education and the historic upward trajectory in this arena, school districts may benefit from retaining in-house counsel as opposed to contracting with outside law firms. An in-house counsel may be more motivated to resolve litigious cases and provide immediate counsel on issues that are brewing. A proactive student-centered approach coupled with legal guidance and authority through an in-house counsel may significantly reduce special education encroachment that arises from exorbitant due process filings.

11. The researcher will communicate the research findings to the SELPA superintendents and administrators involved in the study. Training modules reflective of the different IDEA principles will also be devised. These modules will be used to provide extensive professional development for administrators. Additionally, the researcher will communicate the impact of this study's findings by writing professional journal articles and presenting at professional conferences (e.g., Association of California School Administrators, California School Boards Association; Council for Exceptional Children, etc.).

Recommendations for Further Research

This study, conducted with administrators within a SELPA in California, provides several possibilities for future research. Recommendations emerging from this study are discussed in this section.

Establishing and promoting a strong rapport, effective communication, and collaboration between administrators and parents should be studied in light of its impact on litigation. At times parents are steered into the path of litigation because they feel the need for some expert guidance to navigate the murky waters of special education. It is the researcher's opinion that an administrator's lack of committed engagement with parents increases the likelihood of lawsuits against the districts. The relational aspect of educational administration should be studied for its impact on special education's fiduciary and programmatic outcomes.

Another area that can be studied is the role of the special education community advisory committee (CAC) and its impact on special education outcomes. CAC includes representatives from district parents and district and SELPA administrators, and can be

used as a vehicle to keep community members apprised of special education issues, hence, creating a positive, nonadversarial partnership with parents. This partnership can become a repository of goodwill when relationships go sour with some families. The CAC can be used as a positive channel to repair those relationships. If administrators are able to garner the support of their communities through vehicles like the CAC, then a study on the occurrence of litigation initiated by parents while an active CAC is in effect may be another area of interest for future research.

Future research may focus on implementing strong professional development modules on the six principles of IDEA along with intensive conflict resolution and alternative dispute resolution training (ADR), and thereafter assess the number of due process filings against the district once administrators have received intensive training in these areas. A pre- and poststudy may be beneficial in retrieving some empirical data on the impact of administrator professional development and training on due process filings within the district.

A qualitative study with open-ended questions on the leadership characteristics and styles of administrators who have been successful in meeting the needs of students in special education may add to the breadth of knowledge that is currently available in the field.

The researcher recommends that the results of this study be shared with superintendents throughout the state, and that a qualitative study be conducted with the superintendents regarding their beliefs on special education. These beliefs should then be compared to the success of their respective special education programs as determined by the number of due process filings within individual districts.

Superintendents can effectuate transformational change in education. A similar study, using the same or an adapted version of the survey, should be conducted with district superintendents to determine their understanding of special education law. The researcher recommends this as an area for future research and promise since a study conducted with superintendents by Outka (2010) identified education of students with disabilities as superintendents' least area of perceived knowledge, irrespective of their highest degree.

A Delphi study utilizing a panel of experts including SELPA directors and/or directors of special education should be conducted to study this monumental challenge in the field regarding administrator preparation. This panel should identify strategies that they believe can address this need for specialized training in the field. A similar study should also be conducted with teacher department leaders to ascertain their level of knowledge and to identify gaps and strengths.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

This study acknowledged and recognized the changing tapestry of special education and the corresponding need for administrators to keep abreast with the state and federal legislation guiding the realm of special education. It is evident from the outcome of this study that current and ongoing professional development for administrators is vital in meeting the humanistic demands of overseeing special education programs and fulfilling the fiduciary responsibilities toward school districts and taxpayers.

School districts do not have unlimited funding; moreover, as the researcher has ascertained from experience as a special educator, litigation primarily stems from

parents' feeling a lack of meaningful participation in the IEP process, administrators and their staff not understanding their responsibilities under FAPE, and IEPs that are procedurally and structurally flawed. With federal funding only at 17.1% for special education in comparison to the \$90 million per year spent by school districts across the nation to resolve conflict (DeNisco, 2013), there is an impending fiscal catastrophe in special education that cannot be ignored.

The above stated aligns with the findings from this study and should be the wakeup call for school districts, inspiring them to spearhead transformational change in the field of educational administration as it relates to special education. A collective expectation and vision of effectuating and implementing change should become the mantra, leading to improved student, organizational, and personal outcomes. Proactive and legally sound behaviors on the part of school districts will mitigate the legal ramifications of IDEA (2004), which is an entitlement statute.

Implications of the findings from this study further suggest a need for reevaluating the course requirements for administrator training programs in California. In fact, the results of this study can provide valuable information in developing authentic and practical training programs/modules and supports for administrators relevant to the cornerstone of special education, IDEA, and its six overarching principles. Implementing systematically designed training modules will empower administrators with the required information, promote accountability, and establish guidelines for following legal criteria and mandates.

Competencies previously considered compartmentalized for a handful of administrators are now urgently becoming the norm for all administrators. Embracing

this reality with persistence and discipline is the key to improvement and providing school districts with the competitive intelligence to avoid litigation. This study made it noticeably conspicuous that administrators are not adequately prepared to face the legal challenges associated with educating students with disabilities. The researcher strongly advocates for the need to provide special education training to support and build the capacity of administrators, an area that has been neglected for years in administrative leadership preparation.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
Synthesis Matrix

COMMON THEMES	SOURCE 1	SOURCE 2	SOURCE 3	SOURCE 4
HISTORY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION	Hulett (2009)	Huefner (2006)	Colarusso & O'Rourke (2005)	Journal of Scholarship and Practice Winter (2009)
LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF SPECIAL EDUCATION	Weber, Mark C (2009)	Mitchell L. Yell, Antonis Katsiyannis, Joseph, B. Ryan, Kimbriey A. McDuffie & Lindsay Mattoks (2008)	Susan Etscheidt and Christina M. Curran(2010)	Jennifer Y. Wagner & Antonis Katsiyannis (2010)
FISCAL CHALLENGES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION	Mueller(2009)	Katsiyannis and Herbst(2003)	O'Dell (2003)	Antonis Katsiyannis and Maria Herbst(2004)
ROLE OF SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS	Milligan, Neal, & Singleton (2012)	Mary Lynn Boscardin(2005)	Barbara L. Pazey and Heather A. Cole (2012)	Jennifer Y. Wagner and Antonis Katsiyannis (2010)
TRAINING NEEDS OF SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS	Susan Mortorff Robb, and Robert Gilmore(2011)	Lasky & Karge (2006).	Cooner, Tochterman, and Garrison-Wade (2005)	Voltz and Collins (2010),

	A	B	C	D	E
1	COMMON THEMES	SOURCE 5	SOURCE 6	SOURCE 7	SOURCE 8
2	HISTORY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION	Barbara L. Pazez and Heather A. Cole (2012)	Bryan G. Cook1 and Sara Cothren Cook(2011)	Susan Etscheidt a & Christina M. Curran(2010)	Perry A. Zirke(2013)
3	LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF SPECIAL EDUCATION	Linda Karen Tilson(2011)	Katsiyannis and Herbst (2003)	Wagnor and Katsiyannis(2010)	Perry A. Zirke(2004 & 2008)
4	FISCAL CHALLENGES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION	Jennifer Y. Wagner1 and Antonis Katsiyannis (2010)	Chambers,Harr,and Dhanani(2003)	Parrish et al (1998 & 2004)	Lewis William Davis(2007)
5	ROLE OF SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS	Dissertation By Linda Karen Tilson(2011)	Jeremy M. Lynch(2012)	Michael F. DiPaola Chriss Walther-Thomas (2003)	Smith & Colon (1998)
6	TRAINING NEEDS OF SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS	Lashley (2007),	Boscardin, Mainzer, & Kealy (2010)	Valesky and Hurth's (1992)	Council for Exceptional Children (2001)

	A	B	C	D	E
1	COMMON THEMES	SOURCE 9	SOURCE 10	SOURCE 11	SOURCE 12
2	HISTORY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION	Jean B Crockett(2002)	Jamie Meek Chaffin (2013)	Deborah L. Voltz and Loucrecia Collins (2010)	Mary Lynn Boscardin, Richard Mainzer, and Mary V. Kealy (2010)
3	LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF SPECIAL EDUCATION	Katsiyannis, Zhang and Frye (2002)	Antonis Katsiyannis and Maria Herbst(2004)	Robert A. Garda Jr(2006)	Wiskom, Fowler & Christopher(2011)
4	FISCAL CHALLENGES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION	Arnold & Chestnutt (2000)	Chambers,Parrish, & Harr(2003)	Smith(2003)	Bagenstos(2009)
5	ROLE OF SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS	Jean B Crockett(2002)	Jamie Meek Chaffin(2013)	Mary Lynn Boscardin, Richard Mainzer, and Mary V. Kealy(2010)	Deborah L. Voltz and Loucrecia Collins (2010)
6	TRAINING NEEDS OF SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS	Jacobson, Jacobson and Hilton(2006)	Protz(2005)	Jacobs, Tonnsen, & Baker (2004)	Dissertation By Heidi I. Bender(2011)

COMMON					
1	THEMES	SOURCE 13	SOURCE 14	SOURCE 15	SOURCE 16
2	HISTORY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION	Deborah Deutsch Smith, Anthony Truong, Roxanne Watson, Melissa D. Hartley, Susan Mortorff Robb, and Robert Gilmore(2011)	Deborah Deutsch Smith and Bianca Elizabeth Montrosse(2012)	Patrick G. Harrigan(2003)	Mary Lynn Boscardin(2007)
3	LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF SPECIAL EDUCATION	Yell(2006)	Yell, M. L., & Drasgow, E. (2000)	California Education Code; California Education Code	Wright & Wright(2007)
4	FISCAL CHALLENGES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION	Greene (2007)	Bateman(2010)	Fulfrost(2004)	Steve(2000)
5	ROLE OF SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS	Mary Lynn Boscardin(2007)	Boscardin(2005)	Searby(2010)	Sorrentino & Zirkel (2004)
6	TRAINING NEEDS OF SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS	Beth Lasky and Belinda D. Karge(2006)	Valesky & Hirth (1992)	Smith and Colon (1998)	Cline(1981)

COMMON THEMES	SOURCE 17	SOURCE 18	SOURCE 19	SOURCE 20	SOURCE 21
HISTORY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION	Alexander & Alexander (2005)	Crockett (1999)	Milligan, Neal, & Singleton (2012)		
LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF SPECIAL EDUCATION	Van Horn, Burello, & De Clue (1992)	Chalfant & Pysk (2007)			
FISCAL CHALLENGES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION	Bridget A. Flanagan & Chad J. Graff (2000)				
ROLE OF SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS	Dissertation By Carissa Gail Mitchell(2011)	Dissertation By Keisha Henderson-Black(2009)	Dissertation By Carmen Martinez Rodriguez(2007)	Smith, J.O., & Colon, R.J. (1998)	
TRAINING NEEDS OF SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS	Weinstein(1989)	Davidson & Algozzine(2002).	Mayer (1982).	Johnson & Duffett (2003).	Monteith, D.S. (1994)

APPENDIX B

Special Education Law Survey

Copy of page: Welcome to My Survey

***The purpose of this quantitative study is to identify the knowledge of special education law amongst administrators within a Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) in California. Additionally, it is the purpose of this study to identify the perceived training needs of administrators. This is a research project being conducted by Suruchi Singh at Brandman University as part of her Ed. D dissertation. You are invited to participate in this research project because you are a principal or assistant principal within the SELPA. Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any negative consequences. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this research survey, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized. The procedure involves filling out an online survey, which will take approximately 20 minutes. Your responses will be confidential and no identifying information such as your name, email address or IP address will be saved. The survey questions will be about your understanding and knowledge of special education law. To help protect your confidentiality, the survey will not contain information that will personally identify you. The results of the research study will be published as doctoral dissertation research, but research findings will be reported in a manner which prevents identification of any participant or school site. Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is to contribute to the field of educational research and inform the professional practice of educational administrators relevant to special education. If you have any questions about the research study, please contact. Suruchi Singh at sing4104@mail.brandman.edu or at ssingh@fjuhsd.net. This research has been reviewed according to Brandman University IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.**

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that: • you have read the above information • you voluntarily agree to participate • you are at least 18 years of age. If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the "disagree" button.

Agree

Disagree

Survey, which was created by Dr. Wendy Overturf has been adapted with permission from the author. The first few questions will address your opinions about special education.

1. How do you perceive your knowledge of special education law and procedures as it relates to the role of an administrator?

Low Average High

2. Indicate your current need for additional training in special education law and procedures as it relates to your role as an administrator.

Very Great Need Average Need Very Little Need

3. How would you rate your administrative preparation program in terms of providing you with the opportunity to learn special education law and procedures as it relates to the role of an administrator?

No exposure to special education law and procedures Average exposure to special education law and procedures Excellent exposure to special education law and procedures

4. Please choose the statement that is most accurate.

Agree

The majority of my knowledge of special education law came from my administrative preparation coursework.

The majority of my knowledge of special education law came from other sources outside of my administrative preparation coursework.

The majority of my knowledge of special education law came from both my administrative preparation coursework and other sources.

Please identify what "other sources" include.

5. Do you believe you have sufficient knowledge of special education law and procedures to comply with the requirements of law as it relates to the role of an administrator?

No

Yes

The next section of questions relates to special education law and its procedures in the school setting. Please remember that the purpose of this survey is not to gain information about an individual but rather to gain information about the

knowledge of special education law and procedures in all administrators within a SELPA in California. It is important that you answer the questions without assistance.

The "not sure" response is ONLY to be used if you feel that if a comparable situation presented itself in a school setting, that prior to making a decision you would consult with another person or use another source of information. PLEASE BASE YOUR RESPONSES ON SPECIAL EDUCATION LAWS AND REGULATIONS IN CALIFORNIA.

6. Special education services for children with disabilities are provided at no cost to their parents.

- False
- True
- Not Sure

7. The law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), specifies that all children with impairments such as intellectual disability, autism, specific learning disability, or blindness require special education services designed to meet their individualized educational needs.

- False
- True
- Not Sure

8. Parents of a child with a disability who has been in special education for 3 years decide that they no longer want special education services for their child. The parents may revoke consent for special education placement if they put this in writing.

- False
- True
- Not Sure

9. Parents of a child in special education are concerned that their child is not making significant progress in special education. The child was reevaluated 18 months ago with a complete and comprehensive battery of tests. The principal denied the request for the reevaluation stating that the law requires that children in special education be reevaluated every 3 years so the district was within appropriate time lines. The principal's decision was within the scope of the law.

- False
- True
- Not Sure

10. At least one of the child's general education teachers is required to attend the IEP team meeting if the child is or may be participating in the general education environment.

- False
- True
- Not Sure

11. Parents of a child with a severe cognitive disability as well as significant physical disabilities request that their child receive services in the general education classroom, which the parents believe would be the least restrictive environment for their child. At the IEP meeting, the parents were told that due to the extent of the child's delays (at least 5 years below grade level) that it would not be possible for him to be in the general education classroom. The nature and severity of the disability was so severe that the school could not consider this placement. The parents were told the child's needs would best be met in the self-contained special education classroom, with inclusion for art, music, and Physical. Education. Additionally, the parents were told that the district's standard practice is to place a child with such severe needs in a self-contained special education classroom because child will not receive an academic benefit from inclusion in the general education classroom. The school district should have considered placement in the general education even though the child was functioning so significantly below grade level.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

12. Parents of a 9th grade student with learning disabilities in the area of reading, with no behavioral issues have moved into your district from another district. Parents report to the administrator that the previous school district was providing transportation to the student. Transportation is not listed as a related service on the IEP. The parents are requesting that the bus stop in front of their house and feel this is justified because transportation can be considered a related service under IDEA. At the conclusion of the IEP, the school district denied the request, indicating that there is no indication that the child's unique individual needs require special transportation.

Should the school district have provided the service the parent is requesting?

- Yes, the law requires that all children with disabilities be provided with specialized transportation as a related service.
- No, the district examined the child's needs and there is no evidence that the child's disability prevents him from traveling safely to and from the bus stop and on the bus.
- No, the law requires specialized transportation only when such additional factors such as wheelchair lifts are required.
- Not sure

13. At an IEP meeting for a student with learning disabilities the team agreed that the student often needs extra time on tests and assignments. The IEP agreed that the student did not always need extra time, therefore on the IEP, the accommodation was stated as, "the child may have additional time on tests, as needed, depending on the content and nature of the material." This is an appropriate manner to document this accommodation.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

14. At an IEP team meeting it was determined that a child with an emotional disability (ED) who is in special education should receive services from Mild/Moderate teacher in a Mild/Moderate classroom rather than the ED teacher in the ED classroom, as those services and location would best meet the individual educational needs of the child. This is an appropriate action.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

15. In a landmark decision, the Supreme Court ruled that individualized instruction in special education via the IEP process shall provide the best possible education for children with disabilities.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

16. Six weeks prior to the ending date of an IEP for a child with disabilities, the special education teacher makes several attempts to contact the parents to arrange an IEP meeting. The teacher has detailed records of all attempted communication with the parents to schedule this meeting. The parents state that they cannot attend any time in this period, as they are busy at work. The parents state that they will be available, but not until after the date that the IEP ends. Parents provide the district a written waiver to extend the timeline. The school IEP team members meet to open and close the IEP meeting. A copy of the IEP is sent to the parents. This is a violation of the law because the law states that the parents are to be included in the IEP and the parents indicated when they would be available.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

17. A child with a disability who is receiving special education services in Georgia moves to California. The California school district has a copy of the child's IEP and because the current IEP will be expiring in less than thirty days, the new school district, at the administrative placement review, decides to adopt the current Georgia IEP till the 30 day review. The school district should have written a new IEP based on their own evaluation of the child's special education needs.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

18. At an initial IEP team meeting for a child referred for attention and learning concerns, the team decides that in order to determine eligibility more information is required from a physician and recommends that parents consult a physician. The parents consult with the physician and sign a release to have that information shared with the IEP team. This additional information provided by the physician results in the child qualifying for special education. The school district is responsible for paying the medical charges.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

19. On April 22, 2013, an IEP team developed an IEP for the student, effective from August 25, 2013, to June 6, 2014. On May 26, 2014, the IEP team met to review/revise the student's IEP. The district met the required timelines as May 26, 2014 was within the year period prior to the expiration of the IEP.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

20. The IEP team may determine that the least restrictive environment for a particular child with special educational needs is a residential setting.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

21. Report cards are issued to regular education students on a quarterly basis Therefore, the special education teacher needs to report progress to the parents of a child in special education on at a least a quarterly basis.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

22. The school nurse is screening a child and suspects the child may have a special education need. The nurse decides to initiate a referral. The school nurse is obligated by law to inform the parent that she is making a referral for a special education evaluation.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

23. The law requires that all children in special education be reevaluated at least once every three years. This reevaluation also is known as FAPE- Functional Analysis Program Evaluation and is one way of assuring that the child's placement and program are continuing to meet the child's individualized educational needs.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

24. When a child is being reevaluated for continued placement in special education and additional testing is being recommended, which of the following must occur?

- Verbal consent from the parent
- Written notice to the parent
- Written consent from the parent
- Not Sure

25. If a school health service is necessary for the child with a disability to attend school, and must be provided by a physician, the school is obligated to provide for and assume the cost of the service.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

26. At the IEP team meeting to discuss the continued placement in special education of a child with a disability, the majority of the team feel that the child no longer qualifies as a child with disabilities under the criteria for learning disabilities, but rather is a child who has a cognitive disability. The majority of the team feel the child's needs would best be met in a more restrictive placement. The parents disagree and file for mediation. During this process:

- The child will stay in the current placement until the mediation process concludes.
- The child will move to the more restrictive placement as the majority of the IEP team feel that is the placement that will provide "a free and appropriate education."
- Because consensus cannot be reached at the IEP team meeting, special education services will be temporarily suspended given that is the intent of the least restrictive environment clause of IDEA
- Not Sure

27. On May 22, 2014 the principal receives a written request from a parent for a special education evaluation of their child. School ends on May 30, 2014 and starts again on August 7, 2014. What should the principal do?

- Acknowledge and date the request and begin the necessary paperwork. However, because school is over in a few weeks, inform the parent that there is not enough time to complete the evaluation and have the parents sign the form requesting an extension to complete the evaluation.
- Acknowledge and date the request and begin the necessary paperwork. However, the timelines stop during the summer months, so no form is required to request an extension.
- Acknowledge and date the request and begin the necessary paperwork. The evaluation and determination of eligibility will need to be made during the summer months.
- Not Sure

28. The principal receives a call from a local physician indicating that she was contacting the district on behalf of the parents of a student who recently enrolled in the school district. The physician feels that the student needs special education services and requests evaluation of the student. The principal informs the physician that the request for an evaluation needs to be made in writing. The principal's action was:

- Correct. Request for evaluation needs to be in writing.
- Incorrect. School districts do not accept requests for evaluation from physicians.
- Incorrect. The principal should have accepted the verbal request for evaluation
- Not Sure

29. The purpose of Extended School Year (ESY) programs for children with special education needs is to maximize their educational benefit.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

30. Because a school district offers a complete summer school program, Extended School Year (ESY) services are not required in the district if students with disabilities have access to summer school services.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

31. School districts only need to provide an annual written notice to parents for the continued placement of their child in special education.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

32. At an initial IEP team meeting for a student who was referred for a suspected specific learning disability (SLD), the IEP team determined that the child did not meet the eligibility criteria for SLD. The parents disagreed and obtained an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE). The conclusion from this IEE is that the child does have a learning disability. Because there is now conclusive evidence from an outside agency that the student has a learning disability, the IEP must reconvene, accept this new information and provide appropriate placement and services for the student under IDEA.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

33. At the annual IEP of a 17 year old student with identified special education needs in the area of learning disabilities, it was determined that transition needs didn't need to be considered as this child receives all instruction in the general education classroom with only very minor accommodations. The child is on track to graduate with his class with a regular high school diploma. He has already decided that he will attend UC-San Diego. Because the child is following the regular school curriculum and will be receiving a regular diploma, there is no need in addressing transition needs at this time, but if the child's plans change, this will have to be reevaluated. This action is within the scope of the law.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

34. Unless guardianship has been transferred to the parent or another adult, when the special education child reaches age 18, all rights under special education law go to the adult pupil and the school district is required to notify both the adult pupil and parents of the transfer of rights.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

35. The determination of some disabilities is complex and may require that multiple tests or evaluation procedures be used. However, there are times when a single evaluation method is appropriate such as a child who receives a score of 50 on an IQ test. This score is more than two standard deviations below the mean and definitely indicates the presence of a cognitive disability. It is appropriate to place the child in special education without any further testing or evaluation.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

36. It is permissible to file for an extension for an annual IEP meeting if requested by the parents.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

37. An 11th grade general education student is being considered for expulsion for bringing a weapon (3 inch blade) to school. Previously teachers had brought forth concerns about this child to the Campus Student Intervention Team. At the time of the incident, no formal referral had been initiated. Which of the following best supports the provisions of the IDEA?

- Because this child is not in special education, the child is not governed by the disciplinary procedures under IDEA.
- This school district needs to first determine if this child qualifies for special education even though a referral was never processed.
- In this case, it does not matter whether or not the child is in special education or not. This was a zero tolerance offense under IDEA and consequently the same disciplinary procedures apply for all students.
- Not Sure

38. A principal is within the scope of the law to authorize a series of suspensions for a child with disabilities for up to 10 cumulative school days in a school year for violations of school conduct rules when necessary and appropriate to the circumstances without providing educational services.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

39. Short term suspensions from the bus for a special education child are counted when determining whether a series of suspensions result in a change of placement if the child has no other means of getting to school and, and therefore, does not receive services during the suspension.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

40. Under what circumstances must in-school suspensions involving a student with a disability need to be counted when determining whether a series of suspensions results in a significant change of placement?

- When the suspension is for more than ½ of the school day.
- When the student does not have the opportunity to continue to receive the services in his IEP.
- An in-school suspension does not need to be considered in this determination.
- Not Sure

41. A student in special education is sent home early on a day when he is not following school rules. The administrator does not suspend the student; however the student does not receive services delineated in his IEP. This day counts when determining whether a series of short-term removals results in a change of placement.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

42. If a student is placed in special education due to an emotional disability, inappropriate behaviors are usually the result of the child's disability. Therefore, traditional disciplinary interventions cannot be used.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

43. A manifestation determination is required with any disciplinary change of placement.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

44. Suspensions from school are limited to 5 consecutive school days unless a notice of expulsion has been sent.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

45. Any student in special education suspended for more than 10 consecutive days in a school year, whose alleged misconduct is a manifestation of his/her disability is entitled to an FBA and a BIP.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

46. School personnel may remove a student to an IAES for no more than 30 days, without regard to whether the student's behavior is a manifestation of the child's disability, if the student:

- Carries a weapon or possesses a weapon at school, on school premises, or to or at a school function under the jurisdiction of the school;
- knowingly possesses or uses illegal drugs, or sells or solicits the sale of a controlled substance, while at school, on school premises, or at a school function under the jurisdiction of the school; or
- has inflicted serious bodily injury upon another person while at school, on school premises, or at a school function under the jurisdiction of the school.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

47. The IEP team needs to decide what educational services will be provided to a child with disabilities during any disciplinary removal.

- True
- False
- Not Sure

These last few questions will assist with the interpretation of results.

48. Please indicate your education level.

- Doctorate
- Special Degree (Juris Doctor)
- Masters + 30
- Masters
- Bachelors
- Other (please specify)

49. What is your current position?

- Site Principal
- Site Assistant Principal

50. How many years of experience do you have as an administrator?

51. Please feel free to enter any comments you may have with regard to this survey.

Would you like to receive an executive summary via e-mail with the rationale for the correct responses when this study is completed? If Yes, please provide your email in the box below.

Thank You

APPENDIX C

Wendy Overturf Approval

Dear Dr. Overturf,

Thank you sincerely for the permission to use your instrument. I have a long road ahead of me, however, with your permission, will keep in touch with you along my journey.

Respectfully,

Suruchi

--- On Sat, 2/16/13, Wendy Overturf <wjoverturf@charter.net> wrote:

From: Wendy Overturf <wjoverturf@charter.net>

Subject: RE: REQUEST

To: "'Suruchi Singh'" <suesingh2000@yahoo.com>

Date: Saturday, February 16, 2013, 11:40 PM

You most certainly have my permission to use it. However, there are some things in the law that have changed since I wrote it.

Good luck!

Wendy

-----Original Message-----

From: Suruchi Singh [<mailto:suesingh2000@yahoo.com>]

Sent: Saturday, February 16, 2013 10:35 PM

To: wjoverturf@charter.net

Cc: suesingh2000@yahoo.com

Subject: REQUEST

Dear Dr. Overturf,

My name is Suruchi Singh and I am a doctoral student enrolled in Brandman University's Graduate School of Education.

Professionally, I am the Coordinator for Special Education in a high school district in Orange County, California and work directly with administrators who oversee special education at high school campuses. A substantial part of my assignment includes coaching and mentoring the administrative team to ensure that the District is in compliance with state and federal laws while consistently improving outcomes for students with disabilities.

Your study was extremely impressive, one of the finest that I have read, and appealed to me on several levels as the role of an administrator transcends the legal mandates to a moral imperative.

I am writing to request permission to use your Survey instrument with participants in my study and promise to use the information for educational purposes only.

I sincerely hope that you would consider my request. If permission is granted, I will be sure to cite and give credit to all your hard work in the creation of this wonderful instrument.

It will truly be an honor to speak with you in person. I look forward to hearing from you.

Suruchi Singh

XXXXXX

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form

The purpose of this quantitative study is to identify the knowledge of special education law amongst administrators within a Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) in California. Additionally, it is the purpose of this study to identify the perceived training needs of administrators. This is a research project being conducted by Suruchi Singh at Brandman University as part of her Ed. D dissertation. You are invited to participate in this research project because you are a principal or assistant principal within the SELPA. Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any negative consequences.

The procedure involves filling out an online survey, which will take approximately 20 minutes. Your responses will be confidential and no identifying information such as your name, email address or IP address will be saved. The survey questions will be about your understanding and knowledge of special education law. To help protect your confidentiality, the survey will not contain information that will personally identify you. The results of the research study will be published as doctoral dissertation research, but research findings will be reported in a manner which prevents identification of any participant or school site.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is to contribute to the field of educational research and inform the professional practice of educational administrators relevant to special education. If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Suruchi Singh at sing4104@mail.brandman.edu or at ssingh@fjuhsd.net. This research has been reviewed according to Brandman University IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.

Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that:

- you have read the above information
- you voluntarily agree to participate
- you are at least 18 years of age

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the "disagree" button.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that:

- you have read the above information
- you voluntarily agree to participate
- you are at least 18 years of age

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the "disagree" button.

Agree

Disagree

APPENDIX E

Introductory Information E-mail for Participants

Dear Fellow Administrator,

I serve as the Director of Special Education for the Fullerton Joint Union High School District and am a doctoral student at Brandman University, Irvine.

The purpose of my doctoral dissertation is to use a valid and reliable survey to determine the level of special education law knowledge amongst principals and assistant principals within our SELPA. Although your Superintendent has provided written permission for me to conduct this survey in your school district, your participation in the study is strictly voluntary.

The survey link through Survey Monkey is:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/NCPZBZ5>. Please click on this link to participate in the survey.

All responses from participants will be completely confidential and no identifying information will be sought or shared. No names will be attached to the survey and all information will remain locked in files. No employer/supervisor/school district will have access to the individual responses. The results of the research will be published as a doctoral dissertation research, and research findings will be reported in a manner, which prevents identification of any individual participant or school site.

At the conclusion of the survey, you will have the option to request an executive summary of the findings of the study.

I believe that his study will be very valuable to our profession and may be used to help identify areas that need to be included in administrative credentialing course work and/or determine professional development opportunities and needs.

I will be available to answer any questions that you may have and can be reached at XXXXX or via e-mail at XXXXX.

Sincerely,

Suruchi Singh

APPENDIX F

District Approval

June 30, 2014

Dear SELPA Superintendents,

I serve as the Director of Special Education for the Fullerton Joint Union High School District and am a doctoral student at Brandman University, Irvine. I would like to respectfully seek your permission to conduct a *Special Education Law Survey* with the Principals and Assistant Principals in your district.

As part of my doctoral dissertation, a validated and reliable survey will be used to determine the level of special education knowledge amongst Principals and Assistant Principals. The survey will be sent electronically to participants. All responses will be completely confidential and no identifying information will be sought or shared. At the conclusion of the survey, all administrators who participate in the study will have the option to request an executive summary of the findings of the study. Included within the summary will be a rationale for the correct response to each survey question. This information may serve as a handy reference tool for administrators.

This study is very valuable to our profession and may be used to help identify areas that need to be included in administrative credentialing course work and/or determine professional development opportunities and needs.

I have attached an Executive Summary explaining my study for your review and consideration.

Your authorization below will give me permission to conduct the aforementioned survey. If you have any questions or comments, I can be reached at XXXXXX or via e-mail at XXXXXX

Sincerely,

Suruchi Singh

DISTRICT NAME

- PERMISSION GRANTED
- PERMISSION NOT GRANTED

SUPERINTENDENT NAME

SIGNATURE

DATE

APPENDIX G

Brandman University Institutional Review Board IRB Application Approval

Brandman University Institutional Review Board IRB Application Approval



Page 1 of 3

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

IRB Application Action – Approval

Date: 11-20-2014

Name of Investigator/Researcher: Suruchi Singh
Faculty or Student ID Number: B00414684

Title of Research Project:

Knowledge Of Special Education Law Amongst Administrators In A Southern California Special Education Local Plan Area

Project Type: New Continuation Resubmission

Category that applies to your research:

- Doctoral Dissertation EdD
 DNP Clinical Project
 Masters' Thesis
 Course Project
 Faculty Professional/Academic Research
 Other: _____

Funded: No Yes _____
(Funding Agency; Type of Funding; Grant Number)

Project Duration (cannot exceed 1 year): 1 year

Principal Investigator's Address: _____

Email Address: suesingh2000@yahoo.com Telephone Number: _____

Faculty Advisor/Sponsor/Chair Name: Dr. Myrna Rivera Coté

Email Address: mcote@brandman.edu Telephone Number: _____

Category of Review:

- Exempt Review Expedited Review Standard Review

Brandman University IRB Rev. 3.20.14

Adopted

November 2013

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I have completed the NIH Certification and included a copy with this proposal
<input type="checkbox"/> NIH Certificate currently on file in the office of the IRB Chair or Department Office

Signature of Principal Investigator: Suruchi Singh Digitally signed by Suruchi Singh
DN: cn=Suruchi Singh, o=BU,
email=ssingh@brandman.edu, c=US
Date: 2014.11.23 17:03:52 -08'00' Date: 11-23-2014

Signature of Faculty Advisor/Sponsor/Dissertation Chair: Myrna Rivera Cote Digitally signed by Myrna Rivera Cote
DN: cn=Myrna Rivera Cote, o=Brandman,
ou=Professor, email=mcote@brandman.edu, c=US
Date: 2014.11.23 20:08:46 -08'00' Date: 11-23-2014

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
IRB APPLICATION ACTION – APPROVAL
COMPLETED BY BUIRB

IRB ACTION/APPROVAL

Name of Investigator/Researcher: Suruchi Singh

- Returned without review. Insufficient detail to adequately assess risks, protections and benefits.
- Approved/Certified as Exempt form IRB Review.
- Approved as submitted.
- Approved, contingent on minor revisions (see attached)
- Requires significant modifications of the protocol before approval. Research must resubmit with modifications (see attached)
- Researcher must contact IRB member and discuss revisions to research proposal and protocol.

Level of Risk: No Risk Minimal Risk More than Minimal Risk

IRB Comments:

The only modification that was made to this application was to change the risk level from "Less than Minimal Risk" to "Minimal Risk" to acknowledge the possibility that data breach/confidentiality issues could be inherent in data storage.

IRB Contact

Name: Alan Enomoto

Telephone: (925) 930-2020 Email: enomoto@brandman.edu

IRB Certification Number: 1282352 Date: December 4, 2014

Revised IRB Application



Approved



Returned

Name: Alan Enomoto

Digitally signed by Alan Enomoto
DN: cn=Alan Enomoto, o=Brandman University, ou=School of
Education, email=enomoto@brandman.edu, c=US
Date: 2014.12.05 09:40:28 -0800

Telephone: (925) 930-2020 Email: enomoto@brandman.edu Date: 12/04/2014