

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: AN EXAMINATION OF THE LEVEL OF LEADERSHIP KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS OF SCHOOL DISTRICT SPECIAL EDUCATION COORDINATORS

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The purpose of this study was to examine the level of leadership knowledge and skills of district special education coordinators in a school system that serves a large number of parents serving in the military. Using the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) six professional standards, special education administrators ranked how essential the CEC identified knowledge and skills are to their everyday performance on the job. CEC Standards for leadership knowledge and skills were ranked as to how essential they were to day-to-day needs on the job in support of students with disabilities. This study also explored the relationship among teachers, administrators, and special education coordinators on what they identify as essential to their day-to-day job performance. All respondents provided a self-assessment of their perceived level of knowledge and skills by completing an on-line web-based survey yielding a return rate of 81.5%. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected for this study. After investigating the perceived ratings and the ranking of essential levels of the CEC standards, it was found that coordinators viewed all six standards as

essential and ranked their highest level of competency as Program Development and Organization. Coordinators ranked themselves as least knowledgeable in terms of Evaluation. Coordinators identified Program Development and Organization as the most essential skill to day-to-day performance and viewed Research and Inquiry as the least essential skill to daily performance. There was no significant difference among the coordinators on their perceived level of competency across the geographic regions of the system. The degree to which the ratings of essential skills matched among the coordinators, teachers, and administrators revealed both coordinators and teachers viewed Program Development as more essential to day-to-day job performance whereas administrators indicated Leadership and Policy and Program Development were the two most essential standards for serving students with disabilities in the school. The standard reported as least essential to the day-to-day performance of serving students with disabilities was Evaluation.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE LEVEL OF LEADERSHIP KNOWLEDGE AND  
SKILLS OF DISTRICT SPECIAL EDUCATION COORDINATORS.

By

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## Dedication

In honor of my beloved partner who was my constant source of encouragement and inspiration and my Friday night confidant and friend who took such good care of me after class for four years. This is also dedicated to all the children and adults with disabilities in my life who have taught me so much about the meaning of the word “special”.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

The participants of this study were from a school system that serves a large number of students whose parents were serving in the military. It will be referred to as “the school system.” This school system is responsible for the oversight of three areas: Europe, Pacific and America. The school system employs more than 12,300 individuals responsible for educating approximately 84,000 students. The organization operates 192 schools in 14 districts located in 12 foreign countries, seven states, Guam, and Puerto Rico. It is a program of high quality education for eligible dependents of military and civilian personnel of the assigned overseas.

### **Policy Requirements**

The provision of special education services in the school system is mandated by the 1997 amendment (PL 105-17) to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (PL 101-476) as implemented by the school system policy and applies to the schools it operates on the United States, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and Guam as well as overseas in foreign nations. The military medical departments provide early intervention and related services assigned to them in overseas areas, at the same priority as medical care is provided to active duty military members. It is the policy of the school system that students shall be provided a free, appropriate education in schools where placement and service decisions are based on the individual needs of the student, in the least restrictive environment, and in accordance with the system’s guiding

principles. This policy is consistent with it's mission. Embedded in this mission and policy is the practice of inclusive education, which is defined as the "participation of all students, including those with disabilities, limited English proficiency, identified gifts and talents and other special needs in the general education program, as appropriate". Supplementary aids and services are provided to these students where necessary in order for them to be successful. Inclusive education is grounded in the philosophy that ALL children can learn and should have equal access to a quality education and the opportunity to be challenged to perform at increased levels of achievement. The school system educators share the responsibility of educating all children through collaborative efforts and through implementing the guiding principles of the system.

Employees who teach and administer programs in the school system schools must be certified in the area or subject in which they teach. This is also true of school administrators. The school system policy requires special education teachers have a major in special education or a minimum of 30 semester hours in special education. Course work may include diagnostic-prescriptive type instruction, curriculum based assessment and instruction, remediation activities, and information on students who are intellectually challenged and have behavior disorders. A minimum of 12 hours of coursework must be in the specific field of teaching and educators must maintain certification every six years through continuing education by demonstrating six additional semester credits in their chosen field. For example, a teacher of preschool children with disabilities must have 30 semester hours of special education

coursework and 12 hours must be specifically related to preschool or early childhood coursework. Special education coordinators are required to hold certification in an area of special education or related field such as teacher of students with learning impairments or speech-language pathologist, respectively, and must also maintain certification through meeting the required six credits every six years. Special education coordinators in the school system who work overseas are not required to hold an administrative (principal) certificate, however, the special education coordinators who work in the schools in the U.S., Guam, and Puerto Rico are required to hold an administrative certificate for principal or assistant principal because they supervise related services personnel. When districts recruit for a special education coordinator, they seek to fill the vacancy with a certified special education teacher or personnel with certification in a related field such as school psychology or speech-language pathology. Special education coordinators also referred to as Instructional Systems Specialists (ISS), must hold a master's degree in education, have three years of specialized experience in their specialty area, and hold a teaching or professional certificate in their appropriate content area. Although the professional organizations CEC and the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) have provided research-based standards for the knowledge and skills required for special education leadership, these are not incorporated into the requirements for special education certification for the school system.

## **Demographics of the Schools**

During school year 2010-11 there were 192 schools in 14 districts in the school system (three areas) and each has a principal or both a principal and assistant principal or two depending on the school size. Usually one administrator is assigned to supervise the special education program. In the school system there are 1,080 special education teachers. There are 14 special education coordinators at the district level and each area has one Area Special Education Coordinator for a total of three. There is also one supervisory ISS, special education coordinator, at the school system headquarters.

The number and types of special education teachers, district and area special education coordinators, and building level administrators (principals and assistant principals) are allocated to the field by manpower documents based on school system's specified formulas, usually calculated based on student enrollment. Staffing standards are consistent throughout the organization. For example, schools are allocated one special education teacher, Learning Impaired Mild-Moderate, based on a caseload of 16-21 students. The Areas and Districts are allocated one special education coordinator each. In the Europe area there is one area coordinator and one district coordinator for each of the five districts for a total of six. It is the superintendent's prerogative to determine if additional manpower is needed in the district. In Europe there are two extra coordinators for two of the Europe districts.

In the school system, teachers are paid based on years of experience teaching as well as their level of education (Bachelor's, Master's, Master's plus

30, and Doctorate). Special education coordinators were paid on a variety of salary schedules. The majority of coordinators were paid as special education teachers, but as of 2010 are paid along with all other instructional systems specialists. The stateside coordinators are paid on the administrator salary schedule (depending on whether they are certified as elementary or secondary). There were a few coordinators who were paid on a special salary schedule (program managers), but this schedule has been eliminated through attrition.

### **District Special Education Coordinators**

In the school system, the support for the implementation of special education programs has been traditionally provided by the district special education coordinator. These individuals are typically special education teachers who have years of experience as a teacher leader or Case Study Committee (CSC) Chairperson at the school level and who are highly motivated to provide leadership and expertise on matters pertaining to programs for students with disabilities. The duties of the CSC chairperson vary according to the structure of the core CSC and the nature of the assignment. The responsibilities of the CSC chairperson may include maintaining the special education files, scheduling meetings, and conducting meetings,

In an undated school system document entitled “Roles and Responsibilities for the District Instructional Systems Specialist, (Special Education)” there are eight primary skills required of the special education coordinator: (a) serve as principle advisor to the district superintendent regarding special education; (b) assist school personnel in all aspects of special education

(Case Study Committee procedures, curricular modification, least restrictive environment, transportation); (c) provide staff development for district special education personnel; (d) monitor special education data to ensure accuracy and completeness prior to quarterly data extractions; (e) make staffing recommendations for all professional and paraprofessional special education positions; (f) conduct program reviews in schools in the district; (g) serve as the district liaison to the medical related services providers (occupational therapists, physical therapists, developmental pediatricians, audiologists, early intervention service providers); and (h) provide district non-special education roles and responsibilities (unspecified).

When it comes to educating students with disabilities in the school system, it is usually the district special education coordinator who has the technical expertise to develop and support the special education workforce. The special education coordinator is the key technical advisor to the district superintendent on all matters pertaining to educating students with disabilities as well as those at risk for school failure. One of the Guiding Principles in the Community Strategic Plan is the inclusion of students with disabilities to the maximum extent possible in the least restrictive environment. Usually the special education coordinator assists the building administrators and the teaching staff to develop programs that encourage staff to work collaboratively and to ensure that students with disabilities are successful in both the special education and general education classroom. Therefore, it seems imperative that the special education coordinator have the specific knowledge and skills considered core to the job. Such standards



have been published by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) for the administrator of special education. The standards include leadership and policy, program development and organization, research and inquiry, evaluation, professional development and ethical practice, and collaboration.

### **Statement of the Problem**

For decades children with disabilities have been taught and supported by special education teachers. Special educators and school administrators continually seek ways to improve the educational outcomes of students with disabilities within the context of school improvement (Council for Exceptional Children, 2001). Additionally, special educators and administrators seek guidance on policy compliance, programs, and service delivery. In the school system, the support for the implementation of special education programs has been traditionally provided by the district special education coordinator who provides guidance or support for special educators and administrators in their efforts to work with students with disabilities.

Within the last decade the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) has published 40 professional standards for special education administrators (CEC, 2003, 2009). These standards are specific to the knowledge, skills, competencies, and leadership responsibilities of the special education administrator. The purpose of the standards was to provide guidelines to be used to “create a vision, develop policy, and provide practice parameters for institutions of higher education, school districts and states” (Boscardin, McCarthy & Delgado, 2009). The standards serve a framework for the leadership that might someday be linked

to the outcomes of students with disabilities. However, there is variation in the way in which special education administrators are certified (Lashley & Boscardin, 2007). Unfortunately, within school system the leadership roles and responsibilities for administering special education programs at the district level have not been consistently defined. While the school system has standardized system-wide job position descriptions, they don't specify the knowledge, skills, and responsibilities of the district special education coordinator for supporting teachers and administrators and impacting the outcomes for students with disabilities. As a result, there are inconsistencies with program compliance and variations in what the district special education coordinators do on a day-to-day basis in support of special education teachers, administrators, instruction, and service delivery for students with disabilities. In addition, there are wide discrepancies among the district special education coordinators across the school system such as pay and supervision responsibilities. These inconsistencies create morale and work ethic issues within the organization.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the degree to which the leadership knowledge and skills of the district special education coordinators as identified by self-report are aligned with the professional standards recommended by CEC in the 2009 Administrator of Special Education Standards. How special education coordinators rated themselves on the CEC professional standards for knowledge and skills were examined to determine if there was consistency among the coordinators or if gaps existed in their self-reported ratings of their abilities.

They rated how essential the CEC knowledge and skills were to their everyday performance on the job. Secondly, this study investigated how special education teachers and building level administrators rated the leadership knowledge and skills as essential to their day-to-day needs on the job in support of students with disabilities. Thirdly, this study explored if there is a relationship to the essential needs of teachers and administrators and what special education coordinators identify essential to their day-to-day job performance.

### **Need for the Research**

Through examination of the knowledge and skills of the coordinator, the school system gains greater knowledge of how these individuals can better support the needs of the special educator, building level administrator, the area office and higher headquarters. Is the greatest need in support of policy and legislation or curriculum implementation? How can the coordinator facilitate and impact student achievement to the greatest extent possible? What knowledge and skills are most important to support the special education teacher? What do building administrators perceive to be the most important skill of the district special education coordinator? Is there a certain disposition that the coordinator needs to be successful in support of schools? Are there certain educational experiences and certifications such as school administration that would better prepare them to support students with disabilities?

A research-based examination of the knowledge and skills of the district special education coordinator in the school system has not been done. Although the school system requires routine monitoring of special education programs, it

has never examined how the knowledge and skills of the coordinator impacts program compliance with applicable laws and policies, student outcomes, teacher professional development, or support of the administrator in creating a school culture that values inclusion of students with disabilities. This study provided insight into the work of the coordinators and their future in terms of how they are hired, how they are paid, and how they provide leadership within the district and the school system based on their highly specialized knowledge and skills.

### **Research Questions**

- 1) To what degree do the district special education coordinators rate their level of competency on the knowledge and skills on the CEC professional standards as identified through self-assessment?
- 2) How do the special education coordinators rank the CEC leadership knowledge and skills as essential to their day-to-day on-the-job performance?
- 3) What are the similarities and differences in leadership knowledge and skills among the district special education coordinators across the geographic areas in the system?
- 4) To what degree do the rankings of the special education coordinators and the rankings of special education teachers and school administrators match?

## **Significance of the Study**

Professional journals and institutions of higher learning have been espousing that strong leadership in support of students with disabilities and those at risk for school failure is critical to student success (Baaken, O'Brian, & Sheldon, 2007). There is no doubt educational leadership in schools has become a very challenging and demanding career and one of the single most important aspects of leading schools is the support of students with disabilities (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003). Leadership becomes even more challenging given the demands of the regulations guiding program implementation, the paperwork, potential litigious parents, collaboration and inclusive practices, ensuring accommodations are implemented, and the use of evidence-based practices just to name a few reasons (Baaken et al., 2007). Knowing and understanding the leadership skills required of the district special education coordinators as well as understanding how the coordinator can support teachers and principals provides educators with a greater understanding of what is important and what is critical to ensure that students with disabilities get what they need to succeed in school.

## **Contribution to the Education of Children with Disabilities**

There is no doubt school leadership is changing to a more outcomes-based focus (Baaken et al., 2007; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003; Thompson & O'Brian, 2007). We are moving from rules-driven to results-driven systems (Baaken et al., 2007). The role of the special education administrator is changing in concert with the role of the building administrator. Special education administrators must promote collaboration among teachers and administrators to ensure access to the

general education curriculum (Lashley & Boscardin 2003). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 require there be a focus on ensuring students with disabilities make academic progress. The federal acts also place emphasis on the partnership between special and general education. As schools face these reform efforts, building administrators need technical assistance to keep up with the knowledge and skills related to special education to ensure students with disabilities succeed. On the other hand, it is imperative that the special education coordinator also have the knowledge and skills to assist the principal in these efforts. This study examined what support structures the building administrator and special education teachers find important to ensure student success and facilitate a school culture that promotes success for learners with disabilities. There are essential sets of knowledge and skills that special education coordinators must display as they plan for and administer quality special education programs (CEC, 2009). These skills are necessary for special education programs to be managed effectively and efficiently. This study examined the knowledge and skills needed by special education coordinators to enhance services for students with disabilities.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The school system is a unique school system because it spans the globe and has a specific mission to educate the children of the military and civilians supporting our country. There may be fewer opportunities for administrators and special education teachers to work with the district coordinator. For example,

there is a district where a school is located on a remote island and other schools located in central and eastern Europe. The cost of travel and the expansive geography could reduce the frequency of interaction between the special education coordinator, building administrator, and special education teacher. In the stateside districts where the special education coordinator supervises the special education teacher or related service provider and there is expansive geography such as the northeast to the southeast there could be a limitation in the relationship of the teacher with their supervisor. This study did not permit generalization of the knowledge and skills of the special education coordinators and their sphere of influence outside of the schools. Other variables outside the control of this researcher could have impacted on the results of this study. For example, a participant may be selected from a particular school that is experiencing a great deal of discord or may be experiencing negative personal health or life issues that may have influenced their responses.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

Within the context of this study, commonly used terms are defined as follows:

*Assessors:* The Educational Assessor conducts assessments primarily in areas of cognitive processing and academic achievement for special education eligibility requirements and triennial review documentation. The Assessor also provides diagnostic assessments for students with Individual Education Programs who may need further evaluation to determine if there is a need for a significant change in eligibility, an identified need for a related service, or need to add an area of

service. The Assessor position is designed to support the Child Study Committee during the assessment phase of the special education process.

*Case Study Committee:* There are two kinds of Case Study Committees; Core CSC and student specific CSC. The Core CSC is composed of school personnel who oversee the special education program. It usually consists of the special education providers assigned to the school, an administrator, one or more general educators and other specialists within the school (e.g., counselor, nurse). The Core CSC is responsible for a variety of activities that contribute to the effective functioning of the special education program. The student specific CSC is responsible for those activities directly related to a specific student from the time of referral through Individual Education Program (IEP) development.

The school administrator has the ultimate responsibility for the functioning of the CSC and the implementation of the school system policies. The school administrator will either serve as the chairperson of the committee or designate another person to fill the role. For initial Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, the CSC must include an administrator. For eligibility and other meetings specific to a particular student's needs, the administrator may designate a representative however, administrative participation is encouraged. When a designee is used, the designee may not represent two separate required participants (e.g., designee and special education teacher).

*The School System:* A school system operated for serving children whose parents are military and eligible civilian dependents. It encompasses the following three areas *Europe, Pacific and America:* The school system operates 192 schools in



14 districts located in 12 foreign countries, seven states, Guam, and Puerto Rico.

All schools within the school system are fully accredited by U.S. accreditation agencies. Approximately 8,700 educators serve more than 84,000 students.

*Special Education Procedural Guide:* The Special Education Procedural Guide, provides guidance to the school system for the provision of services to students with disabilities. It is a reference manual to aid administrators, area and district personnel, and local Case Study Committees (CSC) in performing their assigned responsibilities.

*The School System Policy Instruction:* Administrative reference to implement policy, assign responsibilities, and prescribe procedures under 20 U.S.C. Chapter 33 (the Individuals

with Disabilities Education Act) (reference (b)) and 20 U.S.C. 921-932, 10 U.S.C. 2164,

and additional directives and instructions from the school system headquarters for the following: 1.1.1. Provision of early intervention services (EIS) to infants and toddlers with disabilities (birth through 2 years, inclusive) and their families, and special education and related services (hereafter referred to as "special services") to children with disabilities (ages 3 through 21 years, inclusive) entitled to receive special services from the school system.

*Related Services:* Programs operated by the Military Medical Departments to provide early intervention services (IDEIA Part C) and related services in accordance with the school system policies and instructions.

*EXCENT:* The school system has implemented a computerized system of record management for special education. It is a comprehensive file management system that establishes a special education file on any student referred for special education, those entering with an existing special education record, and those currently receiving special education.

*Individualized Education Program (IEP):* A written document defining specially designed instruction for a student with a disability, ages 3 through 21 years, inclusive. That document is developed and implemented in accordance with the school system policies and instructions.

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004 (IDEIA) -* The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education and related services to eligible infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities. In the school system infants and toddlers with disabilities (birth-2) and their families receive early intervention services under IDEA Part C and it does not apply to overseas but does apply to stateside schools. Children and youth (ages 3-21) receive special education and related services under IDEA Part B. (retrieved from <http://idea.ed.gov/> 11/11/08)

*No Child Left Behind Act of 2001:* Public Law 107-110. The NCLB Act is the most sweeping reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) since ESEA was enacted in 1965. It redefines the federal role in K-12 education and will help close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority

students and their peers. It is based on four basic principles: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work (retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/inits/commissionsboards/whspecialeducation/reports/gloss.html> on 11/11/08).

*District Special Education Coordinator:* An instructional systems specialist, special education, who is assigned to the school system area office or district office within the school system's educational program serving as the principal technical advisor and expert on the design and administration of special education. This term is often used interchangeably with Special Education Director, special education administrator/supervisor, or special education coordinator.

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of the Literature**

#### **Background/Context**

The schools in this study are heralded as the “President’s Schools” and serve the dependents of military members serving in the United States and overseas. The system has prided itself on being on the cutting edge, striving for and demonstrating highest student achievement (Strategic Plan, 2008). The programs for students with disabilities should not be held to any lesser standard in the “President’s Schools”. The outcomes of this study inform the school system leadership of the knowledge and skills special education administrators should demonstrate in support of schools and in efforts to improve the outcomes of students with disabilities by providing a framework established in the literature. If the premier professional special education association, CEC, promotes evidence-based knowledge and skills for special education administrators, then the school system should hold their coordinators to similar standards. In the school system, the special education coordinators serve as the principal advisors to the district superintendent regarding all matters pertaining to special education. Their knowledge and skills are critical to supporting students with disabilities and meeting the mandates of the system policies. Although there is documentation identifying the roles and responsibilities of the district special education coordinators with eight specific job responsibilities, the literature is limited. The school system documentation that supports the job requirements needs to be extended to meet 21<sup>st</sup> century leadership roles and responsibilities.

## **Review and Critique of Relevant Research**

### **Search Methods**

A two-step process was used to search for studies related to leadership knowledge and skills in special education. Initial searches were done on the computerized EBSCO host online research databases and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) using several search terms in varying combinations. Key words that were used in the literature search included terms such as: (a) special education administrator; (b) district coordinator; (c) leadership roles and responsibilities; (d) knowledge and skills; and (e) certification. Additionally, searches for research studies that have appeared in peer-reviewed journals from professional organizations such as the CEC, Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE), National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDE), and Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) were conducted. This method resulted in 12 studies. Subsequently the search was limited to the past 10 years because issues in education and special education, especially instructional leadership, have been rapidly changing. Four studies were eliminated that investigated aspects or characteristics of initial special education teachers or general education administrators.

The reference lists of the remaining eight studies were reviewed for additional literature that seemed relevant to the topic of special education leadership knowledge and skills. Three additional studies were found through the ancestral search, resulting in a total of 11 studies, which were critically reviewed

in the following section. An overview of these studies can be found in Appendix A.

### **Review and Analysis of Relevant Literature**

All 11 empirical studies reviewed and analyzed had data relevant to special education leadership collected through descriptive methodology using a variety of designs including surveys/questionnaires, case studies, interviews, observations, and document reviews. Six studies (Layton, 2005; Szwed, 2007; Thompson & O'Brian, 2007; Washburn-Moses, 2005; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999; Wigle & Wilcox, 2003;) used self-reported mailed surveys. Two studies (Billingsley et al., 2004; Carlson et al., 2002) used structured telephone interviews. Two studies (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Firestone & Martinez, 2007) used multiple data sources such as observation, interview and document reviews, sampling events, and shadowing of individuals over specified periods of time. One study used an integrated research-based approach focused on how CEC created the standards for special education leadership (Boscardin et al., 2009).

Two studies (Wigle & Wilcox, 1999; Wigle & Wilcox, 2003) utilized the same data from their 1999 study to analyze the competencies of general education administrators and special education directors identified on the 35 skills developed by CEC as important for professionals working in the area of special education. One study (Billingsley et al., 2004) used a subsample of special education teachers obtained by the Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE) (Carlson et al., 2002). The SPeNSE study was designed to describe the quality of personnel serving students with disabilities and factors associated with

workforce quality. Part of a national assessment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandated by Congress, SPeNSE examined: (1) the extent to which personnel are adequately prepared to serve students with disabilities, (2) variation in personnel preparation, and (3) factors that explain that variation. Based on a sample of more than 8,000 administrators, preschool teachers, general and special education teachers, speech-language pathologists, and paraprofessionals, researchers are using this information to explain the quality of the workforce based on state and local policies, preservice education, continuing professional development, and working conditions. One study (Firestone & Martinez, 2007) drew from a larger study conducted at the Center for Educational Policy Analysis (CEPA) at Rutgers University, of schools who were partnered with the New Jersey Math Science Partnership. Data were collected over a two year period from fall of 2003 to spring of 2005. The analysis focused on the different ways teacher leaders and the district influenced practices. Boscardin et al., (2009) looked at the CEC leadership standards through the lens of the stakeholders using an integrative research synthesis approach.

### **Purposes and Research Questions**

The 11 studies had two general purposes: to examine the leadership knowledge and skills of the special education administrator, general education administrator, and special education teachers in their role to provide services to students with disabilities within the public school (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Layton, 2005; Szwed, 2007; Thompson & O'Brian, 2007; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999; ; Wigle & Wilcox, 2003); and to examine the

preparation programs and qualifications of special education administrators and teachers (Billingsley et al., 2004; Carlson et al., 2002; Washburn-Moses, 2005 ) serving students in public schools. All 11 studies provided an explicit explanation of the purpose of the study while only five studies (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Boscardin et al., 2009, Billingsley et al., 2004; Firestone & Martinez, 2007; and Layton, 2005) provided specific questions related to the purpose of the study. One study (Firestone & Martinez, 2007) examined the relationship between the special education teacher leader and the district with regard to instructional practices and educational change efforts. None of the studies examined provided a purpose or questions about what the general education administrator or the special education teacher sees as important to day-to-day job performance or needs from the district special education administrator.

### **Design Sample and Participants**

All 11 studies were descriptive research studies divided into either quantitative, qualitative, or mixed method designs to investigate leadership, roles and responsibilities, and knowledge and skills in special education. One study (Bays & Crockett, 2007) used a grounded theory method to investigate how instructional leadership for special education occurs in elementary schools. Six studies (Boscardin et al., 2009, Layton, 2005; Thompson & O'Brian, 2007; Szwed, 2007; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999; Wigle & Wilcox, 2003) focused primarily on the leadership knowledge and skills of the special education administrator. Seven studies (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Billingsley et al., 2004; Carlson et al., 2002; Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Washburn-Moses, 2005; Wigle & Wilcox,



1999; Wagle & Wilcox, 2003) investigated special education teachers and general education administrators and their knowledge, skills, leadership, certification and practices in support of services to students with disabilities. Three studies (Layton, 2005; Szwed, 2007; Thompson & O'Brian, 2007) used data collected from only one type of respondent, the special education administrator (also referred to as the Special Education Needs Coordinator). The sampling sizes of ten of the 11 studies ranged from 27 to 1,153. The largest study (Carlson et al., 2002) had a sample size of 8,419 and included administrators and both special and general education teachers, speech-language pathologists, and special education paraprofessionals.

### **Methods and Instruments**

Seven studies (Boscardin et al., 2009, Layton, 2005; Szwed, 2007; Thompson & O'Brian, 2007; Washburn-Moses, 2005; Wagle and Wilcox, 1999; Wagle & Wilcox, 2003) utilized data collected through survey methodology. These studies were self-reported mailed surveys/questionnaires sent in by respondents or a web-based survey. Two studies (Billingsley et al., 2004; Carlson et al., 2002) used a pre-survey followed by a structured telephone interview and two studies (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Firestone & Martinez, 2007) used face-to-face interviews along with observational and document analysis. Three studies (Boscardin et al., 2009; Wagle & Wilcox, 1999; 2003) used a standardized instrument developed by CEC as the basis for their survey. One study (Billingsley et al., 2004) used the extant data from the SPeNSE study.

Six studies (Billingsley et al., 2004; Layton, 2005; Szwed, 2007; Thompson & O'Brian, 2007; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999; Wigle & Wilcox, 2003) lacked sufficient descriptions of the survey instrument, sampling techniques, or protocol development. Empirical research is guided by the requirements of reliability and validity, the extent to which the instrument measures what it intended to measure and is it consistently measuring what it was intended to measure. Of the six studies cited above, three (Szwed, 2007; Thompson & O'Brian, 2007; Washburn-Moses, 2005) were field tested or piloted prior to administering the survey to study respondents. The six studies cited above had weak descriptions of the instrument and no discussion of the reliability and validity that are the hallmarks of empirical research.

### **Variables**

All 11 studies included a dependent variable related to the leadership, knowledge, and skills related to serving students with disabilities in a variety of K-12 public school settings. Nine studies (Billingsley et al., 2004; Boscardin et al., 2009, Carlson et al., 2002; Layton, 2005; Szwed, 2007; Thompson & O'Brian, 2007; Washburn-Moses, 2005; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999; Wigle & Wilcox, 2003) investigated specific leadership knowledge and skills of the special education teacher, special education administrator or general education administrator in serving students with disabilities. Two studies (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Firestone & Martinez, 2007) investigated the role of leadership by teacher leaders and principals in instructional practices and in support of special education. Eight studies (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Billingsley et al., 2004; Carlson et al., 2002;

Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Szwed, 2007; Thompson & O'Brian, 2007; Washburn-Moses, 2005; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999; Wigle & Wilcox, 2003 ) included specific data on the demographics of the respondents in varying combinations to include such measures as gender, age, ethnicity, job title, years of experience, number of students and disability types, school size, and certification. Only one study (Thompson & O'Brian, 2007) specifically reported the lack of racial diversity in the ranks of special education directors, which mirrors the limited racial diversity in educational administration across the nation as well as in the teaching population (SPeNSE, 2002).

### **Data Analysis and Results**

Four studies (Layton, 2005; Washburn-Moses, 2005; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999; Wigle & Wilcox, 2003) used simple descriptive statistics to provide analysis for the research findings. Of these studies the chi-squared analysis was the most common analysis utilized. One study (Szwed, 2007) did not provide any description of the analysis of the data obtained during the research except to report percentage of respondents. Two studies (Billingsley et al., 2004; Carlson et al., 2002) provided comprehensive descriptive and multivariate analysis using descriptive statistics, chi-squares, and analyses of variance (ANOVAs). Both studies also weighted the results to adjust for non-response bias and to produce national estimates. One study (Bays & Crockett, 2007) used the grounded theory method (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008) with application of open, axial, and selective coding of qualitative responses. Similarly, one study (Boscardin et al., 2009) used an integrative research synthesis approach (triangulation of the data sources) that

resulted in a robust prioritization of the knowledge and skills associated with effective performance of an administrator of special education. One study used a case study design (Firestone & Martinez, 2007) and the analysis was coded using N6 software for qualitative research.

## **Findings**

Generally, this body of literature provided numerous findings about how the special education teacher, special education administrator, and general education administrator support students with disabilities and how they see themselves as instructional leaders. However, the literature does not provide a focus on what specific knowledge and skills are the most important critical skills that inform school personnel on what key factors are necessary to improve instructional practices and achievement for individuals with disabilities. The major findings of this body of literature are reported in relationship to three themes of the research: instructional leadership, preparation and professional development programs, and individual roles, responsibilities, and competencies.

**Instructional leadership.** Five studies (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Boscardin et al., 2009, Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Layton, 2005; Szwed, 2007) yielded findings that focused on the instructional leadership for programs serving students with disabilities. Layton (2005) and Szwed (2007) found the Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCO) in the United Kingdom vary significantly in their participation on senior leadership and management teams. While the SENCOs displayed significant variations in their workloads, the majority do not perceive themselves in a leadership role even though they are

tasked with managing all aspects of the special education program with the exception of handling budgets. It is important to note that SENCOs perceived that senior management and leadership roles would allow them greater influence with staff, more opportunities for professional development with staff and an opportunity to influence a more inclusive culture within the school (Layton, 2005). Firestone and Martinez (2007) investigated the role of the special education teacher (usually the Case Study Committee Chairperson) as a teacher leader in support of the special education program. Their findings indicate the district and teacher leaders play complimentary roles to inform instructional practices. The results indicated that two factors affected how influential the teacher leaders were. One was the content knowledge they brought to their work and their general experience as a teacher and two, the modes of interaction as they worked with teachers using monitoring and coaching strategies. The authors identify the biggest constraint for the teacher leader is the ambiguity of their authority and purpose.

Bays and Crockett (2007) investigated how instructional leadership for special education occurs in elementary school. The data analysis using a grounded theory method revealed principals face multiple competing priorities when it comes to instructional leadership for special education. As a result of the negotiating of competing priorities such as administrative duties, legal compliance, instructional quality and supervision, the principal realistically disperses (scattering things in ways that make them go away) rather than distributes some of the responsibilities. The resulting outcome is a weakening of

their instructional leadership. The authors reported that despite the principal's efforts to balance their duties, their interactions with special education teachers about improving teaching and learning for students with disabilities happened very minimally. The authors found the principal distributed the leadership to the special education administrator who played a supportive role in the instructional leadership through providing professional development and supervision of special education teachers. The authors concluded there is a need for future research to determine if instructional leadership is well informed about special education and how duties are distributed among principals, teachers and special education administrators.

Boscardin et al., (2009) sought to develop a framework for leadership in special education administration that provided a robust set of representative knowledge and skill statements. The authors used multiple methods to conduct a rigorous literature review of the standards, vetted the statements through two levels of Q-sorts, and then asked the members of the professional organization to complete a survey. The resulting statements were subsequently adopted by the CEC Professional Standards and Practice Committee and served as the statements for the foundation of this descriptive study. The outcomes of this study were provided as guidelines to be used to create a vision, develop policy, and provide additional parameters for higher education, school districts and states.

**Preparation and professional development programs.** Four studies (Billingsley et al., 2004; Carlson et al., 2002; Thompson & O'Brian, 2007; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999; Wigle & Wilcox, 2003) provided analyses focused on the

certification and preparation programs of special education teachers, and special education and general education administrators. Thompson and O'Brian (2007) provided an analysis of the career path and professional development needs of current and future special education directors in Illinois. They were also asked to opine on factors that might influence qualified professionals to pursue course work and experiences to obtain the state required certification for the special education director. The findings of their study indicated less than one fourth of the directors had experience "in a school administration position that is not directly related to special education." An overwhelming majority of respondents considered the study of finance and law to be two critical areas for programs preparing future directors of special education. Wigle and Wilcox (1999; 2003) found special education administrators rated themselves higher in all 35 skills on the CEC list of competencies than either the special education teacher or general education administrator. The findings also related to the specific skills and competency areas in which preservice and inservice programs need to focus for all educational personnel as well as the general education administrator. Their findings were significant for preparation programs to focus on skills related to assessment, program development, collaboration, communication, advocacy, and educational technology.

Both the Carlson et al. (2002) and Billingsley et al. (2004) studies revealed the significance of the preparation and continued education of the workforces that serve students with disabilities. Specifically the Carlson et al. (2002) findings showed a significant impact teacher preparation has on the status of recruitment

and retention of qualified personnel to serve students with disabilities. The SPeNSE report included aspects of preservice and professional development, reporting that teachers who received eight or more hours of professional development perceived themselves as significantly more skilled than did colleagues who received zero to seven hours of professional development. Furthermore, the study reported special education teacher quality was directly linked to the depth and quality of the staff development and the teachers who reported high quality professional development experiences also had higher teacher quality scores.

**Individual roles, responsibilities, and competencies.** The body of literature, specifically six studies (Boscardin et al., 2009, Layton, 2005; Szwed, 2007; Washburn-Moses, 2005; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999; Wigle & Wilcox, 2003), focused on the roles and responsibilities and competencies of the special education administrator. Wigle and Wilcox (1999; 2003) specifically reported the results that special education directors generally saw themselves as more skilled than adequate and far more adequate than inadequate in their skills. Conversely, general education administrators and special educators more often reported themselves to be adequate rather than skilled and far more inadequate than did special education directors. Wigle and Wilcox (1999) reported the majority of individuals in their study were both well-educated and had a good deal of professional experience. All special education directors had a Master's degree or higher, while 53% of the special educators had a Master's degree. This result is not surprising given the relatively higher level of preparation and experience that



special education administrators would be expected to have going into such a position.

The CEC had identified 35 skills as being important for administrators working in the area of special education (Wigle & Wilcox, 1999). Through self-report the administrators identified their own level of competency on the 35 skills as being far less skilled than adequate and as being inadequate in a relative high percentage of their responses. Wigle and Wilcox reported this finding as troublesome because of how general education administrators may perceive appropriate programming for students with disabilities versus what the special education director might think is most appropriate. The authors purported that the inclusive school environments placed more demands upon the general education administrators indicating that administrators need to both understand and support effective and flexible service delivery programs, ensuring that there is support for appropriate learning outcomes for all students.

The findings of the Layton (2005) and Szwed (2007) studies show the many and varied types of roles and responsibilities in which the SENCOs are engaged in their day-to-day support of students with disabilities. The amount of time spent in each of the varied duties such as teaching students, administrative work, liaising with teachers and parents, providing training, and creating resources make it a job that is nearly impossible to do. Szwed (2007) discussed barriers (in rank order) to fulfilling the role of the SENCO such as lack of time, liaising with staff, liaising with external agencies, bureaucracy, and the changing role of the SENCO.

The Boscardin et al., (2009) study acknowledged six standards and subsequent statements of knowledge and skills had to be identified as essential by at least 60% of respondents and had to also meet the literature review and Q-sort in order to remain as an included statement. The resulting 40 statements were focused on the varied leadership roles and responsibilities of the special education administrator.

### **Summary of Empirical Review**

This body of literature provides a series of research projects that used data collected through survey methodology. The literature presented used primarily descriptive statistics to investigate instructional leadership in special education, preparation and professional development programs for special education teachers and special education and general education administrators, and the more definitive roles and responsibilities of the special education administrator, specifically the skills needed to administer programs for students with disabilities.

Although these studies offer some preliminary data regarding the leadership knowledge and skills necessary to support programs for students with disabilities, there are numerous limitations in the studies cited. The majority of findings presented from this body of literature fail to adequately describe the following methodological processes: (a) sample of participants; (b) development of the instrument(s) specifically the qualitative open-ended questions; (c) data collection procedures; and (d) data analysis. Only those studies using mixed methods (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Boscardin et al., 2009, Firestone & Martinez,

2007) had enough data to triangulate the responses to ensure confirmation of the data.

Furthermore, this body of literature failed to address two of the most important aspects of data analysis regarding instrumentation: validity of the instruments used to survey participants and the reliability of the instrument to consistently measure what it is intended to measure. Discussion of these two methodological processes is almost non-existent in this literature. Construct validity is the most important form of validity (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008) as it gets at the heart of what the instrument is measuring. Only one study (Thompson & O'Brian, 2007) discussed the social validity of their research on developing a program of study for certification of special education administrators in Illinois. Additionally, reliability of the obtained data should have been discussed in terms of whether the data derived from the instrument were reliable.

While there has been some empirical research done in the area of the knowledge and skills of the special education administrator, there is still much more work that can be done. Future research is needed that connects the special education administrator to instructional leadership and educational reform efforts and the skill sets that are required for administrators to improve outcomes with students. The six standards outlined by the CEC provide a perfect framework to examine the knowledge and skills that 21<sup>st</sup> century special education leaders must demonstrate if there is a desire to improve the quality of special education instruction and support the school leadership in the accountability challenges. This study examined the knowledge and skills that special education

administrators identify as necessary to do the work and whether those same skill sets are needed by school administrators and special education teachers. This study contributes to the existing literature in a way that has not been done before in the school system. Additionally, this study adds to the limited prior research concerning special education administrators.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The primary goal of this study was to assess the specific level of leadership knowledge and skills of the school system district special education coordinators with the CEC professional standards serving as the basis for contrast and comparison. The CEC professional standards were used as a basis for the survey instrument to measure the variables. The methodology employed to test the research questions is presented in this chapter. The chapter is organized into seven sections: (a) rationale/importance of the study, (b) design of the study, (c) selection of participants, (d) instrumentation, (e) data collection, (f) data analysis, (g) Institution Review Board and the school system requirements for approval and (h) summary of methodology.

The four research questions for this study were:

(1) To what degree do the district special education coordinators rate their level of competency on the knowledge and skills on the CEC professional standards as identified through self-assessment?

(2) How do the special education coordinators rank the CEC leadership knowledge and skills as essential to their day-to-day on the job performance?

(3) What are the similarities and differences in leadership knowledge and skills among the district special education coordinators across the geographic areas in the system?

(4) To what degree do the rankings of the special education coordinators and the rankings of special education teachers and school administrators match?

## **Rationale/Importance of the Study**

Through this examination of the knowledge and skills needed for leadership, the degree to which the school system special education coordinators perceive their skills in comparison to the standards set by CEC were identified. Examining how the coordinators support building administrators in establishing best practices and support for students with disabilities is a potential need because of the intense expectations for improving student achievement. The way teachers rank the supportive knowledge and skills provided by the coordinator to enhance student outcomes are also an anticipated need in the schools. A comparison was made between existing knowledge and skills of the school system coordinators and the industry standard developed by CEC. In addition to the survey, demographic data were gathered on the age, gender, ethnicity, highest degree earned, number of students with disabilities served, number of schools served, and number of years of experience of the special education coordinators, building administrators, and special education teachers. Demographic information provided insight into similarities and differences among the three areas of the system (Europe, Pacific, and America) special education coordinators, special education teachers, and school administrators. Further, it provided data to the school system for identifying potential future recruitment and professional development needs of the system.

## **Need for the Research**

Through an examination of the knowledge and skills of the special education coordinator, greater knowledge is gained regarding how these

individuals can better support the needs of students, special educators, building level administrators, the Area Office, and higher headquarters. A research-based examination of the knowledge and skills of the district special education coordinator in the school system has not been done. Although the system requires routine monitoring of special education programs, it has never examined how the knowledge and skills of the coordinator impacts program compliance. The impact of compliance with applicable laws and policies, increasing student outcomes, providing teacher professional development, or supporting the administrator in creating a school culture that values inclusion of students with disabilities is imperative to quality special education programs. This study provides insight into the work of the coordinators and their future in terms of how they are hired, how they are paid, and how they provide leadership within the district and the system based on their highly specialized knowledge and skills.

### **How the Quantitative Research Literature Informs the Proposed Study**

Three notable studies have used the CEC standards in prior research on two different occasions. Wigle and Wilcox (1999; 2003) sought to examine the competencies of directors of special education using the then 35 skills identified by CEC as being important to professionals working in special education. Using self-report procedures, Wigle and Wilcox (1999) investigated the competencies of the general education administrators on the set of 35 skills and compared that to the same set of skills as reported by the special education directors and special educators. The results, though not surprising, showed special education directors reported higher competencies than did either general education administrators or

special educators. The implications of the study suggested specific skill areas in which general education administrators need further preservice and inservice training.

In their second study, Wigle and Wilcox (2003) used the same sample and data from their 1999 research to report the competencies of the special education directors on the set of 35 skills and compared them to the same set of skills as reported by the general education administrators and special educators. The authors identified and described the significant sample limitations of the study and cautioned about over-generalizing the results. The mean levels of competency reported by the special education directors in the general areas of assessment, appropriate program development, communication and advocacy, technology, and behavior management were higher than the other two subgroups. This finding has implications because the skill areas are central to the overall efficacy of a well-developed program for students with disabilities.

Thompson and O'Brian (2007) studied the professional standards (skills) of the special education directors of Illinois regarding their experiences and perceptions, gathering valuable demographic data, as well as looking at the career paths and professional development needs of current and future directors as it pertained to a post-masters certification program. Through the use of open-ended questions, the researchers gathered qualitative data regarding the most rewarding and most difficult aspects of being a special education director. They made it clear that gathering ideas and perceptions of directors and administrators is critical to developing a greater understanding of leadership issues in the field.



While the intent of this study was not to replicate the work of Wigle and Wilcox (1999; 2003), the use of the CEC standards and the self-assessment of the special education coordinators mirrors their work. It is believed this research will contribute to the knowledge base that has been established by Wigle and Wilcox through their studies using the CEC skills and the implications for preservice and professional development programs for the special education coordinator, the building administrator, and the special education teachers. This research study, which focused on the school system special education coordinators, building administrators, and special educators, brought current data to the forefront from those who live and work special education services on a day-to-day basis.

### **Design of the Study**

A mixed method design (Creswell & Clark, 2007) was used to collect descriptive data on a self-administered survey based on the CEC standards. Quantitative data obtained from a self-administered web-based survey and qualitative data from open-ended questions were examined. The qualitative data were used to support the quantitative data and extend the data on the knowledge and skills essential to the day-to-day performance of the special education coordinator, the building administrator, or special education teachers. The gathering of both qualitative and quantitative data allowed for comparison of data among the respondents to determine if there was convergence, differences, or some combination within the results (Cresswell, 2008).

## **Participants/Sample**

In school year 2010-2011 there were 14 districts in the school system and each one had a district special education coordinator. Several districts had a second special education coordinator thus making the sample size larger (N= 18). Using direct sampling, all district special education coordinators were asked to complete the web-based survey instrument to answer Research Questions 1, 2, and 3. A total of 18 special education coordinators were selected to participate.

To answer Research Question 4, a sample of school administrators and special education teachers were required. There were 192 schools in the school system and each had a principal or both a principal and assistant principal and usually one administrator was assigned to supervise the special education program. In the school system there were 1,080 special education teachers: 284 in Europe, 212 in the Pacific, and 584 in America. Special education teachers in the school system were identified by the specific category of their certification and the assignment of their position. They were identified as Teacher, Learning Impaired, Mild-Moderate; Teacher, Learning Impaired, Moderate-Severe; Speech Language Pathologist; Teacher, Preschool Services for Children with Disabilities; Teacher, Vision Impaired; and Teacher, Hearing Impaired. A complete list of available special education teachers in each teaching category at each school was used to randomly select individuals who participated.

Use of a simple stratified random sampling allowed individuals in each of the defined teaching categories to have an equal and independent chance of being selected for the sample. Using a simple stratified random sample, 20% of

these teachers and school administrators who supervise special education were selected to participate in a self-administered electronic web-based survey (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). A total of 137 special education teachers representing all of the teaching categories and 38 administrators were selected to participate.

The sampling design was single stage (Creswell 2008) in that participants were sampled directly. Each participant was assigned a code to protect his/her confidential responses. A random numbers table was used to assign codes to names. Coding assisted with follow-up with non-respondents. Names and codes were kept separately and were never used together at any time.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Special education teachers and building administrators who supervise Case Study Committee (CSC) meetings were asked to complete the web-based survey and rank the 40 CEC professional knowledge and skills standards in relationship to how essential the knowledge and skills are for their daily job performance at the school; refer to Appendix B. For example, the CEC Advanced Special Education Administrator Standard 2, Program Development and Organization, identifies one of the skills as “Develops and implements programs and services that contribute to the prevention of unnecessary referrals.” Special education teachers and administrators were asked to rank this item from one to five with one being the most essential to their day-to-day performance. At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to respond to an open-ended question that asked them to identify any additional knowledge and skills they saw as essential to the day-to-day performance of their jobs. This gave the special

education teachers and school administrators the opportunity to identify skill sets that may be more relevant to their day-to-day work for the organization.

Directions clearly specified they were to rank the knowledge and skills as to how essential the knowledge and skills were to their day-to-day performance on their job with one being the most essential. Essential to day-to-day performance on the job was operationally defined as being those knowledge and skill sets that are critical to the day-to-day duties necessary to operate a program for students with disabilities.

Special education coordinators were asked to respond to an on-line web-based survey which consisted of three parts. First, they were asked to rate themselves on the 40 knowledge and skills items using a Likert-type scale from one to five to address Research Question 1 (refer to Appendix B). The Likert scale asked the coordinators to rate themselves as: (1) highly knowledgeable and skilled, (2) knowledgeable and skilled (3) somewhat knowledgeable and skilled, (4) limited knowledge and skill, and (5) no knowledge and skill.

In the second part of the survey designed to respond to Research Question #2, special education coordinators were asked to rank the knowledge and skills from one to five with one being a knowledge or skill that is “highly essential” to their day-to-day performance. “Day-to-day performance” was operationally defined as what the individual does in their job that supports students with disabilities. A ranking of one as “highly essential” was defined as being critical to the day-to-day knowledge and job skills that are a “must” or required to support a program for students with disabilities. A ranking of two indicated the

knowledge or skill was “essential” or important to day-to-day job performance and is used with high frequency. A ranking of three, “somewhat essential”, meant the individual valued the knowledge or skill and used it with regular frequency in their program for students with disabilities. A ranking of four indicated “limited or inconsistently essential” and meant the knowledge or skill had little value or is used very infrequently in their support of students with disabilities. A ranking of five, “not essential”, indicated the knowledge or skill had no relevance and is not necessary to the individual as they support students with disabilities.

At the end of the survey, in the third part, the special education coordinators were asked to respond to one open-ended question that asked them to identify any additional knowledge and skills they deemed essential to their day-to-day performance. This gave the special education coordinators the opportunity to identify skill sets that may be more relevant to their day-to-day work for the organization.

Data were collected from special education coordinators, administrators, and special education teachers using a web-based survey design; refer to Appendix B. A pre-notice was sent to each participant followed in three days by the cover letter email and link to the actual survey. The pre-notice served to leave a positive impression of the importance of the survey so the participant would not immediately discard the survey when it arrived (Andrews, Nonnecke, & Preece, 2003). Three days following the pre-notice the cover letter was sent individually to each participant. No participant saw the names of any other participant. There was an option for those who choose not to participate with directions to provide a

reply email so that non-respondents could be tracked. An email was sent directly to the randomly selected administrator who supervised special education and s/he was asked to complete the Web-based electronic survey. Special education teachers were also contacted directly by email from the randomized coding list and asked to go to the URL and respond to the survey.

The request for responses had a specific response date for return to the researcher. Directions for completing the survey were clearly defined; specifying how names would remain confidential and never be used in conjunction with the results, and the URL for the location of the survey was linked within the message. Directions included the specific operational definitions of “essential to day-to-day on the job performance” and “highly knowledgeable and skilled, knowledgeable and skilled, somewhat knowledgeable and skilled, limited knowledge and skills, and no knowledge or skills.” Participants were requested to provide the following demographic data: gender, age, ethnicity, highest degree earned, areas of current school system certification, number of students with disabilities served, number of schools served, and number of years of experience in the school system, and special education. Deadlines for return were specified and follow-up email was sent three days prior to closing the response time window. A reminder email was sent to all participants within ten days of the original email message just in case someone accidentally deleted the original message with the URL link to the survey. An experiment by Schaefer and Dillman (1998) found a replacement encouraged faster returns and resulted in higher final response rates. All notification letters and consent forms can be found in Appendices C and D.

The survey was pilot tested with a test group of two special education coordinators, two administrators, and two special education teachers to determine the feasibility of the instrument and clarity of the survey. This allowed for the instrument to be screened for ambiguity, wording, and content overlap. This also gave the researcher an idea on how long it took each respondent to complete the survey.

Social validation data were also gathered for this study after the conclusion of the survey. It requested such information as whether the CEC standards were meaningful and representative of the day-to-day activities for each of the subgroups. Were there missing standards or redundant standards? Can or should these standards be used to select future coordinators to work in the districts? Do these standards promote the skills necessary for school reform and exemplary programs for students with disabilities? Data were attempted from a random sample of two of the district special education coordinators, two building administrators, and two special education teachers who indicated their consent for participating in the social validation.

### **Survey Instrument and Procedures**

The study was conducted using an adjusted version of the CEC professional standards embedded in a web-based survey which all participants completed, though they had separate sections, including one open-ended response at the end of the survey from three identified groups of participants: district special education coordinators, building administrators, and special education teachers. The survey instrument was based on the 40-item document entitled,

“Administrator of Special Education” developed by CEC to define the knowledge and skills required by special education administrators. Adjustments were made to the CEC instrument to ensure the items were more relevant for school system personnel. For example, the original CEC statement read, “Local, state, and national fiscal policies and funding mechanisms in education, social, and health agencies as they apply to the provision of services for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.” In this study Standard 1: Leadership and Policy, Item 3 was re-worded to state, “Local, district and school system fiscal policies and funding mechanisms in education, military, and related services agencies as they apply to the provision of services for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.”

To further exemplify that the CEC standards were appropriate to use as a measure of what coordinators should know and be able to do or to identify what is essential to the job, CEC produced an evidence-based report that provides specific literature/theory-based, practice-based, and research-based references to support each of the knowledge and skill items. For example, in the CEC “Administrator of Special Education” document, Standard 5, Professional Development and Ethical Practice, Skill SA5S1 is “Communicates and demonstrates a high standard of ethical administrative practices when working with staff serving individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.” The Advanced Common Core correlated item is “model ethical behavior and promote professional standards.” The evidence-based report includes three literature/theory based



references focused on guidance for ethical behavior and modeling ethical behavior (Koselnik, 2004; Mijares, 1996; 2005).

The 40-item list of knowledge and skills had six standards: Leadership and Policy; Program Development and Organization; Research and Inquiry; Evaluation; Professional Development and Ethical Practice, and Collaboration. Each standard had a subset of specific knowledge and skills. See Appendix B. Using a Likert-type scale for Part 1, the special education coordinators rated themselves as: (1) highly knowledgeable and skilled, (2) knowledgeable and skilled (3) somewhat knowledgeable and skilled, (4) limited knowledge and skill, and (5) no knowledge and skills for each of the CEC professional standards for special education administrators. The terms “highly knowledgeable and skilled, knowledgeable and skilled, somewhat knowledgeable and skills, limited knowledge and skills, and not knowledgeable and skilled.” were operationally defined and included in the directions of the survey as follows: Highly skilled means the individual completing the survey feels that s/he has mastered the knowledge and skill and could easily and accurately apply it across multiple settings and situations. The term “knowledgeable and skilled” is defined to mean the individual completing the survey feels that s/he could apply the knowledge or skill in their day-to-day job performance in most settings, but not as easily or accurately as someone who has mastered the knowledge or skill. The term “somewhat knowledgeable and skilled” is defined to mean that the individual completing the survey feels that s/he has developed the knowledge or skill but could not apply it consistently across a variety of settings in their day-to-day job

performance. The term “limited knowledge and skill” is defined to mean the individual completing the survey feels s/he has some awareness and understanding of the knowledge and skills but cannot apply it with any degree of reliability. The term “not knowledgeable and skilled” is defined to mean that the individual completing the survey feels s/he has no awareness or understanding of the knowledge or skill required for the day-to-day job performance.

Next, in Part 2, special education coordinators were also asked to rank order the same knowledge and skills within each standard as to how essential the knowledge or skill is to their day-to-day job performance. A ranking of one meant the knowledge or skill is most essential, required, for a program to support students with disabilities. The third part of the survey asked special education coordinators to list any additional areas of knowledge and skill you see as essential to the day-to-day job performance of the district special education coordinator.

To address Research Question #4, school administrators and special education teachers were only asked to rank order the 40 items within each standard as to how essential the knowledge or skill was to their day-to-day job performance in accordance with the descriptors provided above.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

This study employed a qualitative and quantitative methodology of data collection and analysis. The data in this study were primarily nonparametric nominal and ordinal (rank-ordered) data. Additionally, most data were presented using descriptive statistics such as frequency, mean, median, mode, and percentages. The Statistic Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) v. 18 was used

to conduct the statistical analysis. The qualitative data from the open-ended responses were reviewed for similarities and differences, coded for themes, and categorized. Specific data analysis procedures are discussed by research question.

Research Question 1: To what degree do the district special education coordinators rate their level of competency on the knowledge and skills on the CEC professional standards as identified through self-assessment? Quantitative analysis of the data utilized a simple frequency (percentage) of the responses to determine how many coordinators rated themselves as skilled, adequate, or inadequate (independent variables) on each of the 40 items (dependent variables) on the survey. Each knowledge and skill was treated as a discrete variable and analyzed for how frequently the respondents rated it as highly knowledgeable and skilled, knowledgeable and skilled, somewhat knowledgeable and skills, limited knowledge and skills, and no knowledge or skills and coded as nominal data. SPSS v. 18 was used to obtain descriptive statistics such as a frequency table, percentages, mean, median, and mode. Additionally, data were grouped by standard (each of the six standards became a variable) for comparison to determine if there was a specific standard that respondents deemed to be more or less skilled in than another. This allowed for combining scores for each standard's section into composite scores to make comparisons.

Research Question 2: How do the special education coordinators rank the CEC leadership knowledge and skills as essential to their day-to-day on the job performance? Data analysis included a SPSS v. 18 frequency distribution of the ranking of each set of knowledge and skills (dependent variables). The ranking of

each knowledge and skill produced ordinal data that were analyzed for descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, median, and mode.

Research Question 3: What are the similarities and differences in leadership knowledge and skills among the district special education coordinators across the geographic areas in the system? To determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between the ratings (nominal data) and rankings (ordinal data) of the coordinators and of those coordinators in Europe versus those in the Pacific and America, SPSS v. 18 was used to analyze the knowledge and skill sets (dependent variables) by assigning each coordinator (independent variable) and the areas (Europe, Pacific, America) as an independent variable against the knowledge and skills. Descriptive statistics showed frequency, percentage, and mode for each of the dependent variables. Chi-square analysis was used to determine if there was a significant difference in the rating of the skills by the coordinators. Descriptive statistics provided a range of the rankings for each coordinator.

Research Question 4: To what degree do the rankings of the special education coordinators and the rankings of special education teachers and school administrators match? Data were analyzed using multiple analyses of variance (ANOVAs). In this question, the three groups were special education coordinators, special education teachers, and building administrators.

The open-ended responses entered by respondents at the end of the survey were coded for themes. Inter-rater reliability was established with a second rater to ensure coding for themes was reliable. The responses were tabulated and rated

by a second independent rater to determine if coding agreement was high (90% or higher reliability). Raters practiced on the pilot responses to determine reliability.

Social validity regarding the CEC knowledge and skills was attempted by email after the survey data analysis. The concept of social validity asks participants to tell the researcher whether the study held value and whether the essential knowledge and skills were relevant to their day-to-day work with students with disabilities. Specific questions for the social validity are found in Appendix E. On the survey, respondents were asked to identify if they could be contacted after the data were collected for questions about the survey. Social validity included data from six respondents who agreed to participate and sought to determine whether the respondent felt comfortable responding to the knowledge and skill items, whether such data were valuable to the system, and how the information may provide added value to enhance professional development or recruitment and retention of highly qualified personnel.

### **Institution Review Board and School System Requirements for Approval**

The school system policy on the *Research Approval Process* guidelines were followed to ensure proper consideration of the course of study. All required documents for proper consideration of the research in the system schools and adherence to the requirements of the policy were completed. Having completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI), permission was obtained from a supervisor to conduct the research. All participants in the proposed research study were informed that participation was voluntary and was held confidential, never linked to an individual, school, or district. Any changes to the

proposed study were informed to the school system Chief of Research and Evaluation. Additionally, University of Maryland Internal Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained before seeking approval from the school system.

### **Summary of Methodology**

This was a descriptive study utilizing a self-administered web-based survey. In this study a mixed method design (Creswell and Clark, 2007) was used to collect data from a sample of the school system special education coordinators and a stratified random sample of building level administrators and special educators. The quantitative data analysis was performed using SPSS v. 18 to complete the statistical analysis. Frequency distributions, percentages, and central tendency statistics were calculated for each variable (knowledge and skill on the modified CEC instrument). Open-ended response data (qualitative data) was analyzed for themes among the respondents' answers. Social validity was checked post-hoc to determine the value of the variables measured in this study.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Analysis of the Results**

Special education teachers, school administrators, and district special education coordinators were surveyed about the leadership knowledge and skills that are essential to the day-to-day requirements of providing an educational program for students with disabilities. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) has published six professional standards for special education administrators (CEC, 2008) that specify 40 distinct evidence-based knowledge and skill sets. These standards are specific to the competencies and leadership responsibilities of the special education administrator. The primary goal of this study was to assess the research questions that relate to the specific level of competency on each of the knowledge and skills and provide a ranking of the leadership knowledge and skills of district special education coordinators as identified by the CEC professional standards. Also, to what degree do the rankings of the district coordinators match with the ranking of special education teachers and school administrators?

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through an online survey, the findings of which are reported in this chapter. The first part of this chapter discusses the demographics and return results. The next section analyzes the key knowledge and skill sets that were identified as highly essential by the special education coordinators for the day-to-day provision of services to students with disabilities (Research Questions 1, 2, and 3). Additionally, an analysis of the differences between the teachers and administrators and district special education

coordinators are identified (Research Question #4). Lastly, this chapter focuses on the reliability analysis and statistical significance of the results using the 40 CEC standards for special education leaders. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) PASW 18 was used to conduct the data analyses.

### **Demographic Characteristics of the Sample**

A total of 194 potential participants were sent the link to the on line web-based survey. Responses were started by 146 participants with 118 participants actually completing the survey, yielding a return rate of 81.5%. Responders were defined as having completed at least 80% of the knowledge and skill questions. This researcher conducted an individual review of each responder to determine if the responders met the set criteria and deleted one additional responder, because the individual did not complete at least 80% of the items. Of the potential respondents, 84.3% of the special education coordinators (N=16), 62.1% of the special education teachers (N=85) and 52.7% of the building administrators (N=20) responded. Approximately 18.5% of the participants did not complete the survey after having started it. It appears from the responses, that the participants completed the demographic data and then did not respond to the individual knowledge and skill survey items. The numbers of responses for the eliminated nonresponders dropped sharply following the demographic section. It should be noted that the numbers of respondents varied based on the definition of the requirement to complete at least 80% of the survey items. Also, the numbers of respondents will vary by item because they did not finish the item. The analysis of each item was based on who finished.



In order to determine if there was a significant difference among the three groups of respondents who finished the survey versus those who did not, Chi-Square analysis for nominal variables was used to look at gender, race/ethnicity, age, and highest degree earned. In the original sample, 17.2% (N=5) of the males and 17.5% (N=20) of the females did not complete the survey which resulted in no significant differences. Among the respondents who indicated white/Caucasian ethnicity, 81.3% (N=91) completed the survey, whereas 82.4% (N=14) of the African American respondents completed the survey, which resulted in no significant difference. The remaining ethnic groups were too few in number to assess for significant differences. Among the age brackets of respondents, all 20 to 29 year olds completed the survey (N=5), whereas the 30 to 39 year olds were most likely not to finish (N=7). Among the 40 to 49 year olds (N=32) and those over 50 (N=58), the respondents who finished were similar. There was also no significant difference among the respondents with regard to highest degree earned. Those with a Bachelor's (N=13) degree were just as likely to complete the survey, as the respondents with a Master's (N=120) and Doctorate (N=9).

To determine if there was a significant difference among the respondents who did and did not finish the survey, independent sample *t*-tests were used with the ratio level variables for number of students with disabilities served, number of schools served, number of years of experience, and number of years of school system experience. Results revealed there were no significant differences between numbers of students with disabilities served ( $t(114) = -.813, p = .418$ ),

number of schools served ( $t(131) = .058, p = .954$ ), years of experience ( $t(126) = -.145, p = .885$ ), and school system years of experience ( $t(126) = .365, p = .716$ ) between those who finished and those who did not finish the survey. Refer to Table 1.

Table 1

*Independent t-test Results for Responders vs. Non-Responders*

Variable	<i>t</i>	df	Sig.
Number of students with disabilities served	.813	114	.418
Number of schools served	-.058	131	.954
Years of experience in special education	.145	126	.885
Years of school system experience	-.365	126	.872

The descriptive statistics for the demographic variables measured on an interval or ratio scale are shown in Table 2. The number of students served ranged from 0 to 946; the mean number of students served was 55.13 (SD = 129.68). The large number is likely due to the coordinators serving a whole district with multiple schools. The respondents who indicated no students may be special education teachers who serve as assessors for their complex of schools and don't teach or serve a caseload. The number of schools served ranged from 1 to 19; the mean number of schools served was 2.91 (SD = 4.21). The number of years teaching special education ranged from 1 to 45; the mean number of years teaching special education was 17.47 (SD = 11.39). The number of years of experience with the school system ranged from 1 to 31 (SD = 8.97); refer to Table 2.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Variables*

Variable	N	Range	Mean	SD
Number of students served	95	0 to 946	55.13	129.68
Number of schools served	107	1 to 19	2.91	4.21
Years in special education	103	0 to 45	17.47	11.39
Years in the school system	103	0 to 31	10.97	8.97

The data on number of students with disabilities served revealed a mean of 27.8 with a range of 2 to 85 students served; refer to Table 2. Ten responses were not included because they seemed too large and therefore considered outliers. It appeared the numbers reported for these 10 responses were for all students not just students with disabilities. For example, five of the responders were district special education coordinators who indicated the total number of students with disabilities served in their district (i.e., 976 is the total number of students with an IEP); however, 11 of the coordinator responders did not indicate a total and left the item blank. The data on number of schools served revealed a mean of 2 with a range of 1 to 33 based on an N=139. Only one response was eliminated from analysis, because it was not a number.

The mean number of years of experience in special education was 13.06 years with a range of 1 to 45 years based on N=135; refer to Table 2. Two responses were eliminated from further analysis because they were not quantifiable. The mean number of years of experience in special education in the school system was 7.89 years with a range of 0 to 30 years. One response was

eliminated from analysis because it was not a quantifiable response, meaning the respondent did not follow the directions and provide a number. Responses that were fractional numbers of six months or zero were rounded to one year and included in the analysis.

The frequencies and percentages for the demographic variable measured on a nominal or ordinal scale are displayed in Table 3. Half of the respondents worked in Europe (50.9%, N=59), while a third worked in America (31%, N=36), and a minority worked in the Pacific (18.1%, N=21). More than three-fourths of the respondents were female (81%, N=94), , while one fourth were male (19%, N=22). Slightly more than three-fourths of the respondents identified themselves as white (78.9%, N=91), whereas the remaining one fourth of the respondents identified themselves as black (11.4%, N=14), Pacific Islander (5.2%, N=6), and Hispanic (3.5%, N=4). In terms of age, over half of the respondents fell in the over 50 age group (51.3%, N=58). One fourth of the respondents identified themselves as being in the 40 to 49 year age range (25.2%, N=32), while one fifth of respondents reported being in the 30 to 39 year age range (19.1%, N=22). The remaining few respondents (N=5) fell in the 20 to 29 year age range (4.3%). Of the 142 responders, 10% hold a Bachelor's (N=12), 83% hold a Master's (N=98), and 7% hold a Doctoral degree (N=7).

Table 3

*Frequencies and Percentages for Demographic Variables (N = 116)*

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Geographic area served		
DDESS	36	31.0
DoDDS-E	59	50.9
DoDDS-P	21	18.1
Gender		
Male	22	19.0
Female	94	81.0
Race		
White	90	78.9
Black	13	11.4
Pacific Islander	7	6.2
Hispanic	4	3.5
Age in years		
20 to 29	5	4.3
30 to 39	22	19.1
40 to 49	29	25.2
Over 50	59	51.3

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Current job position</b>		
District SPED coordinator	16	13.8
Special education teacher	80	69.0
Building administrator	20	17.2
<b>Level of education</b>		
Bachelors	12	10.4
Masters	95	82.6
Doctorate	8	7.0
<b>General education certification</b>		
Yes	48	41.4
No	68	58.6
<b>Special education certification</b>		
Yes	79	68.1
No	37	31.9
<b>Administrator certification</b>		
Yes	36	31.0
No	80	69.0
<b>Elementary certification</b>		
Yes	59	50.9
No	57	49.1

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Secondary certification</b>		
Yes	43	37.1
No	73	62.9
<b>Emotionally impaired certification</b>		
Yes	30	25.9
No	86	74.1
<b>Learning impaired mild/moderate certification</b>		
Yes	53	45.7
No	63	54.3
<b>Speech language pathology certification</b>		
Yes	29	25.0
No	87	75.0
<b>Learning impaired moderate/severe certification</b>		
Yes	32	27.6
No	84	72.4
<b>Hearing impaired certification</b>		
Yes	5	4.3
No	111	95.7

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Preschool for impaired certification		
Yes	25	21.6
No	91	78.4
Vision impaired certification		
Yes	3	2.6
No	113	97.4

In an analysis of the district special education coordinators, the average number of students with disabilities served was analyzed. Even though only five coordinators responded, it appeared representative of the sample. The average number of students with disabilities served was 553 with a range of 350 to 946 students. The average number of schools served was a mean of 11.6 with a range of 4 to 19 schools. The average number of years of experience was a mean of 32 with a range of 23 to 43. The average number of years experience with the school system was a mean of 18.86 with a range of 5 to 29. Further analysis of the number of schools served by geographic area revealed the Europe coordinators served an average of 15 schools, coordinators in America serve an average of 7.7 schools, whereas the Pacific coordinators served an average of 8.6 schools.

### **Results of Research Question 1**

Research Question 1: To what degree do the district special education coordinators rate their level of competency on the knowledge and skills on the CEC professional standards as identified through self-assessment? Quantitative



analysis of the data utilized a simple frequency and percentage of the responses to determine how many coordinators rated themselves as highly knowledgeable and skilled, knowledgeable and skilled, somewhat knowledgeable and skilled, limited knowledge and skill or no knowledge or skill (independent variables) on each of the 40 items (dependent variables) on the survey. Each knowledge and skill was treated as a discrete variable and analyzed for how frequently the respondents rated it as highly knowledgeable and skilled, knowledgeable and skilled, somewhat knowledgeable and skills, limited knowledge and skills, and no knowledge or skills and coded as nominal data.

SPSS v. 18 was used to obtain descriptive statistics such as a frequency table, percentages, mean, median, and mode for all research questions. To determine if there were perceived differences amongst different standards, data were grouped by standard (each of the six standards became a variable) for comparison. Scores were combined into composite scores. Total composite scores were derived by combining the individual responses from the coordinators for each item in the standard and computing a mean for that standard. As noted on Tables 4-9, the lower the score, the higher the respondent rated him or herself on their knowledge or skill for that standard.

### **Leadership and Policy Standard**

The descriptive statistics for the Leadership and Policy items are displayed in Table 4. Findings indicated the coordinators rated themselves as most skilled in terms of interpreting and applying current schoolsystem instructions, regulations, and policies to individuals with exceptional learning needs ( $M =$

1.43). Coordinators rated themselves as least skilled in terms of developing a budget in accordance with the school system policies for serving individuals with exceptional learning needs ( $M = 2.64$ ,  $Median = 2.00$ ,  $Mode = 2.00$ ).

Table 4

*Descriptive Statistics for Coordinators Perceptions about Leadership and Policy Competence (N = 14)*

Item	Mean	Median	Mode
<b>Knowledge</b>			
Foundation for administration of programs for individuals with learning needs	2.00	2.00	2.00
Historical and social significance of programs for individuals with learning needs	1.86	2.00	2.00
Local, district, and school system fiscal policies and funding mechanisms	2.29	2.00	2.00
<b>Skills</b>			
Applies current instructions and system policies to individuals with learning needs	1.43	1.00	1.00
Applies leadership to provision of services for individuals with learning needs	1.93	2.00	2.00
Develops budget in accordance with system policies for individuals with learning needs	2.64	2.00	2.00
Engages in recruitment, hiring, and retention practices	2.43	2.50	3.00
Communicates personal vision for meeting needs of individuals with learning needs	1.57	1.50	1.00

*Note.* The lower the score, the more knowledgeable and skilled the respondents perceived themselves

## **Program Development and Organization**

The descriptive statistics for the Program Development items are displayed in Table 5. Findings indicated the coordinators rated themselves as most skilled in terms of developing and implementing a flexible continuum of services based on effective practices for individuals with exceptional learning needs ( $M = 1.29$ ). Coordinators rated themselves as least skilled in terms of administrative plans that support the use of instructional and assistive technologies ( $M = 2.21$ ).

## **Research and Inquiry**

The descriptive statistics for the Research and Inquiry items are shown in Table 6. Findings revealed the coordinators rated themselves as most skilled in terms of engaging in data-based decision-making for the administration of educational programs and services that supports exceptional students ( $M = 1.79$ ). Coordinators rated themselves as least knowledgeable on research-based administrative practices that support individuals with exceptional learning needs ( $M = 2.21$ ).

## **Evaluation**

The descriptive statistics for the Evaluation items are shown in Table 7. The findings revealed the coordinators rated themselves as most skilled in terms of advocating and implementing procedures for the participation of individuals with learning needs in accountability systems ( $M = 1.64$ ). Coordinators rated themselves as least skilled in terms of developing and implementing ongoing evaluations of education programs and personnel ( $M = 2.36$ ) and designing and

implementing evaluation procedures that improve instructional content and practices (M = 2.36).

Table 5

*Descriptive Statistics for Coordinator's Perceptions about Program Development and Organization Competence (N = 14)*

Item	Mean	Median	Mode
<b>Knowledge</b>			
Programs within general curriculum to achieve positive school outcomes	1.57	2.00	2.00
Programs that promote school engagement	1.43	1.00	1.00
Instruction and services needed to support access to the general curriculum	1.43	1.00	1.00
Administrative plans that support the use of instructional and assistive technologies	2.21	2.00	2.00
<b>Skills</b>			
Develops and implements a flexible continuum of services based on effective practices	1.29	1.00	1.00
Develops and implements programs that contribute to prevention of unnecessary referrals	1.86	2.00	2.00

*Note.* The lower the score, the more knowledgeable and skilled the respondents perceived themselves.

Table 6

*Descriptive Statistics for Coordinator's Perceptions about Research and Inquiry Competence (N = 14)*

Item	Mean	Median	Mode
Knowledge			
Research-based administrative practices that supports individuals with learning needs	2.21	2.00	2.00
Skills			
Engages in data-based decision-making for administration of educational programs	1.79	2.00	1.00
Develops data-based educational expectations and evidence-based programs to account for the impact of diversity on individuals with learning needs	2.07	2.00	2.00

*Note.* The lower the score, the more knowledgeable and skilled the respondents perceived themselves.

Table 7

*Descriptive Statistics for Coordinator's Perceptions about Evaluation Competence (N = 16)*

Item	Mean	Median	Mode
Knowledge			
Models, theories, and practices used to evaluate educational programs and personnel	2.00	2.00	1.00
Skills			
Implements procedures for participation of individuals with learning needs	1.64	2.00	2.00
Develops and implements ongoing evaluations of education programs and personnel	2.36	2.00	2.00
Provides ongoing supervision of personnel working with individuals with learning needs	2.36	2.00	2.00
Implements evaluation procedures that improve instruction content and practices	2.21	2.00	3.00

*Note.* The lower the score, the more knowledgeable and skilled the respondents perceived themselves.



## **Professional Development and Ethical Practice**

The descriptive statistics for the Professional Development and Ethical Practice items are shown in Table 8. The findings revealed the coordinators rated themselves as most skilled in terms of communicating and demonstrating a high standard of ethical administrative practices when working with staff serving individuals with learning needs ( $M = 1.50$ ) and in implementing professional development activities that improve instructional practices ( $M = 1.50$ ).

Coordinators rated themselves as least skilled in terms of participating in local, state, and national professional administrative organizations to guide administrative practices when working with individuals with learning needs ( $M = 2.50$ ).

## **Collaboration**

The descriptive statistics for the Collaboration items are displayed in Table 9. The findings revealed coordinators rated themselves as most skilled in terms of demonstrating the skills necessary to provide ongoing communication, education, and support for families of individuals with learning needs ( $M = 1.36$ ).

Coordinators rated themselves as least skilled in terms of developing and implementing intra- and inter-agency agreements that create programs with shared responsibility for individuals with learning needs ( $M = 2.29$ ).

Table 8

*Descriptive Statistics for Coordinator's Perceptions about Professional Development and Ethical Practice Competence (N = 14)*

Item	Mean	Median	Mode
<b>Knowledge</b>			
Ethical theories and practices as applied to administration of programs and services	1.71	1.00	1.00
Adult learning theories as applied to professional development and supervision	2.07	2.00	2.00
Professional development theories that improve instruction and instructional content	1.71	1.50	1.00
Impact of diversity on educational programming expectations	1.71	2.00	1.00
<b>Skills</b>			
Communicates high standard of ethical administrative practices when working with staff	1.50	1.00	1.00
Implements professional development activities that improve instructional practices	1.50	1.00	1.00
Participates in local, state, and national professional administrative organizations	2.50	3.00	3.00

*Note.* The lower the score, the more knowledgeable and skilled the respondents perceived themselves.

Table 9

*Descriptive Statistics for Coordinator's Perceptions about Collaboration Competence (N = 14)*

Item	Mean	Median	Mode
<b>Knowledge</b>			
Collaborative theories/practices that support administration of programs and services	1.86	2.00	2.00
Administrative theories/models that facilitate communication among stakeholders	2.21	2.00	1.00
Importance and relevance of advocacy at local, district, and school system level	1.86	2.00	1.00
<b>Skills</b>			
Utilizes collaborative approaches for involving stakeholders in educational planning, implementation, and evaluation	1.71	2.00	1.00
Strengthens the role of parent and advocacy organizations as they support individuals with learning needs	2.00	2.00	1.00
Develops/implements intra- and inter-agency agreements that create programs with shared responsibility for individuals with learning needs	2.29	2.00	2.00
Facilitates transition plans across the educational continuum	1.57	1.50	2.00

Item	Mean	Median	Mode
Skills (continued)			
Implements collaborative administrative procedures and strategies to facilitate communication among stakeholders	1.79	2.00	1.00
Engages in leadership practices that support shared decision making	1.50	1.00	1.00
Demonstrates the skills necessary to provide ongoing communication, education, and support for families of individuals with learning needs	1.36	1.00	1.00
Consults/collaborates in administrative and instructional decisions at the school and district levels	1.36	1.00	1.00

*Note.* The lower the score, the more knowledgeable and skilled the respondents perceived themselves.

## Overall Ratings of Standards

Using composite scores the descriptive statistics for the six standards are summarized in Table 10. Given the means ranged from 1.63 to 2.26, on the whole, coordinators perceived themselves as knowledgeable and skilled in terms of the six standards. The findings indicated coordinators thought they were most knowledgeable in terms of Program Development and Organization ( $M = 1.63$ ) and least knowledgeable in terms of Evaluation ( $M = 1.99$ ).

Table 10

*Descriptive Statistics for Coordinator's Perceptions of the Six Standards of Competence (N = 14)*

Standard	Range	Mean	SD
Leadership and policy	1.29 to 2.86	2.02	.53
Program development and organization	1.00 to 2.17	1.63	.42
Research and inquiry	1.00 to 3.50	2.00	.78
Evaluation	1.00 to 3.60	2.26	.74
Professional development and ethical practice	1.00 to 3.17	1.70	.62
Collaboration	1.00 to 2.73	1.77	.57

*Note.* The lower the score, the more knowledgeable and skilled the respondents perceived themselves.

## Results of Research Question 2

Research Question 2: How do the special education coordinators rank the CEC leadership knowledge and skills as essential to their day-to-day on-the-job performance?

### Leadership and Policy

The descriptive statistics for the Leadership and Policy items are displayed in Table 11.

Findings indicated the coordinators rated as most essential the skill of interpreting and applying current school system instructions, regulations, and policies to individuals with exceptional learning needs ( $M = 1.06$ ). Coordinators rated as least essential the skill of engaging in recruitment, hiring, and retention practices pertinent to personnel serving individuals with exceptional learning needs ( $M = 2.44$ ). This is likely due to central hiring practices of the school system.

### **Program Development and Organization**

The descriptive statistics for the Program Development items are displayed in Table 12.

Findings indicated the coordinators rated as most essential the skills of developing programs and strategies that promote positive school engagement ( $M = 1.12$ ), developing instruction needed to support access to the general curriculum ( $M = 1.12$ ), and implementing a flexible continuum of services based on effective practices for individuals with exceptional learning needs ( $M = 1.12$ ). Coordinators rated as least essential the skill of implementing programs and services that contribute to the prevention of unnecessary referrals ( $M = 1.38$ ).

Table 11

*Descriptive Statistics for Coordinator's Rating of Essential Leadership and Policy Standards (N = 16)*

Item	Mean	Median	Mode
<b>Knowledge</b>			
Foundation for administration of programs for individuals with learning needs	1.56	1.00	1.00
Historical and social significance of programs for individuals with learning needs	1.88	2.00	1.00
Local, district, and school system fiscal policies and funding mechanisms	1.62	1.50	1.00
<b>Skills</b>			
Applies current school system instructions and policies to individuals with learning needs	1.06	1.00	1.00
Applies leadership to provision of services for individuals with learning needs	1.31	1.00	1.00
Develops budget in accordance with policies for individuals with learning needs	2.25	2.00	1.00
Engages in recruitment, hiring, and retention practices	2.44	2.50	1.00
Communicates personal vision for meeting needs of individuals with learning needs	1.38	1.00	1.00

*Note.* The lower the score, the more essential was the knowledge or skill to daily performance.

Table 12

*Descriptive Statistics for Coordinator's Rating of Essential Program Development and Organization Standards (N = 16)*

Item	Mean	Median	Mode
<b>Knowledge</b>			
Programs within general curriculum to achieve positive school outcomes	1.25	1.00	1.00
Programs that promote school engagement	1.12	1.00	1.00
Instruction and services needed to support access to the general curriculum	1.12	1.00	1.00
Administrative plans that support the use of instructional and assistive technologies	1.31	1.00	1.00
<b>Skills</b>			
Develops and implements a flexible continuum of services based on effective practices	1.12	1.00	1.00
Develops and implements programs that contribute to prevention of unnecessary referrals	1.38	1.00	1.00

*Note.* The lower the score, the more essential was the knowledge or skill to daily performance.



## **Research and Inquiry**

The descriptive statistics for the Research and Inquiry items are shown in Table 13.

Findings revealed the coordinators rated as most essential the skill in engaging in data-based decision-making for the administration of educational programs and services that supports exceptional students ( $M = 1.31$ ). Coordinators rated as least essential the other two Research and Inquiry standards: research-based administrative practices that supports individuals with learning needs and develops data-based educational expectations and evidence-based programs to account for the impact of diversity on individuals with learning needs.

## **Evaluation**

The descriptive statistics for the Evaluation items are shown in Table 14. The findings revealed the coordinators rated as most essential the skill of advocating and implementing procedures for the participation of individuals with learning needs in accountability systems ( $M = 1.62$ ). Coordinators rated as least essential the skill of designing and implementing evaluation procedures that improve instructional content and practices ( $M = 2.31$ ).

Table 13

*Descriptive Statistics for Coordinator's Rating of Essential Research and Inquiry Standards (N = 16)*

Item	Mean	Median	Mode
<b>Knowledge</b>			
Research-based administrative practices that supports individuals with learning needs	1.67	1.00	1.00
<b>Skills</b>			
Engages in data-based decision-making for administration of educational programs	1.31	1.00	1.00
Develops data-based educational expectations and evidence-based programs to account for the impact of diversity on individuals with learning needs	1.62	1.50	1.00

*Note.* The lower the score, the more essential was the knowledge or skill to daily performance.

Table 14

*Descriptive Statistics for Coordinator's Rating of Essential Evaluation Standards (N = 16)*

Item	Mean	Median	Mode
Knowledge			
Models, theories, and practices used to evaluate educational programs and personnel	1.88	2.00	1.00
Skills			
Implements procedures for participation of individuals with learning needs	1.62	1.00	1.00
Develops and implements ongoing evaluations of education programs and personnel	1.94	2.00	2.00
Provides ongoing supervision of personnel working with individuals with learning needs	2.27	2.00	1.00
Implements evaluation procedures that improve instruction content and practices	2.31	2.00	2.00

*Note.* The lower the score, the more essential was the knowledge or skill to daily performance.

## **Professional Development and Ethical Practice**

The descriptive statistics for the Professional Development and Ethical Practice items are shown in Table 15. The findings revealed the coordinators rated as most essential the skill of communicating and demonstrating a high standard of ethical administrative practices when working with staff serving individuals with learning needs ( $M = 1.20$ ). Coordinators rated as least essential the skill of participating in local, state, and national professional administrative organizations to guide administrative practices when working with individuals with learning needs ( $M = 2.50$ ).

## **Collaboration**

The descriptive statistics for the Collaboration items are displayed in Table 16. The findings revealed coordinators rated as most essential the ability of demonstrating the skills necessary to provide ongoing communication, education, and support for families of individuals with learning needs ( $M = 1.25$ ). Coordinators rated as least essential the skill of developing and implementing intra- and inter-agency agreements that create programs with shared responsibility for individuals with learning needs ( $M = 2.25$ ).

Table 15

*Descriptive Statistics for Coordinator's Rating of Essential Professional Development and Ethical Practice Standards (N = 16)*

Item	Mean	Median	Mode
<b>Knowledge</b>			
Ethical theories and practices as applied to administration of programs and services	1.44	1.00	1.00
Adult learning theories as applied to professional development and supervision	2.31	2.00	2.00
Professional development theories that improve instruction and instructional content	1.69	2.00	1.00
Impact of diversity on educational programming expectations	1.69	1.50	1.00
<b>Skills</b>			
Communicates high standard of ethical administrative practices when working with staff	1.20	1.00	1.00
Implements professional development activities that improve instructional practices	1.50	1.00	1.00
Participates in local, state, and national professional administrative organizations	2.50	2.00	2.00

*Note.* The lower the score, the more essential was the knowledge or skill to daily performance.

Table 16

*Descriptive Statistics for Coordinator's Rating of Essential Collaboration Standards (N = 16)*

Item	Mean	Median	Mode
<b>Knowledge</b>			
Collaborative theories/practices that support administration of programs and services	1.69	1.50	1.00
Administrative theories/models that facilitate communication among stakeholders	1.81	2.00	1.00
Importance and relevance of advocacy at local, district, and school system level	1.62	1.50	1.00
<b>Skills</b>			
Utilizes collaborative approaches for involving stakeholders in educational planning, implementation, and evaluation	1.56	1.50	1.00
Strengthens the role of parent and advocacy organizations as they support individuals with learning needs	2.19	2.00	1.00
Develops/implements intra- and inter-agency agreements that create programs with shared responsibility for individuals with learning needs	2.25	2.00	2.00
Facilitates transition plans across the educational continuum	1.69	2.00	1.00

Item	Mean	Median	Mode
Skills (continued)			
Implements collaborative administrative procedures and strategies to facilitate communication among stakeholders	1.44	1.00	1.00
Engages in leadership practices that support shared decision making	1.38	1.00	1.00
Demonstrates the skills necessary to provide ongoing communication, education, and support for families of individuals with learning needs	1.25	1.00	1.00
Consults/collaborates in administrative and instructional decisions at the school and district levels	1.31	1.00	1.00

*Note.* The lower the score, the more essential was the knowledge or skill to daily performance.

## Overall Ratings of Standards

The descriptive statistics for the six standards are summarized in Table 17. Given the means ranged from 1.21 to 1.99, on the whole, coordinators perceived all six standards to be essential to daily job performance. The findings indicated coordinators thought the standard most essential to daily performance was Program Development and Organization ( $M = 1.22$ ) and the standard least essential to daily performance was Evaluation ( $M = 1.99$ ).

Table 17

*Descriptive Statistics for the Coordinator's Rating of Six Standards of Competence (N = 16)*

Standard	Range	Mean	SD
Leadership and policy	1.00 to 2.38	1.69	.48
Program development and organization	1.00 to 2.00	1.22	.33
Research and inquiry	1.00 to 3.50	1.63	.74
Evaluation	1.00 to 3.80	1.99	.82
Professional development and ethical practice	1.00 to 2.86	1.76	.55
Collaboration	1.09 to 2.55	1.65	.41

*Note.* The lower the score, the more essential was the standard to daily performance

## Results of Research Question 3

Research Question 3: What are the similarities and differences in leadership knowledge and skills among the district special education coordinators



across the geographic area in the system? To determine if there is a statistically significant relationship between the ratings (nominal data) of the coordinators in Europe, America and the Pacific, descriptive statistics were used to show frequency, percentage, and mode for each of the dependent variables. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether district coordinators' competence ratings varied significantly across geographic region. One way ANOVAs were considered an appropriate statistical analysis by this researcher because it was assumed there was not a high correlation among the dependent variables. The Bonferroni Correction Factor was used to adjust for the inflated alpha due to the multiple ANOVAs and the new  $p$  value was .00833. The means and standard deviations for the coordinators' ratings across the three regions are displayed in Table 18 while the ANOVA findings are summarized in Table 19. The findings reveal that none of the competence ratings varied significantly across regions.

Table 18

*Means and Standard Deviations for District Coordinators' Ratings across*

*Geographic Region*

Standard	America ( <i>N</i> = 4)		Europe ( <i>N</i> = 7)		Pacific ( <i>N</i> = 3)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Leadership and policy	2.11	.68	2.14	.48	1.62	.36
Program development	1.71	.63	1.76	.30	1.22	.38
Research and inquiry	1.63	.75	2.36	.75	1.67	.76
Evaluation	2.25	.68	2.51	.61	1.67	.99
Professional	1.63	.44	1.81	.77	1.56	.59
development	1.91	.74	1.81	.51	1.52	.61
Collaboration						

Table 19

*One-way ANOVA Results for Competence Ratings across Geographic Regions (N = 14)*

Standard	df	MS	F	Sig.
<b>Leadership and policy</b>				
Between groups	2	.31	1.12	.362
Within groups	11	.28		
<b>Program development</b>				
Between groups	2	.32	2.09	.170
Within groups	11	.15		
<b>Research and inquiry</b>				
Between groups	2	.02	.13	.882
Within groups	11	.14		
<b>Evaluation</b>				
Between groups	2	.76	1.49	.267
Within groups	11	.51		
<b>Professional development</b>				
Between groups	2	.08	.19	.828
Within groups	11	.44		
<b>Collaboration</b>				
Between groups	2	.14	.39	.686
Within groups	11	.36		

Note: The Bonferroni Correction Factor Sig. = .00833

## Results of Research Question 4

Research Question 4: To what degree do the rankings of the special education coordinators and the rankings of special education teachers and school administrators match? One way ANOVAs were used to determine whether essential standard ratings varied significantly across job position. To reduce the possible effect of error due to accumulative comparisons that can occur with multiple ANOVAs the Bonferroni Correction Factor was applied. The new  $p$  value was .00833. Significant differences were found in leadership and policy and professional development. The means and standard deviations for the ratings across the three job positions are displayed in Table 20 while the ANOVA findings are summarized in Table 21.

Ratings regarding how essential Leadership and Policy standards were to daily performance varied significantly across job position ( $F(2,113) = 12.68, p = .000$ ). Post-hoc Tukey test findings revealed special education teachers thought Leadership and Policy standards were less essential to daily performance ( $M = 2.23$ ) than district coordinators ( $M = 1.69, p = .004$ ) and building administrators ( $M = 1.57, p = .000$ ). The Tukey test was used because it is a frequently used post-hoc test that determines the differences between means in terms of standard error. Although it is not as conservative as the Bonferroni test, it provided a means to make a comparison with a critical value which is helpful when the sample sizes are small or when there are not significant differences among the means.

Ratings regarding how essential Professional Development standards were to daily performance varied significantly across job position ( $F(2,112) = 5.84, p = .004$ ). Post-hoc Tukey test findings revealed special education teachers thought Professional Development standards were less essential to daily performance ( $M = 2.29$ ) than district coordinators ( $M = 1.76, p = .019$ ) and building administrators ( $M = 1.78, p = .011$ ). Table 21.

Table 20

*Means and Standard Deviations for Essential Standard Ratings across Job*

*Position*

Standard	Coordinator ( $N = 16$ )		SPED Teacher ( $N = 80$ )		Administrator ( $N = 20$ )	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Leadership and policy	1.69	.48	2.23	.67	1.57	.33
Program development	1.22	.33	1.60	.48	1.57	.39
Research and inquiry	1.63	.74	1.63	.83	1.63	.56
Evaluation	1.99	.82	1.99	.80	1.65	.47
Professional	1.76	.55	1.76	.77	1.78	.42
development	1.65	.41	1.65	.63	1.79	.44
Collaboration						

Table 21

*One-way ANOVA Results for Essential Standards across Job Position (N = 116)*

Standard	Df	MS	F	Sig.
<b>Leadership and policy</b>				
Between groups	2	4.65	12.68	.000
Within groups	113	.37		
<b>Program development</b>				
Between groups	2	.99	4.92	.009
Within groups	112	.20		
<b>Research and inquiry</b>				
Between groups	2	.21	1.20	.306
Within groups	111	.17		
<b>Evaluation</b>				
Between groups	2	.42	2.88	.061
Within groups	112	.15		
<b>Professional development</b>				
Between groups	2	.66	5.84	.004
Within groups	112	.11		
<b>Collaboration</b>				
Between groups	2	.20	2.07	.131
Within groups	113	.09		

*Note:* Significance of .000 essentially exceeds  $p > .001$

## **Analysis of Written Comments**

In this section of the survey respondents were asked to list any additional areas of knowledge and skills seen as essential to the day-to-day job performance of the district special education coordinator. The open-ended responses entered by each respondent were coded for themes looking for similarities and differences among responders. To discover the themes in the text of the open-ended responses (N=23), the researcher conducted an open coding analysis with a compare and contrast method that helped formulate ten themes. The responses were reviewed for word repetitions, key words, and overall ideas. The themes were defined by the researcher and can be viewed in Appendix G. Inter-rater reliability was established with a second rater to ensure coding for themes was reliable. Both raters practiced on the pilot responses to establish familiarity with the themes until reliability was achieved, wherein both raters selected the same theme for the written statement. This researcher was the primary rater. The second rater was a certified special education teacher familiar with special education terms and policies. The second rater was asked to code a sample of ten statements using the defined themes. The responses were then tabulated by the primary rater. Rating of the statement themes were the same for nine of the ten statements indicating coding agreement was high (90% or higher reliability).

The overall themes identified by the respondents centered on: compliance and monitoring; professional development; communication and advocacy; best practices for instruction; school community resources; technology; problem solving/mediation resolution; funding and resources; roles and responsibilities;

and other. These themes are also similar to the six standards used in the survey. The six CEC standards of the knowledge and skills for special education administrators are leadership and policy, program development and organization, research and inquiry, evaluation, professional development and ethical practice, and collaboration. There was crossover among the standards and themes identified in the respondent comments such as compliance and monitoring with leadership and policy, best practices in instruction with program development, and organization or professional development.

The three most frequent themes of the open-ended responses were centered on best practices in instruction, roles and responsibilities, and compliance and monitoring. Compliance and monitoring of programs to ensure each child with a disability is afforded a free and appropriate public education was the most frequent comment made by respondents. Next respondents most frequently commented on the roles and responsibilities of the professional elements and standards required of teachers, administrators, and special education coordinators related to the provision of services for students with disabilities. Similarly, respondents identified best practices in instruction with the same frequency as roles and responsibilities. It was clear that respondents were equally concerned that determining which practices and interventions are most effective and efficient for ensuring optimal student achievement.

### **Social Validity**

Social validity regarding the CEC knowledge and skills was gathered after the survey data analysis by email. On the survey respondents were asked to



identify if they could be contacted after the data are collected for questions about the survey. Ten respondents indicated they were willing to respond to social validity questions. All ten were sent the social validity questions in hopes to garner at least six respondents; refer to Appendix E. The social validity questions sought to determine whether the respondent felt comfortable rating the knowledge and skill items, whether such data are valuable to the system, and how the information may provide added value to enhance professional development or recruitment and retention of highly qualified personnel. Despite an additional follow-up email one week following the original email message, none of the respondents replied regarding their feelings about the value of the survey.

### **Internal Consistency and Reliability**

#### **Screening for Outliers**

The reliability of the twelve subscales was assessed via Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Items with low item-total correlations were dropped from subsequent analysis. The following items had low item-total correlations and were not used to create the composite variables: Perceived Level of Research and Inquiry item 1, Essential Level of Leadership and Policy item 1, Essential Level of Research and Inquiry item 3, Essential Level of Evaluation item 2, and Essential Level of Professional Development item 7.

Twelve composite variables were then created. Cases whose composite standardized scores exceeded three were deleted from subsequent analyses. Five cases were considered as outliers. These cases had composite scores greater than three in the following: Perceived Level of Research and Inquiry (1), Perceived

level of Evaluation (2), Perceived Level of Program Development (1), and Perceived Level of Collaboration (1).

### **Reliability of Scales**

A reliability analysis on the Likert-scale items in the survey was performed (without the five outliers). This analysis was used to determine its internal consistency. The reliability of the measure was determined through the calculation of Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The alphas for the three measures are presented in Table 22. According to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), a scale is deemed internally consistent when its alpha is .70 or greater. Alphas were all above the acceptable criterion of .70 and most fell near to .80 thus all subscales were reliable.

Table 22

*Coefficient Alphas for the Study Measures*

Measure	Case N	Item N	Alpha
Perceived levels			
Leadership and policy	112	8	.79
Program development and organization	108	6	.76
Research and inquiry	112	2	.75
Evaluation	105	5	.79
Professional development	108	7	.82
Collaboration	105	11	.87
Essential levels			
Leadership and policy	14	8	.78
Program development and organization	14	6	.84
Research and inquiry	14	2	.83
Evaluation	14	4	.87
Professional development	14	7	.85
Collaboration	14	11	.91

### Summary

The underlying purpose of this study was to examine how district special education coordinators rated and ranked as essential those knowledge and skills deemed necessary to the day-to-day job performance of serving students with disabilities. Additionally, the study sought to determine if there were similarities or differences among special education teachers, school administrators, and district special education coordinators views of the leadership knowledge and skills that are essential to the day-to-day requirements of serving students with

disabilities. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) published six professional standards for special education administrators (CEC, 2009) that specified 40 distinct evidence-based knowledge and skills that served as the foundation for this web-based survey.

The demographic data analysis revealed the majority of respondents were female. Nearly half of the respondents were from Europe and nearly three quarters identify as white Caucasians. More than half the respondents are over age 50 while one quarter fell in the 40 to 49 year old age range. Over 80% of the respondents reported having a Master's degree and nearly 60% of them reported being certified in general education. The majority of respondents also reported being certified in learning impaired, mild/moderate.

After investigating the perceived ratings and the ranking of essential levels of leadership and policy, program development and organization, research and inquiry, evaluation, professional development and collaboration, it was found that coordinators viewed all six standards as essential and ranked their highest level of competency as Program Development and Organization. Coordinators ranked themselves as least knowledgeable in terms of Evaluation. Coordinators identified Program Development and Organization as the most essential skill to day-to-day performance and viewed Research and Inquiry as the least essential skill to daily performance. There was no significant difference among the coordinators on their perceived level of competency on the knowledge and skills across the geographic regions of the school system.

The ratings of the three groups of special education teachers, school administrators, and district coordinators varied significantly across job position. Special education teachers thought leadership and policy standards were less essential to daily performance than district coordinators and building administrators. Special education teachers expressed the view that Professional Development standards were less essential to the day-to-day job performance than district coordinators and building administrators.

The qualitative data collected through this study revealed participants commented primarily about understanding and implementing the school system special education compliance standards. The next two most common themes that emerged from the comments were best practices in instruction and the roles and responsibilities of the district special education coordinator. Coordinators indicated a desire to be aware of current best practices in instruction and apply them to students with disabilities, know how to differentiate instruction, and be aware of current research. The written comments confirmed that in terms of leadership and policy, district special education coordinators believed their strength is interpreting and applying current school system instructions, regulations, and policies to individuals with exceptional learning needs. The second most common theme in the written comments revolved around best practices in instruction and further confirmed that coordinators felt most skilled at developing and implementing flexible continuum of services based on effective practices for individuals with special needs.

This study inquired about the perceived and essential levels of knowledge and skill needed by district special education coordinators for the day-to-day job performance of serving students with disabilities. Respondents provided a self-assessment of their perceived level of knowledge and skills on the six standards developed by CEC for administrators of programs for students with exceptional learning needs. Results indicated that coordinators believed all six standards are important to the implementation of programs for students with disabilities. In terms of knowledge and skill strengths, the coordinators rated themselves as most skilled in interpreting and applying the school system instructions and policies and developing and implementing a flexible continuum of services based on effective practices for individuals with disabilities. They are also skilled at engaging in data-based decision-making for the administration of educational programs and services that support exceptional students, as well as advocating and implementing procedures for the participation of individuals with learning needs in accountability systems. Another area of strength is communicating and demonstrating a high standard of ethical administrative practices when working with staff serving individuals with disabilities, and demonstrating the skills necessary to provide ongoing communication, education, and support for families of individuals with exceptional learning needs.

The coordinators rated themselves as least skilled in the following areas: engaging in the recruitment; hiring and retention practices that comply with local, district, and school system policies as they apply to personnel serving students with disabilities; developing and implementing programs and services that

contribute to the prevention of unnecessary referrals; research-based administrative practices that support individuals with exceptional learning needs; developing and implementing ongoing evaluations of education programs and personnel; designing and implementing evaluation procedures that improve instructional content and practices; participating in local, state, and national professional administrative organizations to guide administrative practices when working with individuals with learning needs; and finally, developing and implementing intra- and inter- agency agreements that create programs with shared responsibility for individuals with learning needs.

Data analysis of the coordinators' responses indicated no significant differences in the ratings of knowledge and skills across geographic areas. In terms of the degree to which the ratings of essential skills matched among the coordinators, teachers, and administrators, it is notable that both coordinators and teachers viewed Program Development as more essential to day-to-day job performance than administrators, whereas administrators indicated that the standards for Leadership and Policy as well as Program Development were the two most essential standards for serving students with disabilities in the school. The standard that was reported as least essential to the day-to-day performance of serving students with disabilities was Evaluation.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

In the school system that participated in this study, the support for the implementation of special education programs has been traditionally provided by the district special education coordinator. These individuals are typically special education teachers who have years of experience as a Case Study Committee (CSC) Chairperson at the school level and who are highly motivated to provide leadership and expertise on matters pertaining to programs for students with disabilities. Within the last decade, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) published 40 professional standards for special education administrators (CEC, 2004). These standards are specific to the knowledge, skills, competencies, and leadership responsibilities of the special education administrator. Despite research studies about what the essential knowledge and skills of special education administrators should be, the literature provides little information about what is most essential for special education teachers and building administrators and there is nothing written about the knowledge and skills of the district special education coordinators who serve in the school system's schools. This study endeavored to provide insight into the current knowledge and skills of the district special education coordinators in the school system. It also looked into what knowledge and skills the special education teachers and building administrators thought were essential to the daily operation of the special education program. Survey responses of coordinators, special education teachers, and school building administrators indicated a range of knowledge and skills among those who serve



students with disabilities in the school system. A total of 116 surveys were analyzed in order to answer the study's research questions:

1. To what degree do the district special education coordinators rate their level of competency on the knowledge and skills on the CEC professional standards as identified through self-assessment?
2. How do the special education coordinators rank the CEC leadership knowledge and skills as essential to their day-to-day on-the-job performance?
3. What are the similarities and differences in leadership knowledge and skills among the district special education coordinators across the geographic areas in the system?
4. To what degree do the rankings of the special education coordinators and the rankings of special education teachers and school administrators match?

### **Discussion of Findings**

Based on the analyses of the data collected from this study, several conclusions can be made regarding the competencies and essential knowledge and skills of special education coordinators and what is needed to support programs for students with disabilities in schools. Findings related to the specific knowledge and skills standards (as defined by CEC) are discussed in this chapter. The discussion is organized by each of the standards and within each standard is discussed the appropriate answer to the applicable research question.

## **Demographics**

The number and types of respondents who completed this survey (N=116) makes it appropriate to garner conclusions about who supports special education programs in the school system and what they think about the essential knowledge and skills needed to provide a quality program for students with disabilities. With a return rate on the web-based survey of nearly 80%, the results of the findings in this study about the school system's special education program is certainly respectable. In this study nearly 80% of the respondents reported as being white/Caucasian and more than half the respondents reported being over age 50. More than teachers, these data reflect the type of personnel in the district coordinator and building administrator positions. This also reflects the known ethnic and age breakdowns reported by the Equal Employment Opportunity Office of the school system in their annual report to the Director. This does not reflect upon the diversity identified in the school system students with disabilities population. The implication of the ethnic breakdown of the respondents implies a need on the part of the school system to improve recruitment of a more diverse staff supporting students with disabilities. There also appears to be a need to ensure appropriate succession planning to replace the aging population with younger more diverse personnel who match the demographics of the student population. Not surprising was the fact that more than 80% of the respondents held at least a Master's degree and nearly 70% hold some type of degree in special education. It was surprising to find that one district coordinator holds a

Bachelor's degree and the current requirement for the job is a minimum of a Master's degree.

### **Leadership and Policy**

District coordinators rated themselves most competent in terms of interpreting and applying current school system instructions, regulations, and policies to individuals with exceptional learning needs ( $M = 1.43$ ) and least skilled in engaging in recruitment, hiring, and retention practices that comply with local, district, and school system policies as they apply to personnel serving students with disabilities ( $M = 2.43$ ). For many years the monitoring of school compliance with special education instructions and regulations has been the major focus the special education monitoring standards for the school system. It is likely that coordinators do not engage at all in the recruitment and hiring of special education personnel since that is a local school level function done by building administrators in coordination with the area or headquarters office.

The data analysis of the coordinators' view of the essential skills necessary to the daily performance of the job revealed the same as above. They viewed the interpreting and application of current school system instructions, regulations, and policies as most essential to the job and the recruitment, hiring, and retention of special education personnel as the least essential. The special education coordinator is the district resource and it makes sense they should be the resident expert on all matters pertaining to the application of regulatory policy on serving students with disabilities. Since retention of special education personnel is a challenge, it seems more emphasis should be made to ensure

recruitment and retention of quality personnel should be more essential to the daily job performance in collaboration with the building administrator.

The analysis of the geographic differences among the coordinators was not significant. Basically, the coordinators saw themselves as equally skilled across the geographic areas on the CEC knowledge and skill standards. This is important for the school system to note as it means there is no evidence of perceived discrepancies in the skill levels of coordinators across the system. This could be attributed to the standards used for recruitment and hiring of district coordinators or the fact that many of the district coordinators are “home grown” CSC chairpersons with a high desire to provide special education leadership.

In the composite analysis of the leadership and policy standard, it is noteworthy that special education teachers do not see leadership and policy standards as essential to the daily job performance as the coordinators and building administrators. There could be many reasons why the analysis revealed this finding, one of which may be the level of involvement of coordinators and administrators in the day-to-day functioning of the special education program. Special education teachers are responsible for running the instructional program for each identified student and leading their own meetings with parents and other school staff without a great deal of intervention from the coordinators and administrator, even though administrators are required to attend the meetings. Special education teachers do not frequently engage in issues of the school system fiscal policies and funding mechanisms or budgetary issues which make up part of the leadership and policy standard.

## **Program Development and Organization**

District coordinators rated themselves most competent in terms of developing and implementing a flexible continuum of services based on effective practices for individuals with exceptional learning needs ( $M = 1.29$ ) and least competent at developing and implementing programs and services that contribute to the prevention of unnecessary referrals ( $M = 1.86$ ). In the school system the policy provides for students, regardless of disability type, to receive whatever services they need through an array of service delivery models (Quilt of Many Colors, 1998) so it is not surprising coordinators felt very competent ensuring that students are offered a flexible continuum of services. With the extensive efforts that have been made recently in the Response to Intervention focus, it seems somewhat odd that district coordinators would feel least competent in putting together pre-referral intervention programs that would support students and prevent unnecessary referrals to the Case Study Committee.

The data analysis of the coordinators' view of the essential skills necessary to the daily performance of the job with regard to program development and organization revealed the most essential skills are shared among three areas: developing programs and strategies that promote positive school engagement ( $M = 1.12$ ), developing instruction needed to support access to the general curriculum ( $M = 1.12$ ) and implementing a flexible continuum of services based on effective practice for individuals with exceptional learning needs ( $M = 1.12$ ). These areas seem central to the issue of providing quality programs for students with disabilities and doing so to the point of ensuring students stay in school to

graduate. Again, the skill deemed least essential by the district coordinators was the skill of implementing programs and services that contribute to the prevention of unnecessary referrals ( $M = 1.38$ ). It might be beneficial to the school system to review how many false positive referrals are made in the system to determine if this is in fact a challenge area for the system and if so, provide some professional assistance to the coordinators.

There were no significant differences among the self-assessed knowledge and skills of the coordinators based on regional differences although it is noted that program development was the one area in which the significance was the lowest (Sig. = .170).

Ratings regarding how essential Program Development standards were to daily performance varied significantly across job position ( $F(2,112) = 4.92$ ,  $p = .009$ ). The results of the study revealed special education teachers thought Program Development standards were less essential to daily performance ( $M = 1.60$ ) than district coordinators ( $M = 1.22$ ,  $p = .006$ ) and building administrators. However, it is noteworthy that overall, special education teachers rated program development as more essential than any other standards. Program development standards embrace such knowledge and skills as programs within general curriculum to achieve positive school outcomes, promoting positive school engagement, instruction and services needed to access the general curriculum, and developing and implementing a flexible continuum of services.

## Research and Inquiry

District Coordinators identified they felt most competent engaging in decisions that are data-based ( $M = 1.79$ ) and least competent with research-based administrative practices that support students with disabilities. This finding is not surprising considering the district special education coordinator has a wealth of data available through the computer-based program *Excent*. *Excent* is a web-based program that tracks student information from pre-referral through eligibility and IEP progress. They are expected to make decisions about staffing based on caseload data for each of the schools since there are caseload standards for each of the areas of certification (e.g., speech-language pathologists are staffed based on 35 students to one professional). The recent emphasis on research-based practices for improving student achievement has certainly made its way into the headlines of the Council for Exceptional Children. It is understandable that practitioners in the field may not be completely up to date in this area due to the dearth of available programs that are research-based, rather it could be more of a need for professional development for the district coordinators.

Coordinators also indicated data-based decision making was one of the most essential skills needed to support the day-to-day program for serving students with disabilities. On the other hand, they indicated that developing data-based educational expectations and evident-based programs for the impact of diversity on individuals with learning needs was less essential to the daily performance of working with students with disabilities and it was only slightly less essential than research-based administrative practices. Interestingly as a

standard, research and inquiry was identified as the second most essential standard for the district coordinator.

Research and inquiry was one of the standards that nearly all three of the groups identified as being most essential to the daily performance of supporting students with disabilities. It came in a rank of number two for both the coordinators and teachers while administrators ranked it as being somewhat less essential.

### **Evaluation**

Implementing procedures for participation (in evaluation) of individuals with learning needs was the skill in which coordinators identified as being most competent. This skill has to do with making appropriate accommodations and modifications for students to participate in system-wide testing or to participate in routine classroom assessments. The skills the coordinators' identified as being the least competent in were providing ongoing supervision of personnel working with students with disabilities and developing and implementing ongoing evaluations of educational programs and personnel. It is noteworthy to see that coordinators who spend a great deal of their time monitoring and evaluating school programs for students with disabilities have rated themselves least competent in this area. Special education program monitoring for compliance is certainly one form of educational program evaluation and each coordinator must conduct monitoring of their schools once every five years. It is disappointing to see they rated themselves as least competent in that area and it points to another



opportunity for the school system to consider providing professional development training.

Again, district special education coordinators rated procedures for participation (in evaluation) of individuals with learning needs as the most essential skill in the evaluation standard. They rated providing ongoing supervision of personnel working with individuals with learning needs as the least essential for their day-to-day operations. In the school system, some district coordinators supervise special education teachers and some do not. In Europe and the Pacific, the coordinators do not supervise any service personnel whereas the coordinators in America are required to provide supervision. At one time this accounted for the difference in salary schedules for the two groups (overseas versus domestic). Those who supervised teachers were required to have administrative certificates and were paid higher salaries. This disparity in salary among the coordinators created some dissatisfaction among the overseas coordinators. In an effort to equalize the playing field the school system placed the overseas coordinators on an administrative schedule and they are now paid commensurately. Coordinators indicated, evaluation was essential and they had the knowledge of models, theories, and practices used to evaluate educational programs and personnel yet they indicated that implementing evaluation procedures that improve instructional content and practices was less essential to their day-to-day business. Perhaps this is another area in which enhanced professional development could help coordinators learn practical ways to implement evaluation procedures that focus on improving instruction.

Across the regions the district coordinators did not identify any particular ratings of their competency in any of the standards and this is true of evaluation. The three coordinators in the Pacific rated themselves more competent than the other two areas, however, it was not a significant difference.

As for differences among the three groups of respondents, evaluation was considered most essential by the administrators and least essential by the coordinators. Special education teachers saw evaluation as somewhat less essential. Overall the evaluation standard is rated as the least essential standard to the day-to-day operations of supporting students with disabilities by all three groups. Student and program evaluation have implications for how well the student learns the general education curriculum and effectively achieves the goals of their individualized learning plan. So it is somewhat surprising that special education teachers, and more critically the special education coordinators and administrators, did not see this skill as more essential to the day-to-day performance imparted by the special education coordinator. Given the continual emphasis the school system is placing on student achievement outcomes, this finding provides an interesting insight into how the field personnel perceive the policies the system has set for raising student achievement.

### **Professional Development and Ethical Practice**

Communicating a high standard of ethical administrative practices when working with staff and implementing professional development activities that improve instructional practices are two of the components of the Professional Development and Ethical Practices Standard in which district coordinators

identified themselves as most competent. Adult learning theories as applied to professional development and supervision and participating in local, state, and national professional administrative organizations are the two items in which coordinators rated themselves as least competent. Attending national professional organization conferences for overseas educators is somewhat cost prohibitive although attendance can be approved for non-school system conferences. District coordinators provide or coordinate the provision of professional development within their districts. There seems to be a need for improvement in skills related to adult learning theory and professional development. In the school system, professional development for educators seems to elicit a spark of negative emotion. There has been a dearth of professional development primarily due to budgetary constraints except in special education. The special educators recently had the support of DoDEA for working with students with moderate severe disabilities through the Special Education Initiative, the 55 million dollar, six year initiative, to boost programs for students with disabilities. The administrators received recent training on mediation which resulted in certification. The district coordinators may or may not attend the trainings offered to teachers and administrators. The attendance at the CEC Conference is a matter of personal professional choice and would certainly relate to broadening continuous personal professional knowledge and skills. The school system financially supported the district coordinators in attending for several years and then withdrew the funding.

As for what district coordinators rated as most essential to daily performance, communicating high standard of ethical administrative practices

when working with staff was the item with the lowest mean score. Again, knowledge of adult learning theories as applied to professional development and supervision and participating in local, state, and national professional administrative organizations were rated as their least essential item in professional development and ethical practices. These certainly match up exactly with the ratings coordinators gave themselves in terms of their competence and how essential the knowledge and skills are to their day-to-day performance on the job.

Regionally there were no significant differences among the three geographical groups on their ratings of which knowledge and skills they felt most competent to perform. Across the regions, professional development and ethical practices were rated about the same as program development in terms of their competence.

As for how the three groups rated the items of professional development and ethical practices they fell just short of being the least essential knowledge and skills for the coordinator in terms of daily performance necessary to support students with disabilities. All three groups rated professional development as a four or five out of the six standards. Perhaps this is because district coordinators do not plan, present, and evaluate professional development nearly to the extent that was available five years ago because of the policy that the school system is now responsible for the centralized training to ensure that all educators and administrators get the same essential messages from the headquarters.

## **Collaboration**

District coordinators rated themselves most competent on the item facilitates transition plans across the educational continuum and least competent on administrative theories/practices that facilitate communication among stakeholders and develops/implements intra and inter-agency agreements that create programs with shared responsibility for individuals with learning needs. For about a decade between 1993 and 2003 the school system focused on training and assisting schools with the development of transition plans for students with disabilities so it is good to see coordinators felt competent to facilitate transition plans across the educational continuum. Additionally, the school system students typically transition seven to nine times before graduating from high school (MCEC, 2010) which means their transition planning needs to be thoroughly defined and documented in order for them to be successful. The school system centrally coordinates the intra- and inter-agency agreements with the military agencies so it is not surprising the coordinators don't see this task as their responsibility.

Coordinators identified utilizing collaborative approaches for involving stakeholders in educational planning, implementation, and evaluation as the most essential collaborative skill. They rated developing/implementing intra- and inter-agency agreements that create programs with shared responsibility for students with disabilities as the least essential skill to their day-to-day performance.

There were no significant differences in the competence of the coordinators in their geographically diverse regions of the school system. This

finding may have been skewed due to the small numbers of Pacific participants in the sample. Due to the small number of respondents there would have to have been a huge difference in order for it to generate statistical significance.

Among the three subgroups of respondents, collaboration ranked third among the most essential skills needed for day-to-day performance by the teachers and coordinators. Administrators ranked collaboration as sixth on their list of priority of essential skills. Coordinators and teachers understand the importance of collaboration and seem to realize the role that collaboration plays with promoting understanding of working with students with disabilities.

### **Qualitative Findings**

The additional written comments that several respondents provided allowed for some focus on themes similar to the professional standards. There were not any real surprises in the quantitative data gathered except the consistency with which the themes matched up to the professional standards. The three most frequent themes of the open-ended responses were centered on compliance and monitoring (evaluation and leadership and policy), best practices in instruction (program development and organization), and roles and responsibilities of the coordinator (leadership and policy). It was clear that respondents were equally concerned about which evidence-based practices and interventions are most effective and efficient to ensuring optimal student achievement.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are certain limitations of this study that must be shared. The results of this study cannot be generalized to any other school system and is limited only to the scope of the school system district special education coordinators and school level programs overseas and in America. There was a limitation of the study due to the non-completion of the survey by some respondents which could have impacted on the outcome of the survey results. While there were no significant differences among the respondents as to who finished and who did not, there were quite a large number of participants who started the survey but did not complete it. This may be due to the time of year in which the survey was requested (toward the end of the school year) which limited how much time a person was willing to give to it or it may have been due to the configuration of the on-line survey and the directions given.

In the item analysis of the survey there was a high correlation among the sub-elements of the six standards creating the potential for respondents to have identified all elements as essential to their day-to-day job performance. Using a five item Likert-type scale for coordinators to show their strengths and limitations may not have provided the most definitive way of identifying the discrete skills they need for day-to-day operations.

### **Implications for Further Research**

Future research in the area of special education leadership could focus on developing further the professional needs of the district special education coordinators. Certainly recruitment, induction, and retention of special education

leaders is worthy of additional study within the school system. Future research could focus on the needs of the school administrator as they support the programs for students with disabilities. Additionally, educational leaders need current information and trends in special education practices and need to make them available to those who work directly with students on a day-to-day basis. Exploring the ways in which research can assist us in gaining insight into the collaborative practices of the classroom teacher, special education teacher, building administrator, and special education leader is certainly worthy of additional study. Specifically, emphasize how the collaboration of these professionals impact student achievement. Another area worthy of study is the relationship of the leadership to student achievement. Researching into the ways in which special education leaders can support the professional development of teachers and school professionals using evidence-based or research-based practices would be a volume of work to explore as we move into the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Summary Implications**

This study has some interesting implications for the participating school system. There are clearly some indicators of possible areas for professional development for the district special education coordinators. The fact is that special education teachers and district coordinators see that improving instructional programs at the school and system levels are important. There is clearly a need to develop and support the use of evidence-based practices, and to coordinate educational standards with students with disabilities in mind so they



can have access to the general education curriculum. Somehow the school system must focus on the need to close the gap on how the system conducts student and program evaluation to ensure the effectiveness of instructional practices and to help students achieve in the general education curriculum. It is key that administrators see their leadership and policy roles and responsibilities as the most essential element of day-to-day program performance. Without administrator support, programs and services for students with disabilities would not achieve their greatest potential by creating an environment that respects all individuals and their unique learning needs. It should be the vision of the leadership to create and sustain a positive climate and culture of the school including services for students with disabilities.

Since most of the district special education coordinators are grown from within the system, based on the CEC standards it appears the school system is doing a good job of preparing leaders from within the system. There are however, discrepancies and areas of differences between the CEC standards (i.e., Evaluation) and skill levels identified by the coordinators. These are clearly areas in which the school system should provide professional development to the coordinators. Special education leaders in the school system should have the same professional standards that are used in the national professional education organizations. This will allow for greater collaboration of efforts to meet the challenge of solving problems of practices that face American education today. There can be no doubt that the special education leader must be one who can create the vision and establish clearly defined goals for the programs and services

for individuals with disabilities. The school system can use information garnered from studies like this to place greater emphasis on leadership preparation, recruitment, and retention. It is at the intersection of the professional standards for special education and general education teachers, special education leaders and building level administrators that we must find more and effective ways to communicate best practices, improve collaborative practices, assist professionals with knowledge of technology that can be used to enhance student learning, and figure ways to disseminate information on research-based interventions. Student achievement can be improved when there is a laser-like focus on our collective efforts. The professional standards clearly help us focus on the key elements of what leaders should know and be able to do. The common knowledge and skill base can only be strengthened when we all share the expectations.

This study may be useful to CEC as they continuously improve their ideals and practices to support students with disabilities. The recent advancement of the CEC Advanced Role Content Standards through the extensive study conducted by Boscardin, McCarthy, and Delgado (2009) and the results of this study may prove helpful in shaping and strengthening the future roles and responsibilities of the district special education coordinator. It also has implications for how the school system provides guidance to school level administrators responsible for all student achievement, including those with disabilities. Furthermore, encouraging special education teachers and coordinators to engage in their professional educational organization such as CEC would greatly impact on their access to current trends and practices in teaching students with disabilities.



## Appendices

### Appendix A. An Overview of Relevant Literature

Study	Rationale/Purpose/Research Questions	Sample/ Participants	Dependent Variables
<b>Study #1 Layton, L.(2005)</b>	To examine the extent to which Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) in the UK report their leadership. How do SENCOs perceive their role as part of the senior leadership team? Are there additional professional development needs? How does the role influence school reform?	SENCOs from West Midlands who had postgraduate certificates from Univ of Birmingham. The sample represented Elementary and Secondary from 5 large LEAs. N = 27 Response rate = 25%	SENCO roles and responsibilities; patterns of workload; management and leadership
<b>Study#2 Thompson &amp; O'Brian (2007)</b>	To explore the experiences and perceptions of special education administrators; to gather information to inform the development and implementation of SPED post-masters degree certification program. Questions not addressed.	State approved special education directors in Illinois N = 67 Response rate = 60%	Directors rank and rating of experiences, professional development needs and factors for a new certification program
<b>Study#3 Szwed, C. (2007)</b>	To examine the context of SENCOs role management within a group of primary schools. Questions not addressed	Purposive sample from metropolitan LEAs N = 48 Response rate = 60%	SENCO status, roles, dedicated time for duties and senior management
<b>Study#4 Wigle &amp; Wilcox (2003)</b>	To investigate the competencies of special education directors on a set of 35 skills identified by CEC as important for professionals working in special ed as compared to special ed teachers and general education administrators	720 surveys sent to administrators, special education directors and teachers in 4 states N = 155 Response rate = 26%	Special education director competencies as compared to school principals and special ed teachers
<b>Study#5 Firestone &amp; Martinez (2007)</b>	To examine how leadership is distributed in districts. How do districts influence teaching practice? How do teacher leaders influence teaching practice? What is the relationship between teacher leaders and districts in educational change efforts?	8 teachers, principals and teacher leaders from 4 schools in 3 districts in collaboration with a university- based program to improve teaching math and science. N = 35	Teacher leaders and district influence on education change

<b>Study#6 Washburn- Moses (2005)</b>	To examine the daily work of high school LD teachers, their roles and responsibilities, positions held and effectiveness of their preparation program. Questions not addressed.	Public high school LD special education teachers from Michigan in 2003 N = 38 Response rate = 44.9%	Special education teacher skills and knowledge
<b>Study#7 Bays &amp; Crockett (2007)</b>	To generate a theory describing how instructional leadership for special education occurs in elementary schools. What practices were used in supervising specially designed instruction, what needs were addressed by these practices, and what conditions caused instructional leadership and supervision to be conducted as it was?	9 rural schools in 3 districts in southeastern US. Theoretical sampling used to identify participants N = 38	Principal's role in instructional leadership and supervision of special educators
<b>Study#8 Carlson et al (2002)</b>	To describe the quality of personnel serving students with disabilities and factors associated with workforce quality (SPeNSE). Questions not addressed	Two-phase sample design using stratified simple random sample of (1) national LEAs, IEUs and state schools and (2) special education personnel from the selected LEAs, IEUs, and state schools. Extant data used N = 8,419 Mean response rate = 72.3%	Preparation, credentials and work experience of special education teachers, service providers, and special education administrators.
<b>Study#9 Wigle &amp; Wilcox (1999)</b>	To investigate the competencies of general education administrators on the 35 CEC skills for those working in special education Questions not addressed	240 School Administrator 240 Special Education Directors 240 Special Education Teachers N = 155 Response rate = 26%	Competencies and special education knowledge and skills of general education admin
<b>Study#10 Billingsley et al (2004)</b>	To profile early career special education teachers' working conditions, induction support and career plans Who provides beginning teachers with suggestions for enhancing teaching? Are work place conditions significant to teachers' intent to stay in teaching? What types of inductions are provided.	Special education administrators and service providers Using data from Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE) N = 1,153 Response rate = 32%	Working conditions and early career supports for special education teachers
<b>Study #11 Boscardin et al., 2009</b>	To provide a broad overview of the literature and processes and procedures used to create and	Literature review of evidence-based practices, Q-sort, and survey.	Knowledge and skill statements

	validate an integrative set of national standards for special education administration.	N = 1124 from CASE & NASDSE	associated with effective performance of special education administrators
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Appendix B: Survey Instrument

**Special Education Coordinator, Special Education Teacher and  
Building Administrator Survey Instrument**

Please provide the following demographic information:

**Demographics:**

Gender: Drop down check

Male\_\_ Female\_\_

Race/Ethnicity: Drop down check

White\_\_ Black or African American\_\_ Hispanic\_\_  
American Indian or Alaskan Native\_\_ Asian\_\_  
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander\_\_

Age: \_\_

Highest Degree Earned: Drop down check

Bachelor of Arts\_\_ Masters\_\_ Doctorate\_\_  
Specify for each degree if General Education\_\_ or Special Education\_\_

Area(s) of School System Certification: Check all that apply (drop down check)

General Education\_\_ Special Education\_\_ Administrator\_\_  
Elementary\_\_ Secondary\_\_  
Emotionally Impaired\_\_ Learning Impaired Mild Moderate\_\_  
Speech-Language Pathology\_\_ Learning Impaired Moderate  
Severe\_\_  
Hearing Impaired\_\_ Preschool Services for Children with Disabilities\_\_  
Vision Impaired

Number of Students with Disabilities Served: \_\_

Number of schools served: \_\_

Number of Years of Experience in Special Education: \_\_

Number of Years of Experience in Special Education with the School System: \_\_

Please check your current job position: Drop down check

District special education coordinator\_\_

Special education teacher\_\_

Building administrator\_\_

Special Education Coordinators please complete Parts 1 and 2.

Special Education Teacher and Building Administrators please complete Part 2.

**Part 1:**

Please **rate** the following in terms of your perceived level of knowledge and skills.

1 = “Highly knowledgeable and skilled”- I have mastered the knowledge and skill and can effectively apply it across multiple settings and situations.

2 = “Knowledgeable and skilled” – I can apply the knowledge or skill in my day-to-day job performance in most settings, but not as easily or accurately as someone who has mastered the knowledge or skill.

3 = “Somewhat knowledgeable and skilled” – I have developed the knowledge or skill but cannot apply it consistently across a variety of settings in my day-to-day job performance.

4 = “Limited knowledge and skill” – I have some awareness and understanding of the knowledge and skill but cannot apply with any degree of reliability.

5 = “No knowledge or skill” – I have no awareness or understanding of the knowledge and skill.

**Standard 1: Leadership and Policy**

**Knowledge**

1. Models, theories, and philosophies that provide the foundation for the administration of programs and services for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
  - highly knowledgeable and skilled
  - knowledgeable and skilled
  - somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
  - limited knowledge and skill
  - no knowledge or skill
  
2. Historical and social significance of the laws, regulations, and policies as they apply to the administration of programs and the provision of services for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
  - highly knowledgeable and skilled
  - knowledgeable and skilled
  - somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
  - limited knowledge and skill
  - no knowledge or skill
  
3. Local, district, and school system fiscal policies and funding mechanisms in education, military, and related services agencies as they apply to the provision of services for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
  - highly knowledgeable and skilled



- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

**Skill**

1. Interprets and applies current school system instructions, regulations, and policies as they apply to the administration of services to individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

2. Applies leadership, organization, and systems change theory to the provision of services for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

3. Develops a budget in accordance with local, district, and school system policies in education, military, and related services agencies for the provision of services for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

4. Engages in recruitment, hiring, and retention practices that comply with local, district, and school system policies as they apply to personnel serving individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

5. Communicates a personal inclusive vision and mission for meeting the needs of individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

**Standard 2: Program Development and Organization**

**Knowledge**

1. Programs and services within the general curriculum to achieve positive school outcomes for individuals with exceptional learning needs.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

2. Programs and strategies that promote positive school engagement for individuals with exceptional learning needs.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

3. Instruction and services needed to support access to the general curriculum for individuals with exceptional learning needs.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

4. Administrative plans that supports the use of instructional and assistive technologies.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill

- no knowledge or skill

**Skill**

1. Develops and implements a flexible continuum of services based on effective practices for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

2. Develops and implements programs and services that contribute to the prevention of unnecessary referrals.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

**Standard 3: Research and Inquiry**

**Knowledge**

1. Research-based administrative practices that supports individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

**Skill**

1. Engages in data-based decision-making for the administration of educational programs and services that supports exceptional students and their families.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

2. Develops data-based educational expectations and evidence-based programs that account for the impact of diversity on individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

**Standard 4: Evaluation**

**Knowledge**

1. Models, theories, and practices used to evaluate educational programs and personnel serving individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

**Skill**

1. Advocates for and implements procedures for the participation of individuals with exceptional learning needs in accountability systems.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

2. Develops and implements ongoing evaluations of education programs and personnel.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

3. Provides ongoing supervision of personnel working with individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled

- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
  - limited knowledge and skill
  - no knowledge or skill
4. Designs and implements evaluation procedures that improve instructional content and practices.
- highly knowledgeable and skilled
  - knowledgeable and skilled
  - somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
  - limited knowledge and skill
  - no knowledge or skill

**Standard 5: Professional Development and Ethical Practice**

**Knowledge**

1. Ethical theories and practices as they apply to the administration of programs and services with individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
- highly knowledgeable and skilled
  - knowledgeable and skilled
  - somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
  - limited knowledge and skill
  - no knowledge or skill
2. Adult learning theories and models as they apply to professional development and supervision.
- highly knowledgeable and skilled
  - knowledgeable and skilled
  - somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
  - limited knowledge and skill
  - no knowledge or skill
3. Professional development theories and practices that improve instruction and instructional content for students with exceptional learning needs.
- highly knowledgeable and skilled
  - knowledgeable and skilled
  - somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
  - limited knowledge and skill
  - no knowledge or skill
4. Impact of diversity on educational programming expectations for individuals with exceptional learning needs.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

**Skill**

1. Communicates and demonstrates a high standard of ethical administrative practices when working with staff serving individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

2. Develops and implements professional development activities and programs that improve instructional practices and lead to improved outcomes for students with exceptional learning needs and their families.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

3. Joins and participates in local, state and national professional administrative organizations to guide administrative practices when working with individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

**Standard 6: Collaboration**

**Knowledge**

1. Collaborative theories and practices that support the administration of programs and services for with individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.

- highly knowledgeable and skilled
- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled

- limited knowledge and skill
  - no knowledge or skill
2. Administrative theories and models that facilitate communication among all stakeholders.
    - highly knowledgeable and skilled
    - knowledgeable and skilled
    - somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
    - limited knowledge and skill
    - no knowledge or skill
  3. Importance and relevance of advocacy at the local, district, and school system level for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
    - highly knowledgeable and skilled
    - knowledgeable and skilled
    - somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
    - limited knowledge and skill
    - no knowledge or skill

**Skill**

1. Utilizes collaborative approaches for involving all stakeholders in educational planning, implementation, and evaluation.
  - highly knowledgeable and skilled
  - knowledgeable and skilled
  - somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
  - limited knowledge and skill
  - no knowledge or skill
2. Strengthens the role of parent and advocacy organizations as they support individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
  - highly knowledgeable and skilled
  - knowledgeable and skilled
  - somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
  - limited knowledge and skill
  - no knowledge or skill
3. Develops and implements intra- and interagency agreements that create programs with shared responsibility for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
  - highly knowledgeable and skilled

- knowledgeable and skilled
  - somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
  - limited knowledge and skill
  - no knowledge or skill
4. Facilitates transition plans for individuals with exceptional learning needs across the educational continuum and other programs from birth/three through adulthood.
- highly knowledgeable and skilled
  - knowledgeable and skilled
  - somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
  - limited knowledge and skill
  - no knowledge or skill
5. Implements collaborative administrative procedures and strategies to facilitate communication among all stakeholders.
- highly knowledgeable and skilled
  - knowledgeable and skilled
  - somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
  - limited knowledge and skill
  - no knowledge or skill
6. Engages in leadership practices that support shared decision making.
- highly knowledgeable and skilled
  - knowledgeable and skilled
  - somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
  - limited knowledge and skill
  - no knowledge or skill
7. Demonstrates the skills necessary to provide ongoing communication, education, and support for families of individuals with exceptional learning needs.
- highly knowledgeable and skilled
  - knowledgeable and skilled
  - somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
  - limited knowledge and skill
  - no knowledge or skill
8. Consults and collaborates in administrative and instructional decisions at the school and district levels.
- highly knowledgeable and skilled



- knowledgeable and skilled
- somewhat knowledgeable and skilled
- limited knowledge and skill
- no knowledge or skill

Special education coordinators, special education teachers, and building administrators please complete Part 2.

**Part 2**

Using the 1 to 5 scale below, please rank the knowledge and skills for each standard as to how “essential” the knowledge or skill is to your day-to-day job performance. “Day-to-day job performance” means what you do to in your job that supports students with disabilities.

1 = “Highly essential” to my day-to-day job performance – I am required to use this to support my program for students with disabilities

2 = “Essential” to my day-to-day job performance – I use this with high frequency to support my program for students with disabilities

3 = “Somewhat essential” to my day-to-day job performance - I value this and use it with regular frequency to support my program for students with disabilities

4 = “Limited or inconsistently essential” to my day-to-day job performance – I don’t value this and use it very infrequently to support my program for students with disabilities

5 = “Not essential” to my day-to-day job performance – This is not relevant nor necessary to support my program for students with disabilities

**Standard 1: Leadership and Policy**

**Knowledge**

1. Models, theories, and philosophies that provide the foundation for the administration of programs and services for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.

- highly essential
- essential
- somewhat essential
- limited or inconsistently essential
- not essential

2. Historical and social significance of the laws, regulations, and policies as they apply to the administration of programs and the provision of services for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.

- highly essential
- essential
- somewhat essential
- limited or inconsistently essential

- not essential
- 3. Local, district, and school system fiscal policies and funding mechanisms in education, military, and related services agencies as they apply to the provision of services for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
  - highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential

**Skill**

1. Interprets and applies current school system instructions, regulations, and policies as they apply to the administration of services to individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
  - highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
2. Applies leadership, organization, and systems change theory to the provision of services for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
  - highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
3. Develops a budget in accordance with local, district, and school system policies in education, military, and related services agencies for the provision of services for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
  - highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential

4. Engages in recruitment, hiring, and retention practices that comply with local, district, and school system policies as they apply to personnel serving individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
  - highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
  
5. Communicates a personal inclusive vision and mission for meeting the needs of individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
  - highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential

**Standard 2: Program Development and Organization**  
**Knowledge**

1. Programs and services within the general curriculum to achieve positive school outcomes for individuals with exceptional learning needs.
  - highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
  
2. Programs and strategies that promote positive school engagement for individuals with exceptional learning needs.
  - highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
  
3. Instruction and services needed to support access to the general curriculum for individuals with exceptional learning needs.
  - highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential

- limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
4. Administrative plans that supports the use of instructional and assistive technologies.
- highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential

**Skill**

1. Develops and implements a flexible continuum of services based on effective practices for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
- highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
2. Develops and implements programs and services that contribute to the prevention of unnecessary referrals.
- highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential

**Standard 3: Research and Inquiry**

**Knowledge**

1. Research-based administrative practices that supports individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
- highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential

**Skill**

1. Engages in data-based decision-making for the administration of educational programs and services that supports exceptional students and their families.
  - highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
  
2. Develops data-based educational expectations and evidence-based programs that account for the impact of diversity on individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
  - highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential

**Standard 4: Evaluation**

**Knowledge**

1. Models, theories, and practices used to evaluate educational programs and personnel serving individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
  - highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential

**Skill**

1. Advocates for and implements procedures for the participation of individuals with exceptional learning needs in accountability systems.
  - highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
  
2. Develops and implements ongoing evaluations of education programs and personnel.
  - highly essential

- essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
3. Provides ongoing supervision of personnel working with individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
- highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
4. Designs and implements evaluation procedures that improve instructional content and practices.
- highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential

**Standard 5: Professional Development and Ethical Practice**

**Knowledge**

1. Ethical theories and practices as they apply to the administration of programs and services with individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
- highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
2. Adult learning theories and models as they apply to professional development and supervision.
- highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
3. Professional development theories and practices that improve instruction and instructional content for students with exceptional learning needs.

- highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
4. Impact of diversity on educational programming expectations for individuals with exceptional learning needs.
- highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential

**Skill**

1. Communicates and demonstrates a high standard of ethical administrative practices when working with staff serving individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
- highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
2. Develops and implements professional development activities and programs that improve instructional practices and lead to improved outcomes for students with exceptional learning needs and their families.
- highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
3. Joins and participates in local, state and national professional administrative organizations to guide administrative practices when working with individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
- highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential

## **Standard 6: Collaboration**

### **Knowledge**

1. Collaborative theories and practices that support the administration of programs and services for with individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
  - highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
  
2. Administrative theories and models that facilitate communication among all stakeholders.
  - highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
  
3. Importance and relevance of advocacy at the local, district, and school system level for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
  - highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential

### **Skill**

1. Utilizes collaborative approaches for involving all stakeholders in educational planning, implementation, and evaluation.
  - highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
  
2. Strengthens the role of parent and advocacy organizations as they support individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.



- highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
3. Develops and implements intra- and interagency agreements that create programs with shared responsibility for individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families.
- highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
4. Facilitates transition plans for individuals with exceptional learning needs across the educational continuum and other programs from birth/three through adulthood.
- highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
5. Implements collaborative administrative procedures and strategies to facilitate communication among all stakeholders.
- highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
6. Engages in leadership practices that support shared decision making.
- highly essential
  - essential
  - somewhat essential
  - limited or inconsistently essential
  - not essential
7. Demonstrates the skills necessary to provide ongoing communication, education, and support for families of individuals with exceptional learning needs.

- highly essential
- essential
- somewhat essential
- limited or inconsistently essential
- not essential

8. Consults and collaborates in administrative and instructional decisions at the school and district levels.

- highly essential
- essential
- somewhat essential
- limited or inconsistently essential
- not essential

Please list any additional areas of knowledge and skill that you see as essential to the day-to-day job performance of the district special education coordinator.

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This concludes the survey.

**CONSENT FORM – Special Education Coordinators**

<p><b>Project Title</b></p>	<p>Leadership Knowledge and Skills of the District Special Education Coordinators: A Self-Report Aligned with CEC Professional Standards</p>
<p><b>Why is this research being done?</b></p>	<p>This research project is being conducted by Sue Gurley under the supervision of Dr. Philip Burke at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you can provide valuable information regarding the knowledge and skills required to provide a program for students with disabilities. The purpose of this research project is to identify how the school system compares to the national standards set forth by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). Specifically, you will be asked to rank the knowledge and skills set forth by CEC and help to determine your self-reported level of knowledge and skill on the items and whether or not the knowledge and skills are essential to your day-to-day job performance in support of programs for students with disabilities.</p>
<p><b>What will I be asked to do?</b></p>	<p>You will be given a website to go to and respond to a 40-item web-based survey. The company that does the on-line survey will keep track of your response to ensure all participants have indicated their desire to do so. You can complete the survey at your desk or at home, anywhere you have internet access. It will take you approximately 30 minutes to complete the survey. First you will be asked to provide demographic information. Then you will be asked to self report your knowledge and skills by ranking yourself on the knowledge and skills and then you will be asked to rank how essential each one is to your day-to-day job performance in support of programs for students with disabilities. At the end of the survey you will be asked to identify any additional knowledge or skills you believe are essential to the job if you do not believe the survey addressed it. The results of the survey will help in determining future professional development needs of our system as well as the knowledge and skills deemed</p>

	necessary for the district special education coordinator.
<b>What about confidentiality?</b>	We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, the data will be stored on a secure server. At the completion of the data collection all data will be stored in locked filing cabinets and storage areas, using identification codes only on data forms, and using password-protected computer files. Your response will be (1) coded for identifiable information and your name will not be included on the surveys and other collected data, (2) through the use of an identification key, only the researcher will be able to link your survey to your identity; and (3) only the researcher will have access to the identification key. This is necessary only to track those who do not respond.

<b>Project Title</b>	Leadership Knowledge and Skills of the District Special Education Coordinators: A Self-Report Aligned with CEC Professional Standards
<b>What are the risks of this research?</b>	There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project.
<b>What are the benefits of this research?</b>	This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about the key leadership knowledge and skills required for district special education coordinators. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of programs for students with disabilities.
<b>Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?</b>	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized. You will be asked to simply email the researcher and tell them you no longer wish to participate.
<b>What if I have questions?</b>	<p>This research is being conducted by Sue Gurley under the supervision of Dr. Philip J. Burke at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Sue Gurley at: <a href="mailto:sue.gurley@eu.dodea.edu">sue.gurley@eu.dodea.edu</a></p> <p>If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related inquiry, please contact: <b>Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) <a href="mailto:irb@umd.edu">irb@umd.edu</a>; (telephone) 301-405-0678</b></p> <p>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</p>
<b>Statement of Age of Subject and Consent</b>	<p><i>By checking the "I agree" button, you are indicating that:</i></p> <p><i>you are at least 18 years of age;</i></p> <p><i>the research has been explained to you;</i></p>

	<i>your questions have been fully answered; and you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.</i>	
<b>Agreement with Participation</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>I Agree and consent to participate</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>I do not wish to participate</b>
	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>I am willing to participate in a follow-up email to help determine if this survey had merit</b>	DATE

**CONSENT FORM – Special Education Teachers/Building Administrators**

<b>Project Title</b>	Leadership Knowledge and Skills of the District Special Education Coordinators: A Self-Report Aligned with CEC Professional Standards
<b>Why is this research being done?</b>	This research project is being conducted by Sue Gurley under the supervision of Dr. Philip Burke at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you can provide valuable information regarding the knowledge and skills required to provide a program for students with disabilities. The purpose of this research project is to identify how the school system compares to the national standards set forth by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). Specifically, you will be asked to rank the knowledge and skills set forth by CEC and help to determine whether or not the knowledge and skills are essential to your day-to-day job performance in support of programs for students with disabilities.
<b>What will I be asked to do?</b>	You will be given a website to go to and respond to a 40-item web-based survey. The company that does the on-line survey will keep track of your response to ensure all participants have indicated their desire to do so. You can complete the survey at your desk or at home, anywhere you have internet access. It will take you approximately 30 minutes to complete the survey. First you will be asked to provide demographic information. Then you will be asked to rank the knowledge and skills as to how essential each one is to your day-to-day job performance in support of

	<p>programs for students with disabilities. At the end of the survey you will be asked to identify any additional knowledge or skills you believe are essential to the job if you do not believe the survey addressed it. The results of the survey will help in determining future professional development needs of our system as well as the knowledge and skills deemed necessary for the district special education coordinators.</p>
<p><b>What about confidentiality?</b></p>	<p>We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, the data will be stored on a secure server. At the completion of the data collection all data will be stored in locked filing cabinets and storage areas, using identification codes only on data forms, and using password-protected computer files. Your response will be (1) coded for identifiable information and your name will not be included on the surveys and other collected data, (2) through the use of an identification key, only the researcher will be able to link your survey to your identity; and (3) only the researcher will have access to the identification key. This is necessary only to track those who do not respond.</p>

<b>Project Title</b>	Leadership Knowledge and Skills of the District Special Education Coordinators: A Self-Report Aligned with CEC Professional Standards
<b>What are the risks of this research?</b>	There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project.
<b>What are the benefits of this research?</b>	This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about the key leadership knowledge and skills required for district special education coordinators. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of programs for students with disabilities.
<b>Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?</b>	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized. You will be asked to simply email the researcher and tell them you no longer wish to participate.
<b>What if I have questions?</b>	<p>This research is being conducted by Sue Gurley under the supervision of Dr. Philip J. Burke at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Sue Gurley at: <a href="mailto:sue.gurley@eu.dodea.edu">sue.gurley@eu.dodea.edu</a></p> <p>If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related inquiry, please contact: <b>Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) <a href="mailto:irb@umd.edu">irb@umd.edu</a>; (telephone) 301-405-0678</b></p> <p>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</p>
<b>Statement of Age of Subject and Consent</b>	<p><i>By checking the "I agree" button, you are indicating that:</i></p> <p><i>you are at least 18 years of age;</i></p> <p><i>the research has been explained to you;</i></p>



	<i>your questions have been fully answered; and you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.</i>	
<b>Agreement with Participation</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>I Agree and consent to participate</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>I do not wish to participate</b>
	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>I am willing to participate in a follow-up email to help determine if this survey had merit</b>	DATE

*Appendix D: Notification Letters*

Pre-notice Letter

Dear Case Study Committee (CSC) Administrator and Special Education Teacher,  
Dear Special Education Coordinator,

In three days you will be receiving a special email asking you to participate in an on-line web-based survey. You will be given a website to go to in order to respond to the survey. The company that does the on-line survey will keep track of your response to ensure that you have indicated you wish to complete the survey. You can complete the survey at your desk or at home, anywhere you have internet access. It will take you approximately 20 minutes to complete the survey. If you get interrupted you can stop at any time and resume the survey where you left off.

First you will be asked to provide demographic information. Then you will be asked to rank the knowledge and skills indicating how essential each one is to your day-to-day job performance in support of programs for students with disabilities. At the end of the survey you will be asked to identify any additional knowledge or skills you believe are essential to the job if you do not believe the survey addressed it.

The results of the survey will identify common knowledge and skills deemed necessary for the district special education coordinator and help in determining future professional development needs of special education coordinators. More importantly the data from this research will serve to validate the day-to-day work that you do in support of students with disabilities.

Sue Gurley  
Student Investigator  
University of Maryland, College Park

## Cover Letter

Dear Special Education Coordinator,

The big day is here. Please take a few minutes to complete this on-line survey. It will take you approximately 30 minutes to complete. There are a few demographic items but the rest are just point and click responses. At the end you will be asked for a few additional comments.

The purpose of this study is to examine the level of the leadership knowledge and skills of the district special education coordinators (identified by self-report) on the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) professional standards. You will also rank how essential the knowledge and skills are to your day-to-day performance on the job supporting students with disabilities. The definitions of “how knowledgeable and skilled” you rate yourself and how “essential” the knowledge and skills are to your day-to-day job performance are provided on the survey itself.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized. You will be asked to simply email me that you no longer wish to participate.

This research is being conducted by me under the supervision of Dr. Philip J. Burke at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact me at: [sue.gurley@eu.dodea.edu](mailto:sue.gurley@eu.dodea.edu)

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related inquiry, please contact: **Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) [irb@umd.edu](mailto:irb@umd.edu); (telephone) 301-405-0678**

This research has been approved by the school system and reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

✓ I agree

Dear CSC Administrator and Special Education Teacher

The big day is here. Please take a few minutes to take this on-line survey. It will take you approximately 20 minutes to complete. There are a few demographic items but the rest are just point and click responses. At the end you will be asked for a few additional comments. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the school system special education teachers and building level administrators rank the leadership knowledge and skills as essential to their day-to-day needs on the job in support of students with disabilities. This study will also explore if there is a relationship among teachers, administrators and special education coordinators on what they identify as essential to their day-to-day job performance.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized. You will be asked to simply email me that you no longer wish to participate.

This research is being conducted by me under the supervision of Dr. Philip J. Burke at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact me at: [sue.gurley@eu.dodea.edu](mailto:sue.gurley@eu.dodea.edu)

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related inquiry, please contact: **Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) [irb@umd.edu](mailto:irb@umd.edu); (telephone) 301-405-0678**

This research has been approved by the school system and reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

✓ I agree

**Reminder Message – follows cover letter 10 days**

Dear Special Education Coordinator  
Dear CSC Administrator and Special Education Teacher

Just in case you accidentally deleted the previous message I sent or lost the URL to complete the Knowledge and Skills Survey this note serves as a reminder and an opportunity to take just a few minutes to take this critical survey.

Please go to the URL located at XXXXXXXXXXXX and spend just 20-30 minutes to provide feedback on the knowledge and skills that are critical to providing services to students with disabilities.

Your participation is appreciated.

Sue Gurley  
Student Investigator  
University of Maryland, College Park

**Follow-up Message 3 Days before Closing**

Dear Special Education Coordinator,  
Dear CSC Administrator and Special Education Teacher,

I noticed that you have not yet completed the Knowledge and Skills Survey I sent you three weeks ago. This is just a reminder that there are only 3 days left before the URL will be closed and you will no longer have access to the survey.

Please take a few minutes now to log onto the web and complete the survey. Your participation is valued and appreciated. Your input will provide insight into services and what is essential to programs for students with disabilities.

Thank you,

Sue Gurley  
Student Investigator  
University of Maryland, College Park

*Appendix E: Post Hoc Questions*

Dear Participant,

In the Knowledge and Skills Survey you completed you agreed to participate in post hoc analysis of the relevance of the survey. In order to determine social validity for this research please respond to the following questions regarding the research on the CEC knowledge and skills. Send the response via email to [sue.gurley@eu.dodea.edu](mailto:sue.gurley@eu.dodea.edu)

1. Were the CEC standards meaningful and representative of the day-to-day activities for programs serving students with disabilities?
2. Were there missing standards or redundant standards?
3. Can or should these standards be used to select future coordinators to work in the the system school districts?
4. Do these standards promote the skills necessary for school reform and exemplary programs for students with disabilities?
5. How can the information gathered in this research provide added value to enhance professional development or recruitment and retention of highly qualified personnel?

Thank you again for participating in this research.

Sue Gurley  
Student Investigator  
University of Maryland, College Park

*Appendix F: IRB and school system Approval*



Gurley IRB approval docment.pdf

## *Appendix G: Open-Ended Response Theme Definitions*

1. Compliance and Monitoring – The school system is responsible for ensuring each child with a disability is afforded a free and appropriate public education. The school system is held responsible for the implementation of the system instructions and regulations governing special education which is the substantive requirement of IDEA. To manage compliance the school system has to establish and maintain procedural safeguards for services through regular and frequent monitoring of the program standards.
2. Professional Development = The National Staff Development Council defines PD as — The term “professional development” means a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement --
3. Communication/Advocacy – Actively engaged in communicating information to help parents, teachers and staff empower themselves to effectively advocate for children with disabilities and to monitor and improve the quality of the programs developed for children and youth with disabilities
4. Best Practices – Instruction – According to Spaulding,2008,(Teaching Exceptional Children Vol 5, Issue 3) Determining which practices and interventions are most effective and efficient for ensuring optimal student achievement is a fundamental concern of special education teachers in this era of accountability.
5. Community Resources – Work with Other Agencies - Linking community resources with an agreed upon vision, organizational goals, strategies, or expected outcomes for youth with disabilities by focusing on what is already present in the community and building on the strengths within a community. Fostering relationships and developing partnerships with a group of equals with a common interest working together over a sustained period of time to accomplish common goals. The community may have to work across programmatic and geographic boundaries
6. Technology – Any aspect of using technology to provide student management support such as the school system adopted program Excent or assistive technology used to support student achievement and integration with the curriculum
7. Problem Solving/Mediation/Resolution = any efforts used to resolve issues and conflicts among staff students and parents related to the provision of services to students with disabilities
8. Funding and Resources – any issues pertaining to the funding and resourcing of special education programs and students with disabilities
9. Roles and Responsibilities= the professional elements and standards required of teachers, administrators, and special education coordinators related to the provision of services for students with disabilities
10. All Others – when a comment does not match the definition of one of the other categories it could fall into the “all others” comment category.



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