

Special Education Teacher Resiliency: What Keeps Teachers in the Field?

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ABSTRACT

Erica Lynn Vernold: Special Education Teacher Resiliency: What Keeps Teachers in the Field?

(Under the direction of Dr. William Malloy)

The purpose of this research was to relate special educators' degrees of satisfaction with resiliency building factors found in schools, to special education teacher retention. This study attempted to answer three research questions: (1) Does a relationship exist between special educators' degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in their schools and the number of years that they stay in their current teaching positions; (2) Do significant differences exist between various groups (school level, classroom type, primary disability taught, certification held) of special educators, in terms of their degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in their schools; and (3) Do significant differences exist among various groups (school level, classroom type, primary disability taught, certification held) of special educators in terms of the number of years that they remain in their current teaching positions?

Data was collected using one survey instrument, the *National Association of Secondary Principals' Teacher Satisfaction Survey* and a series of open ended questions. Participants in this study were thirty eight special education teachers in one North Carolina school district. This study analyzed data through a number of statistical tests to determine if in fact, a relationship existed between special educators' degrees of satisfaction with resiliency building factors found in schools and special education teacher retention.

This study gathered data to suggest that despite finding that there was no significant relationship between special educators' satisfaction with resiliency building factors and the number of years that they remain in their current teaching positions, a relationship may still be found between the special educators' satisfaction with resiliency building factors and special education teacher retention. Study data indicate that the majority of special education teachers who planned on returning to their positions for the following year had high satisfaction levels with resiliency building factors, whereas those teachers who were planning on leaving their positions had low satisfaction levels. This study also found that caring/support, opportunities for meaningful participation and high expectations in the work environment are all important factors for building special education teacher resiliency and promoting retention.

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DEDICATION

To my late father, Richard Vernold,
“Daddy, I did it!”

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Chapter I

Introduction

The shrinking teacher supply and increased demand for “highly-qualified” teachers has presented several challenges, the first being that school districts with teacher shortages cannot meet the “highly-qualified” teacher requirements set forth by *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), forcing such schools to hire teachers to teach classes for which they are not qualified. The second challenge is an increased competition for certified teachers, which has resulted in many teachers’ moving from urban school districts to suburban areas (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004). The last challenge is an overall decrease in academic stability and quality in school instruction for critical shortage areas, such as special education (Singh & Billingsley, 1996).

Filling special education positions is becoming particularly difficult because school districts must find teachers who are not only competent to teach but also willing to constantly overcome the added stress associated with teaching in special education positions. Special educators are responsible for a host of other responsibilities that general education teachers are not. For example, special education teachers must create and implement Individual Education Plans (IEP’s), facilitate IEP meetings, and teach general educators how to include students with disabilities into the general education classroom in addition to all of their regular responsibilities as a teacher.

In light of this stress, many teachers are not specializing in special education or are leaving the field after a short time. Because special education students cannot go without teachers, the necessity for school districts to create cultures that not only attract special educators but also enable such educators to be resilient is becoming increasingly important.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to relate special educators' degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors found in schools to the retention of special education teachers. *Resiliency*, as defined in this study, is the ability to bounce back, to cope, to adapt, and to develop social competence despite adversity. *Resiliency-building factors*, as defined in this study, are those factors that provide teachers with meaningful participation, high expectations, and caring/support in the work environment.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following three research questions:

- 1) Does a relationship exist between special educators' degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in their schools and the number of years that they stay in their current teaching positions?
- 2) Do significant differences exist between various groups (school level, classroom type, primary disability taught, certification held) of special educators, in terms of their degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in their schools?
- 3) Do significant differences exist among various groups (school level, classroom type, primary disability taught, certification held) of special

educators in terms of the number of years that they remain in their current teaching positions?

Previous Research

The federal government and the state of North Carolina have begun to evaluate their teacher supply and demand with greater urgency (Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004; Charlotte Advocates for Education [CSE], 2004; Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Division of Human Resource Management, 2004). Previous studies conducted by NCES (1997), CAE (2004), and the Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Division of Human Resource Management (2004, 2006) have found that a major contributor to the teacher shortage is teacher turnover, the loss of teachers in a school, district, and/or state, during a specified time period.

The National Center for Education Statistics: The Condition of Education Report (1997) indicates that 50% of new teachers leave the teaching profession after only five years of service. According to the *2004 National Center for Education Statistics Teacher Attrition and Mobility Teacher Follow-up Survey*, between the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 school years, approximately 15% of public educators surveyed either left the school at which they were currently working or left the teaching profession altogether (Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004). The *2007 National Center for Education Statistics Teacher Attrition and Mobility Teacher Follow-up Survey*, indicated that approximately 16% of public educators surveyed either left the school at which they were currently working or left the teaching profession altogether (Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2007). Of the teachers who left the teaching profession as a whole, 25% rated pursuing a position other than that of a K-12

teacher as most influential factor in their decision to leave the field (Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2007).

Special educators at the national, state, and district levels are leaving the field on average after only three years (Boe, Cook, Bobbit, & Terhanian, 1998; Zabel & Zabel, 2001). At the national and state levels, job satisfaction, working conditions, and dissatisfaction with school leadership have been consistently identified as contributing to turnover among special education teachers (Singh & Billingsley, 1996; Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004; Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2004).

Deficiencies in the Research

Although numerous research studies have focused on special educators who have exited the field, little research has focused on those special education teachers who remain. What internal or external factors allow them to persevere despite the stress and adversity that they face? More specifically, what makes these special education teachers resilient? What allows them to bounce back, to cope, to adapt, and to develop social competence despite adversity (Gordon, 1995; Linville, 1987; Warner & Smith, 1982)?

Resiliency research to date has focused primarily on children, and what little research that has focused on teachers has been geared toward general educators (Malloy, 2005; Roman-Oertwig, 2004). Therefore, a large gap exists between teacher retention research and special education teacher resiliency research. To completely understand the factors involved in retaining special educators, it is also important to explore the resiliency of those teachers who choose to remain in the field.

Professional Significance

This study attempted to build upon Roman-Oertwig's research (2004) on teacher resiliency and job satisfaction and to refine its scope to specifically investigate special educators and their degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in their schools. Not only does this study contribute to the body of research on the topic of resiliency, but it also has produced data that can be used to address the special education teacher shortage. Given that much time and money is spent attracting and training new teachers, understanding the factors behind why special educators stay in the field may guide school and district leaders in developing and maintaining effective teacher retention programs.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. One such limitation is that it was conducted in only one school district. Therefore, the findings from this study may not be applicable to teachers in other districts.

Another limitation is that the study included only educators in the school district who were classified as special educators. The findings, therefore, are not applicable to general education teachers in the same district.

The study is also limited by the very nature of survey studies. In survey studies, respondents cannot request clarification of the survey questions. Thus, possible response confusion may occur.

The study may have also been limited by the fact that the researcher was a school administrator in the school district in which the research was conducted in. The possibility of influence may have existed because the researcher had professional relationships with several of the potential respondents due to her past and current position in the school district. Due to

this, respondents may not have answered according to how they actually felt but rather according to how they believed the researcher wanted them to answer. The researcher's position in the school district may have also affected the response rate. Teachers may have chosen not to participate in the research because of the researcher's role in the school district.

The final limitation of this study stems from how the sample was selected. The sample for the study was determined with a self-selected sampling, meaning that the participants of this study were selected because they were willing to participate. Since the study's design allowed the participants to choose whether or not to participate in the study, the extent to which this sample represents the traits or behaviors of the general population cannot fully be known. Sampling voluntary participants as opposed to random sampling the general population has historically introduced voluntary response bias because often only the people who care strongly enough about the subject one way or another tend to participate (Dorofeev & Grant, 2006).

Definitions of Terms

To eliminate any confusion, key terms used throughout this study are defined as follows:

Inclusion- special education services provided to students within a general education classroom where they are fully included.

Individual Education Plans (IEP's): legal documents that guide the instruction and services provided to students with disabilities in school settings.

High-Qualified Teacher: a teacher with certification for the subject in which he/she teaches and meets the requirements for highly qualified under NCLB.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): a federally mandated law that is designed to close the achievement gap between different groups of children and to promote accountability in schools.

Resiliency: the ability to bounce back, cope, adapt, and develop social competence despite adversity.

Resiliency-Building Factors: factors that provide teachers with meaningful participation (for example, opportunities for participation in decision making and leadership), high expectations (for example, the communication of quality standards) and caring/support (for example, the recognition for a job well done) in the work environment.

Resource: remedial special education services provided to special education students outside of their normal classroom.

Retention: maintenance of teachers in a school, district, state, etc. during a specified time period (teachers who stay).

Self-contained Class: a classroom that provides instruction only to students with disabilities.

Special Education/ Exceptional Children (EC) Teacher: a teacher whose primary responsibility is to provide instruction to students with disabilities.

Turnover/ Attrition: loss of teachers in a school, district, state etc. during a specified time period (teachers who leave).

Chapter II

Literature Review

Since the 2005- 2006 school year, federal legislation, as outlined in the *No Child Left Behind Act*, has required that a “highly-qualified” teacher be in every classroom. Therefore, many states have begun to evaluate their teaching supply with greater urgency, especially in critical teaching shortage areas, and they have also increased their interest in teacher retention.

Historically, research on the topic of teacher retention has been divided into three main categories. The first category is focused on collecting data to determine how many teachers are leaving the profession. The second category is focused on determining the reasons why teachers leave the profession. The last category and the least-researched category by far, is focused on what factors help teachers to be resilient and to remain in the teaching profession.

The concept of resiliency, as a whole, is a fairly new area of research. The majority of research on the topic focuses primarily on the resiliency of children. To date, very little research has investigated adult resiliency, and even less has investigated teacher resiliency. In light of this shortage of research, the following literature review is divided into four key parts: (1) a review of overall and special education teacher turnover rates and reasons for leaving, (2) current teacher retention initiatives, (3) resiliency, as it applies to teachers, and (4) a discussion of the conceptual model chosen to frame this study.

To better understand the reasons behind the teacher shortage, the issue will first be examined from the national and state levels in regards to the total teaching population. Subsequently, the shortage and reasons behind it will be examined specifically in regards to the special education teaching population.

Overall National Teacher Turnover Rates

Nationally, the gap is widening between the supply and demand for “highly-qualified” teachers (Neito, 2003). It is estimated that between the years 2000 and 2010, 2 million public school teachers will be needed to serve the ever-growing numbers of US students (Olson, 2000). However, *The National Center for Education Statistics* (1997) found in its report *The Condition of Education* that 22% of new teachers leave the teaching profession after only three years of teaching and that 50% leave after only five years.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2007), in its 2004- 2005 Teacher Attrition and Mobility Teacher Follow-up Survey, found that 8% of the public school teachers who taught during the 2003-2004 school year moved to a different school and that 8% left the profession altogether (Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2007). According to data collected by the NCES (2004) in its Teacher Attrition and Mobility Teacher Follow-up Survey, between the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 school years, approximately 15% of the public educators surveyed either left the school at which they were currently working (8%) or left the teaching profession altogether (7%) (Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004). The 2004 report indicated that those teachers who were fifty years old or older and that those who were thirty years old or younger were most likely to leave the teaching profession (Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004).

Reasons Cited for Overall National Teacher Turnover

Of the teachers who left the profession, 29% left to retire, and 20% left to pursue other careers, with the remaining 51% leaving for a variety of other reasons (Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004). The NCES 2004 report indicated that, of the teachers who moved to other schools, 38% cited dissatisfaction with support from administrators, and 32% cited dissatisfaction with workplace conditions as the reasons for moving (Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004). The 2004 study also indicated that teachers who left their schools to teach elsewhere were more critical of the leadership within the school than those who stayed and those who left the teaching profession altogether (Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004). According to the NCES 2004- 2005 Teacher Attrition and Mobility Teacher Follow-up Survey (2007), 38 % of the public school teachers who moved rated opportunity for better teaching assignments as an important factor in their decision to move to another school (Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2007).

Overall, these data indicate that a significant number of teachers surveyed either left their current schools (“movers”) or the teaching profession (“leavers”), with the significant portion of movers or leavers citing dissatisfaction with leadership and workplace conditions or retirement as the main reasons for leaving their schools. Furthermore, these data suggest that a considerable number of leavers were most likely new to the teaching profession because they were younger than thirty, thus corroborating the data supplied by the NCES’s report *The Condition of Education* (1997) that new teachers are at an especially high risk for leaving.

Overall North Carolina Teacher Turnover Rates

Preliminary estimates indicate that North Carolina will need approximately 12,000 new teachers per year for the next ten years while schools of education in the state are producing only 3,200 new teachers per year (Charlotte Advocates for Education, 2004). The retirement of “baby boomer” educators, increased enrollment in North Carolina public schools, teacher turnover, and accountability mandates are all cited as reasons for the increase in demand for “highly-qualified” teachers (Charlotte Advocates for Education, 2004).

The gap in the supply and demand for “highly-qualified” teachers has forced school leaders and politicians in North Carolina to look at programs that not only attract such teachers but also retain them once they begin teaching. Due to this concern, teacher retention and turnover rates have become frequently discussed issues at the state level. Many North Carolina school districts, especially those in urban settings, are finding that their teacher turnover rates are alarmingly high (Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Division of Human Resource Management, 2004).

Data show that, of the 92,166 teachers employed in North Carolina Public School during the 2003-2004 school year, 11,399 teachers left their school districts either during or at the completion of the school year (Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2004). Hence, the average teacher turnover rate in North Carolina for that time period was 12.37% (Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2004). Data collected by the Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Division of Human Resource Management (2004) for the *System Level Teacher Turnover Report 2003- 2004*, illustrate a range in district turnover from a low in Graham

County of 2.73% to a high of 25.76% in Bertie County. The actual number of North Carolina teachers leaving the teaching profession altogether has increased from 600 teachers in the 2002-2003 school year to 651.5 teachers in the 2003-2004 school year (Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2004). A review of five-year (2001-2002 thru 2005-2006) totals shows an average system level turnover rate reported by North Carolina Local Education Agencies (LEA) of 12.57% (Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2006).

Reasons Cited for Overall North Carolina State Teacher Turnover

The *System Level Teacher Turnover Report 2003- 2004* (Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2004) also reported that, of those teachers who left their school districts, approximately 19 % left because they were going to teach elsewhere. Approximately 16% of this 19% stated that they intended to move outside of North Carolina to teach (Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2004). Almost 6% of the teachers who left stated that they did so to pursue careers outside of education (Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2004). In the *System Level Teacher Turnover Report 2005- 2006* (Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2006), “to teach elsewhere” was the top reason cited by LEAs for teacher turnover. According to the data, 17%- 21% of the teachers who left their current positions did so for this reason (Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2006).

Teachers leaving to teach outside the state and those who left to pursue careers outside of education were included in the 2004 and 2006 reports under the turnover category called “turnover that might be reduced” (Public Schools of North Carolina Department of

Public Instruction, 2004 & 2006). This category has been the subject of a variety of teacher retention initiatives in the state, and it is viewed as the target population to retain (Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2004 & 2006).

Special Education Teacher Turnover Rates

Special educators have notably high levels of teacher turnover at both the national and state levels (Boe, Cook, Bobbitt, & Terhanian, 1998; Zabel & Zabel, 2001). Boe, Cook, Bobbitt, and Weber (1996) found that special educators were consistently less likely to remain in the profession than their general education colleagues. In fact, in their study, they found that 28 % of beginning special educators left their teaching positions after only one year. In 1993, Singer found in her longitudinal study of Michigan special educators that 43% of them left after only five years in the field.

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) (2000) found similar results in its research, noting that half of special education teachers were leaving the field within their first five years in the profession. Based on this trend, the CEC (2000) predicted that 200,000 new special education teachers would be needed in upcoming years if attrition continued at this rate.

Due to the lack of willing and appropriately licensed/trained special educators, many school districts have resorted to hiring uncertified teachers to teach special education classes (Billingsley, 2004). According to the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), in 2000, 30,000 special education teachers in the United States were working without appropriate credentials. Experts in the field have raised concerns about placing untrained individuals in special education classrooms for fear that such practice may be detrimental to the educational wellbeing of the students (Billingsley, 2004).

Nationally, specific types of special education classrooms have been found to be especially vulnerable to teacher shortages. Numerous studies have been conducted to determine the types of special education classrooms that are most difficult to staff (Kaff, 2004). George, George, Gersten, and Grosenick (1995) found in their research that special education teachers who teach children with behavioral/emotional disabilities (BED) have the highest turnover rates. Nichols and Sosnowsky (2002) found in their study of special education self-contained cross-categorical classrooms that, as the proportion of students labeled with BED increased, the teachers became increasingly depersonalized and distant from their students, which further compounded the teachers' sense of burn-out.

North Carolina educational statistics reflect similar trends regarding the lack of willing and appropriately licensed/trained special educators. According to the *System Level Teacher Turnover Report 2003-2004* (Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2004), during the 2003-2004 school year, seven of the top thirteen most difficult areas of licensure for which to find licensed teachers for were classified under special education. The *System Level Teacher Turnover Report 2003-2004* (Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2004) also indicated that, during the 2003-2004 school year, the areas of special education general curriculum, special education adapted curriculum, and cross categorical were the top three most difficult special education areas to fill with licensed teachers (Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2004). The *System Level Teacher Turnover Report 2005-2006* (Public Schools of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2006), found that, during the 2005-20046 school year, five of the top ten most difficult areas of licensure for which to find licensed teachers were classified under special education.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Exceptional Children Division (2005) reported that, during the 2003-2004 school year, North Carolina schools had more than one hundred special education teaching vacancies and that, of the approximate 11,000 special education teachers employed, approximately 1,800 were not fully certified. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Exceptional Children Division (2005) also reported that approximately 2,300 teachers employed as special educators left their special education positions at the end of the 2003-2004 school year.

Reasons Cited for Special Education Teacher Turnover

Burn-out and stress have been repeatedly identified as reasons leading to special education turnover (Singer, 1992; Zabel & Zabel, 1982). Stress and the emotional and physical effects that accompany it can manifest itself in a variety of ways. Individuals under stress often feel physically and emotionally drained. Workplace stress that is sustained over time can lead to job dissatisfaction and burn-out. Human service fields such as nursing, law enforcement and special education teaching have been identified as having significantly high burn-out rates due to the fact that professionals in those fields work closely with populations of people who have physical, emotional, and social difficulties (Zabel & Zabel, 2001).

Zabel and Zabel (1982) conducted one of the first studies to examine the relationship between personal and job-related factors and special educator burnout. In their study, they found that younger, less-experienced, less-educated special educators were at the greatest risk for burn-out and attrition. When Zabel & Zabel (2001) replicated their 1982 study, they found that teacher age, preparation, and experience were less important than in the past. In their second study, they found that the most common factor influencing job dissatisfaction among special educators was the newly added responsibilities to their jobs that pushed them

away from working with their students and colleagues (Zabel & Zabel, 2001). According to *The Study of the Personnel Needs in Special Education* (SPeNSE), special education teachers consistently indicate that they are more likely to continue working in education when caseloads are manageable, when paperwork is reasonable, and when schools are supportive of staff and students (Westat, 2002).

Singh and Billingsley (1996) found that the working conditions in a school, stress, and especially the job satisfaction of the special educator had the greatest impact on special educator retention. They found that the better the working conditions within the school, the more likely special educators were to have less burn-out (Singh & Billingsley, 1996). Subsequently, they found that the lack of administrative support and/or a positive working environment were factors that consistently led to special educator burn-out and attrition (Singh & Billingsley, 1996).

More recently, Kaff (2004) attempted to determine which workplace factors negatively impact a special educator's job satisfaction. Kaff's (2004) study found that, because special educators' roles have shifted from direct instruction to paperwork tasks, greater job dissatisfaction has occurred. Special educators in Kaff's (2004) study indicated that increased responsibilities and unsupportive working environments have caused them to feel greater stress. This stress was identified as a key factor in their decisions to leave their positions (Kaff, 2004).

Section Summary

Although teacher retention is a concern in all educational areas, the shortage is significantly felt in special education. Poor working conditions, low job satisfaction, added responsibilities, and lack of administrative support have all been identified as factors that

negatively influence a special educator's stress level. Numerous studies have consistently found that special educators identify stress and burn-out as major reasons for why they leave their positions.

Current Teacher Retention Initiatives

Although job satisfaction and working conditions have been consistently identified as reasons for general and special education turnover, very few teacher retention initiatives focus on systematically improving these areas. Instead, many retention initiatives primarily focus on monetary compensation. In the following section, monetary initiatives will be reviewed as will the reasons why such initiatives have proven to be unsuccessful.

According to *School Finance: Achieving High Standards with Equity and Efficiency* by King, Swanson, and Sweetland (2003) many school districts are looking to increased and differentiated salaries for teachers in the light of impending teacher shortages, *No Child Left Behind* mandates, increased student enrollment, and achievement gaps between Caucasian and minority children. Relocation packages, bonuses, and supplements have also become common practices used by school districts to attract and maintain teachers (King et al., 2003).

King et al. (2003) cited a study by Nelson, Drown, and Gould (2000) that found beginning teacher salaries have been steadily rising while average teacher salaries have remained stable. Based on reports that beginning teachers make on average \$12,000/ year less than other college graduates, school districts around the country are trying to make teaching a more attractive option for high-quality applicants by providing monetary incentives (King et al., 2003). Merit pay, group performance incentives, career-ladder-based pay, and overall increases to starting pay rates for new teachers are some of the plans that

states have used to attract and sustain their teaching workforce (King et al., 2003). North Carolina in particular allows local supplements to be used as incentives to attract and retain teachers. Teachers in North Carolina receive a base pay rate that is determined by the state's salary schedule, but they may also receive additional supplements from their school district.

Although monetary incentives have seen widespread use, King et al. (2003) cited a study by Ballou and Podgursky (1997) that found no evidence to suggest that an increase in teacher salaries would translate directly into an improved number of quality teaching applicants. Ballou and Podgursky (as cited in King et al., 2003) concluded that only significant changes to policies regarding training, licensure, and recruitment in addition to compensation directly impact the number of quality applicants.

King et al. (2003) also presented the work of Cornett and Gaines (1994), which followed monetary teacher retention incentive plans during the 1980s. Cornett and Gaines (as cited in King et al., 2003) made several key observations in their research about the limitations of teacher incentive plans: (1) the majority of incentive programs were poorly designed, (2) they were often susceptible to leadership changes, which moved the plan away from its original intent and implementation, and (3) they effected about little or no significant change in the majority of schools and districts that implemented them.

Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2004) found in their research of teachers in Texas that a teacher's decision to teach in a school was driven less by salary and more by working conditions and job satisfaction. Teachers in the study cited safety, discipline, and principal leadership as greater influences on their decision to teach in a school than salary (Hanushek et al., 2004). In fact, the researchers found that, in Texas, retaining teachers in low-performing urban districts at rates comparable to suburban districts would require

unrealistically extreme increases (25-43%) in salary (Hanushek et al., 2004). Given the resources available to urban districts, the authors suggested improving the working conditions in the schools instead (Hanushek et al., 2004). Hanushek et al. (2004) contended that doing so would be not only less expensive but also more effective in attracting and retaining teachers.

Section Summary

The current initiatives to retain teachers are ineffective because the premise that drives them has been found to be fundamentally flawed. Studies have shown that money alone does not fix the teacher shortage problem. A teacher's decision to leave a position is based more on the working conditions within the school and job satisfaction rather than monetary compensation. Based on these data, new research examining school working conditions, teacher job satisfaction, and teacher resiliency would be helpful in making teacher retention initiatives more effective.

Resiliency

Resiliency in humans is not a new concept; however, it has gained recent popularity because it offers a more optimistic view of human development than traditional deficit perspectives do. To many, a focus on resiliency views humans as half full, rather than half empty, cups of potential. The following section explores the concept of resiliency in greater depth and is divided into the following sub-sections: (1) definition of resiliency, (2) resiliency overview, and (3) resiliency in teachers.

Resiliency is defined as the ability to bounce back, to cope, to adapt, and to develop social competence despite adversity (Gordon, 1995; Linville, 1987; Warner & Smith, 1982).

Thus, individuals who are resilient can deal with career stress in ways that help them not only grow professionally but also continue to be productive in their careers (London, 1998).

Although resiliency was first looked at in children in such groundbreaking studies as Werner and Smith's (1982) longitudinal study of children born in Kauai, Henderson and Milstein (2003) contend that the concept can also be applied to adults because adults are also faced with stress. Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, and Kumpfer's Resiliency Model (1990) illustrates that, when an individual, either an adult or a child, is presented with a stressful situation, he or she should ideally have internal and external protective factors that act as buffers against that stress (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). These protective buffers, if present, help the individual to positively cope with the stress with feeling little disruption to his or her life (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Individuals may stay at a comfortable level of resiliency or may gain greater resiliency because they have developed healthy coping mechanisms in the face of adversity (Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

An individual without protective buffers will allow the adversity to push him or her into a state of disruption (Gordon, 1995; Henderson & Milstein, 2003). According to Henderson and Milstein (2003), eventually the individual will reintegrate from disruption. Dependent on the internal and external protective buffers available to him or her, reintegration may take on dysfunctional or maladaptive characteristics, foster the current level of resiliency, or increase the level of resiliency.

Henderson and Milstein (2003) point out that resiliency is more than a list of external and internal attributes; rather, it is a process that is influenced greatly by an individual's cultural environment. Positive environments contribute to the shifting of a person's response

from negative to positive (Rutter, 1985). Thus, the individual characteristics that facilitate resiliency can be learned and reinforced in one's environment.

Unfortunately to date, very little research has been conducted concerning teacher resiliency in connection to job-related stress (Malloy, 2005; Roman-Oertwig, 2004). However, a growing body of research suggests that both general and special education teachers are faced daily with a variety of stressful situations (Bobek, 2002). This stress, if not effectively managed, can manifest itself in decreased job satisfaction and increased teacher turnover (Bobek, 2002). Bobek (2002) states, "The prevailing conditions associated with teaching make it necessary for all teachers to be resilient" (p.202).

When specifically applying the concept of resiliency to teacher turnover, teachers who remain in the teaching profession are considered more resilient than those who do not (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Teachers who are not resilient are more likely to let adversity manifest itself into dysfunction that drives them away from either the school or the profession. Resilient teachers, when faced with adverse conditions, have better protective buffers that allow them to deal with situations positively. This ability makes these teachers more likely to find greater satisfaction in their jobs and working conditions.

As previously noted, research by Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2004) concluded that satisfaction with working conditions was a significant factor in a teacher's decision to remain teaching in a school. Roman-Oertwig (2004), in her study of resiliency in general educators, found that schools with greater overall teacher job satisfaction also had teachers who were also more resilient.

Malloy (2005) found in his resiliency research on an isolated rural school that low teacher turnover was directly related to a school culture that supported teacher resiliency on a

systematic basis. Hence, Malloy's (2005) findings support the premise that schools that promote resiliency-building will also in turn have lower teacher turnover rates despite limiting factors such as rural location or lack of monetary incentives provided to teachers.

Section Summary

Resilient individuals have protective factors that allow them to effectively navigate stressful situations. Given the nature of the teaching profession, educators are faced with a variety of stressors on a daily basis. Teachers who possess internal and external protective buffers are more likely to have greater job satisfaction and an increased desire to remain in their profession.

Conceptual Framework

Several conceptual frameworks have emerged regarding the concept of resiliency and career motivation. In this section, the researcher reviews the following: (1) Sagor's Resiliency-Building Model for Children, (2) London's Theory of Career Motivation, and (3) Henderson and Milstein's Resiliency Wheel. After the review, the researcher presents the framework that guides this study and the rationale for that framework.

Sagor's Resiliency-Building Model for Children

Sagor (1996) identifies five characteristics of resiliency that aid children when they are confronting stressful situations: Competency, Belonging, Usefulness, Potency, and Optimism (or "CBUPO"). Sagor (1996) suggests that the difference between children who succeed and those who fail is directly linked to the degree of CBUPO that they have. Students who feel competent, useful, potent, and like they belong will be less at risk for failure (Sagor, 1996).

Sagor (1996) believes that schools can address current conditions that lead to school failure, such as low academic self-esteem, alienation/non-affiliation, feeling unneeded/unwanted, and external locus of control, through strategic interventions that build resiliency in children. Sagor's Resiliency-Building Model for Children is as follows:

Sagor's Resiliency-Building Model for Children

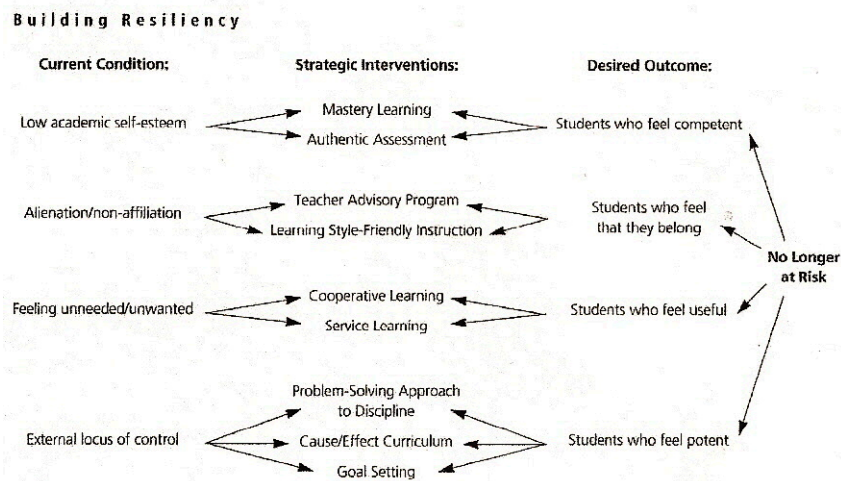


Figure 1.0 (Sagor, 1996, p.40) (*Reprinted with permission*)

London's Theory of Career Motivation

London (1983) developed his theory of career motivation while he was a District Manager of Basis Human Resources Research at the American Telephone and Telegraph Company. Though this theory was originally designed for the business sector, many consider it a seminal piece of literature regarding career motivation and resilience.

London (1983) views career motivation as a multidimensional construct. He defines career motivation as “the set of individual characteristics and associated career decisions and behaviors that reflect the person’s career identity, insight into factors affecting his or her

career and resilience in the face of unfavorable career conditions” (London, 1983, p.620). Therefore, London (1983) views career motivation as the interaction between individual characteristics, situational characteristics and job related decisions and behaviors. London’s (1983) career motivation model appears below.

London’s Interactive Model of Career Motivation Components

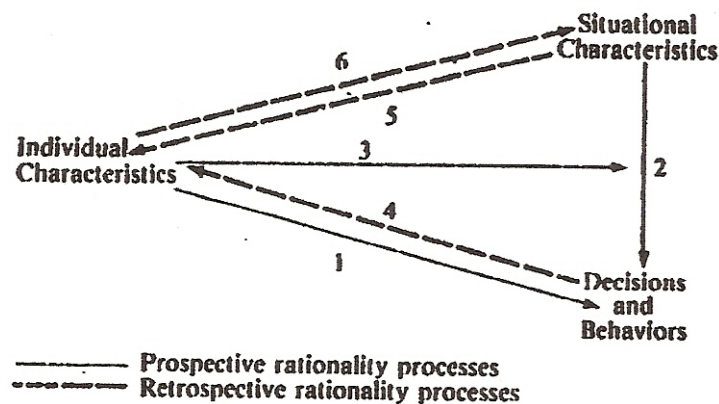


Figure 2.0 (London, 1983, p.626) (Reprinted with permission)

Linkages 1-3 describe prospective rationality processes, behavior that is guided by desired outcomes and expectations (London, 1983). Linkages 4-6 describe retrospective rationality processes, the decisions, behaviors, and situational conditions that affect a person’s interpretation of his or her environment and psychological state (London, 1983).

Henderson and Milstein’s Resiliency Wheel

In their research, Henderson and Milstein (2003) contend that six themes have emerged concerning how an environment can work to provide environmental protective factors and foster individual protective attributes. These six themes are organized into a diagram (Figure 3.0) that Henderson and Milstein (2003) refer to as the *Resiliency Wheel*.

Resiliency Wheel

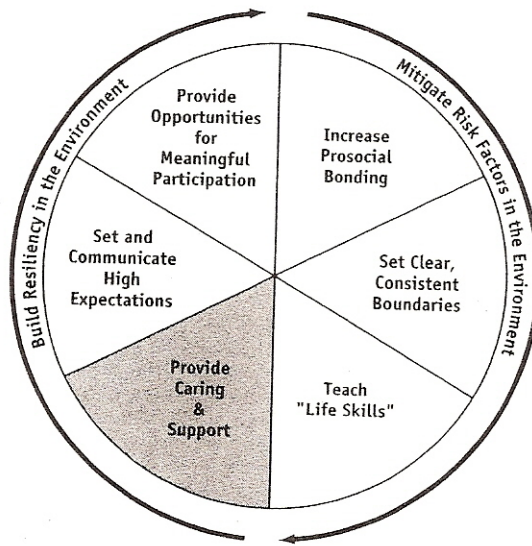


Figure 3.0 (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p.12) (*Reprinted with permission*)

The six steps, or factors, for fostering resiliency in schools are as follows: (1) increased bonding, (2) setting clear and consistent boundaries, (3) teaching life skills, (4) providing caring and support, (5) setting and communicating high expectations, and (6) providing opportunities for meaningful participation (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 12). Steps one through three in the *Resiliency Wheel* are combined under the heading *mitigating risk* because they are intended to dull the impact of risk factors on individuals while steps four through six are labeled as *building resiliency* (Henderson & Milstein, 2003)

Section Summary

Although all three conceptual frameworks are related to resiliency, each model addresses the concept with different populations. Sagor's (1996) model focuses on resiliency-building in children, London's (1983) theory focuses on resiliency in the workplace, and Henderson and Milstein's (2003) model focuses on resiliency-building specifically in

students and teachers.

Conceptual Framework to Guide This Study and Rationale for Why it Was Chosen

The *Resiliency Wheel* that Henderson and Milstein (2003) propose was chosen to guide this study because it specifically addresses teacher resiliency. For the intent and purpose of this study, the researcher focused on resiliency-building factors only as they related to teachers. Therefore, she focused only on steps four through six, the resiliency-building steps of the model, and used these steps to frame her examination of special educator resiliency and retention.

Factor Four: provide caring and support

Henderson and Milstein (2003) suggest that teachers need to work in schools where they feel cared for and supported. Specifically, teachers need positive feedback from peers and supervisors when they are doing a job well (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). School leaders should develop systems to reward and praise teachers on a regular basis (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Also, school leaders must provide teachers with the resources, facilities, guidance, and materials to do their jobs well (Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

Factor Five: set and communicate high expectations

Henderson and Milstein (2003) suggest that teachers need to feel as though they are more than just keepers of order; they need to feel as though they are valued as active participants in both creating and achieving the vision for the school (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). It is important that school leaders let teachers know what is expected of them, thereby setting and communicate high expectations (Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

Factor Six: provide opportunities for meaningful participation

Teachers bring to schools a wealth of knowledge and resources that would benefit students if shared (Henderson & Milstein, 2003), but they are often not given the opportunity and/or time to offer their schools more than what is outlined in their job descriptions (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). As a result, many teachers' skills and expertise are wasted (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Henderson and Milstein (2003) suggest encouraging teachers to participate in school and district wide management teams and to hold leadership positions so that they can have "meaningful roles within larger school organizations" (p.44).

Chapter III

Methodology

This chapter will present a summary of this study's research problem, research purpose, the research questions, the conceptual framework, the research perspective, the research context, research participants, access to the research site, the researcher's role, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures.

Summary of the Research Problem

National, state, and district statistics indicate that a teacher shortage is quickly approaching. Due to this impending teacher shortage, teacher retention is crucial, especially in special education. Teacher turnover has been identified as not only contributing to an overall shortage of teachers but also as being responsible for diverting valuable resources away from students and leading to increased instability in schools.

Although numerous research studies have been conducted regarding special educators who have left the field, little research has examined the teachers who remain. More specifically, what makes these special education teachers resilient? Resiliency research to date has primarily focused on children, and what little research has been done on teachers has been geared only toward general educators (Malloy, 2005; Roman-Oertwig, 2004). A large gap currently exists between special education teacher retention research and special education teacher resiliency research. This gap has prompted this study, which examined the relationship between special educators' degree of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors found in schools and special education teacher retention.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research is to relate special educators' degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors found in schools to special education teacher retention. *Resiliency*, as defined in this study, is the ability to bounce back, to cope, to adapt, and to develop social competence despite adversity. *Resiliency-building factors*, as defined in this study, are those factors that provide teachers with meaningful participation, high expectations, and caring/support in the work environment.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following three research questions:

- 1) Does a relationship exist between special educators' degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in their schools and the number of years that they stay in their current teaching positions?
- 2) Do significant differences exist between various groups (school level, classroom type, primary disability taught, certification held) of special educators in terms of their degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in their schools?
- 3) Do significant differences exist between various groups (school level, classroom type, primary disability taught, certification held) of special educators in terms of the number of years that they have remained in their current teaching positions?

Conceptual Framework of the Study

The *Resiliency Wheel* that Henderson and Milstein (2003) propose was chosen to guide this study because it specifically addresses teacher resiliency. For the intent and

purpose of this study, the researcher focused only on resiliency-building factors as they related to teachers. Therefore, she only focused on steps four through six, the resiliency-building steps of the aforementioned model, to frame her examination of special educator resiliency and retention.

Factor Four: provide caring and support

Henderson and Milstein (2003) suggest that teachers need to work in schools where they feel cared for and supported. Specifically, teachers need positive feedback from peers and supervisors when they are doing a job well (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). School leaders should develop systems to reward and praise teachers on a regular basis (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Also school leaders must provide teachers with the resources, facilities, guidance, and materials to do their jobs well (Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

Factor Five: set and communicate high expectations

Henderson and Milstein (2003) suggest that teachers need to feel as though they are more than just keepers of order; they need to feel as though they are valued as active participants in both creating and achieving the vision for the school (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). It is important that school leaders let teachers know what is expected of them, thereby setting and communicating high expectations (Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

Factor Six: provide opportunities for meaningful participation

Teachers bring to schools a wealth of knowledge and resources that would benefit students if shared, but they are often not given the opportunity and/or time to offer their schools more than what is outlined in their job descriptions (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). As a result, many teachers' skills and expertise are wasted (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Henderson and Milstein suggest encouraging teachers to participate in school and district

wide management teams and to hold leadership positions so that they can have “meaningful roles within larger school organizations” (2003, p.44).

Research Perspective

Building upon the previous research conducted by Roman-Oertwig (2004), this study specifically extended the focus of teacher resiliency research to special educators.

Like Roman-Oertwig’s (2004) study, the design of this study was also quantitative. Through the use of a survey instrument, this study sought to collect data to examine the relationship between special educators’ degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors found in schools and special education teacher retention. A statistical analysis of the survey response data was used to determine if and to what extent a relationship exists between special educators’ degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in schools and special educator retention.

The research design was non-experimental and was therefore conducted in a natural setting (Creswell, 2005). The researcher used causal-comparative research methods to study identified variables after they occurred in search of possible effects (Creswell, 2005). The researcher did not manipulate the research environment because the variables that she intended to study could not easily be manipulated.

Research Context

This research was conducted during the 2006-2007 school year. The research site for this study was Post County in the state of North Carolina. Post County has been the site of significant historical events and is most known for its textile manufacturing. As of 2006, the estimated population of the county and Metropolitan Statistical Area [MSA] was 142,661 people.

The Post School District is the only school district for the entire county. Approximately 22,412 students are enrolled in the Post School District. Of these students, 22.9% are African American, 56.4% are Caucasian, 15.55% are Hispanic, 3.48% are Multi-racial, 1.32% are Asian, and .35% are Native American. The student population is served by a total of 34 schools, 19 of which are elementary schools, 7 of which are middle schools, 7 of which are high schools, and 1 of which is an alternative school.

The school district is overseen by a superintendent and a seven-member school board. The district operates on a \$141,144,997 yearly budget and employs approximately 1,670 teachers.

The Post School District underwent considerable change in its central office and school level leadership during the 2006-2007 school year. The 2006-2007 school year began with a new Superintendent, a new Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, a vacancy in the Assistant Superintendent for Personnel Services position, eight new Directors, including the Director of Exceptional Children, and nine newly appointed Principals.

The average teacher turnover rate in this district for the previous five years was approximately 17%. This teacher turnover rate was 4.5% higher than the state average and 1% higher than the national average. Of the teachers who left the Post School District in 2006, 14.89% cited “to teach in another North Carolina school system,” as their reason for leaving.

Research Participants

Post School District teacher assignment data show that approximately 140 teachers were identified as teaching within the special education department, making the target population for this study those 140 special educators teaching in the Post School District. The

researcher distributed an interest letter to every special educator who taught in the Post School District. The interest letter was sent to them at their schools via US mail. The interest letter gave a brief description of the study and asked that each teacher send it back to the researcher indicating whether or not he or she would be interested in receiving further information about the study. The sample size for the study was determined by using self-selected sampling, meaning that the participants of this study were selected because they were willing to participate. Fifty special educators sent back their interest letters indicating that they were interested in receiving a survey pack. Of those 50 who received a survey pack, 38 returned it completed, thus presenting a final sample size of $n=38$. This study collected and analyzed data from 27% of the target population.

Access and Entry

The Post School District's Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum was contacted and provided a research overview and participant consent form. The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum granted approval to the researcher to conduct this study.

Researcher's Role, Reciprocity, and Ethics

The researcher has been an administrator in Post County School system for over two years. She is a resident of Post County and is fairly well known within the community. Despite her numerous relationships and connections within the community, her primary role in this research study was to collect data and to analyze the results.

All survey materials were analyzed with the intent that the results of the research would be summarized and presented in the researcher's dissertation. A summary of the researcher's findings will be available to the Post County School District and the participants upon request.

The researcher recognized a possibility for bias due her position in the school district. Therefore, the researcher attempted to minimize bias by using a quantitative methodology because data collected and analyzed by such methods are difficult to influence with personal bias.

To preserve anonymity, no names were recorded on the survey materials, and the participants were not personally identified in any report or publication about this study. The researcher took steps to ensure that the data were protected throughout the study. The raw data were kept under lock and key, and all computer files were password protected. All data remained solely in the researcher's possession.

Instrumentation

This research study collected data by using one survey instrument, the *National Association of Secondary Principals' Teacher Satisfaction Survey*, which is found within the Comprehensive Assessment of School Environment (CASE) battery (1987). The survey is a nationally recognized instrument that collects data about teacher satisfaction on nine subscales (CASE, 1987). Teachers rate their satisfaction with (1) administration, (2) compensation, (3) opportunities for advancement, (4) student responsibility and discipline, (5) curriculum and job tasks, (6) co-workers, (7) parents and community, (8) school buildings, supplies and maintenance, and (9) communication (CASE, 1987). The survey asks teachers to respond to 56 questions/statements by using a six-point rating scale: (1) very dissatisfied, (2) dissatisfied, (3) neither satisfied or dissatisfied, (4) satisfied, (5) very satisfied, (6) don't know (CASE, 1987).

Some examples of these statements are as follows:

- The amount of input you have into administrative decisions that affect you and our classroom
- The quality of your relationships with co-workers
- The clarity of school forms and procedures
- The amount of support provided by your administrators

The *Teacher Satisfaction Survey* was administered to more than 1,500 teachers during the national pilot and normative studies (CASE, 1987). Consistency coefficients were calculated for each subscale of the survey based on data from these pilot studies (CASE, 1987). The survey subscale average was determined to be 0.88, with a range of 0.80-0.93 (CASE, 1987). Factor analyses and pilot tests support strong content and construct validity for the survey instrument (CASE, 1987). Since its creation, the *Teacher Satisfaction Survey* has been used by a variety of school districts throughout the United States.

For the purposes of this study, the researcher coded the *Teacher Satisfaction Survey* statements that related to teacher resiliency-building factors by using Henderson and Milstein's (2003) definitions of each of the three factors. Statements 2, 14, 15, 51, 52, and 53 were coded to indicate practices that provide meaningful participation. Statements 3, 26, 31, 32, 33, and 55 were coded to indicate practices that communicate high expectations. Statements 1, 4, 5, 6, 27, 34, 35, 41, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48 and 54 were coded to indicate practices that provide a caring and supportive environment. The coded questions were previously piloted with seven special educators who are not targeted for this study. The participants in the pilot study were given Henderson and Milstein's definitions of each resiliency-building factor and a copy of the survey. They were instructed to select the survey questions that best indicated satisfaction with each of the resiliency-building areas. Once the

participants were finished, their responses were analyzed. A factor analysis of the survey pilot test results supported strong validity and reliability for the coded questions as they related to satisfaction with resiliency-building factors. The consistency coefficients calculated for each coded question ranged from .82-.90.

In addition to the survey, four open-ended questions were added to address unique issues that special educators face. These four questions were also previously piloted with seven special educators who were not targeted for this study. The participants in the pilot test were instructed to dissect the four open-ended questions and to report any concerns regarding the questions' readability, clarity, and meaning. Once the participants were finished, their responses were analyzed. A factor analysis of the open-ended question pilot test results supported strong content/construct validity and reliability for the tested open-ended questions. The consistency coefficients calculated for each additional question ranged from .89-.95.

Data Collection Components

Once the researcher obtained approval from the University of North Carolina- Chapel Hill's Institutional Review Board and a list of all the special education teachers working in the selected school site from the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, she distributed an interest letter to every special educator who was teaching in Post School District. The interest letter was sent to them at their schools via US mail. The interest letter gave a brief description of the study and asked each teacher to send it back to the researcher indicating whether or not he or she would be interested in receiving further information about the study.

The teachers who indicated that they are interested in receiving further information were sent a survey pack that included a consent form and survey materials. Each participant

was asked to complete a consent form, demographic sheet, *CASE Teacher Satisfaction Survey*, and supplemental survey question sheet. Completion of the survey pack took on average no more than twenty minutes of each participant's time

Each participant was asked to send the completed survey packet materials to the researcher in the pre-addressed stamped envelopes provided. The participants were instructed to use one envelope to send back their consent form. They were instructed to use the other envelope to send back their completed survey materials. Once the survey was returned to the researcher, each participant's part in the study was over. There was no follow-up evaluation.

As an incentive to participate in the study and to help ensure a high rate of return, the researcher gave each participant one entry into a raffle. Once the data collection period was complete, all the participants' signed consent forms were placed into a random drawing for two \$25 gift cards to a local store. The winners were notified via email.

The researcher took steps to ensure that the data were protected once they were collected. A duplicate copy of the raw data was stored under lock and key in a site other than the researcher's primary place of work. The primary raw data were kept under lock and key any time that they were not used for the purpose of analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher systematically conducted data checks to ensure the proper handling of data during the process of analysis. She double checked all data entry at differing times after the original entry to minimize data entry errors. The researcher regularly duplicated all computer files and created back-up disks of data that were stored in a locked fire-resistant location away from the researcher's place of work

The data were processed with a statistical computer program called SPSS 11.0. The researcher employed a number of statistical tests to determine relationships between variables.

The following tests were used in this study:

- Descriptive statistics tests were used to summarize the overall trends/tendencies in the data, to provide information about the variability of scores, and to provide information about how one score compared to another.
- Multiple regression and logistic regression tests were used to examine the combined relationship of the multiple independent variables with the single dependent variable. Multiple regression and logistic regression tests were also used to analyze the combined effect of all independent variables. (Research Questions 2 & 3)

Trends in the participants' responses to the open-ended questions were reviewed. The researcher analyzed all data to determine if a relationship existed between special educators' degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors found in schools and special education teacher retention.

Section Summary

This study's purpose is to determine if a relationship exists between special educators' degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors found in schools and special education teacher retention. The research site for this study was Post County, North Carolina. One hundred and forty special education teachers were identified as special educators in the Post School District. All 140 were invited to participate in this study, 50 of whom sent back their interest letters indicating that they were interested in receiving a survey pack. Of the 50 who received a survey pack, 38 returned it completed, thus presenting a final

sample size of $n=38$. This study collected and analyzed data from 27% of the targeted population.

This research study collected data by using one survey instrument, the *National Association of Secondary Principals' Teacher Satisfaction Survey*, which is found within the CASE battery (1987). Four open-ended questions were asked in addition to the CASE survey to address unique issues that special educators face.

The researcher analyzed all data to determine if a relationship exists between special educators' degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors found in schools and special education teacher retention. Descriptive statistics tests were used to summarize the overall trends/tendencies in the data, to provide information about the variability of scores, and to provide information about how one score compares with another. Multiple regression and logistic regression tests were used to examine the combined relationship of the multiple independent variables with the single dependent variable. Multiple regression and logistic regression tests were also used to analyze the combined effect of all independent variables.

Chapter IV

Results

The purpose of this research was to relate special educators' degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors found in schools, to special education teacher retention. The following section presents the descriptive statistics describing the study sample. Next, the statistics describing the study's key variables are presented. The section after that presents the descriptive statistics for participants' responses to each coded survey question and a breakdown of the coded question subset by satisfaction level. Finally, the results of the statistical significance tests for each research question are described, and the trends in the participants' responses to open ended questions are discussed.

Description of Sample and Study Variables

The data describing the sample of special educators in this study are presented in Tables 1 and 2 while the data describing the key variables are presented in Table 3.

Table 1

<i>Demographic Characteristics of the Study Sample</i>		
Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	0	0.0
Female	38	100.0
Race		
White	34	89.5
Black	3	7.9
Bi-Racial	1	2.6
Education Level		
Bachelor's degree	21	55.3
Master of arts	16	42.1
Doctor of philosophy	1	2.6

As shown in Table 1, all (100%) the special educators in the sample were female, and a majority of them were White (89.5%). A little over half had only Bachelor's degrees (55.3%) while the other half had Master's degrees (42.1%).

Table 2

<i>Descriptive Characteristics of the Study Sample</i>				
Variable	Range	Mean	SD	Skewness
Age	24 to 62	40.63	10.22	.13
Years of teaching	0 to 32	12.69	9.89	.43
Years as EC teacher	0 to 32	11.03	9.71	.74
Years in current position	0 to 18	5.28	4.68	1.25
Students on caseload	6 to 50	19.92	9.70	1.22

The ages of the teachers in this study ranged from a minimum age of 24 to a maximum age of 62 years of age. The number of years that the teacher had taught had a minimum value of 0 and a maximum value of 32. The mean for this variable is 12.69 years. The number of years that the teachers had been EC teachers had a minimum value of 0 years and a maximum value of 32 years. The mean for this variable is 11.03 years as an EC teacher. The number of years that the teachers worked in their current positions ranged in value from 0 years to a maximum value of 18 years. The mean value for the years they have taught in their current positions is 5.28 years. The number of students on each teacher's caseload range from 6 to 50 with a mean of 19.92 students.

Characteristics of Non-respondents

Race, education and age of the participants in this study were found to be in alignment with the overall characteristics of the target population. However, gender of the special educators in the sample was not. According to the data provided by the school district .04% of the special educators in the Post School District were male, yet none of them (0%)

chose to participate in this study. Therefore, all the male special educators in the Post County School District were non-respondents.

Table 3

<i>Frequencies for Key Study Variables</i>		
Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Level Taught		
Elementary	19	50.0
Middle	9	23.7
High	10	26.3
Classroom Type		
Self-contained	11	28.9
Inclusion	9	23.7
Resource	18	47.4
Disability Category Taught		
Autism	1	2.6
Learning disabled	15	39.5
Behaviorally/emotionally disabled	3	7.9
Severe & multi-handicapped	1	2.6
Speech/language disabled	2	5.3
Cross-categorical	10	26.3
Educable mentally disabled	4	10.5
Other	2	5.3
Qualification Status		
Not qualified	5	13.2
Qualified	33	86.8
Resiliency Satisfaction		
Low	11	28.9
High	27	71.1
Returning to Current Position for the 2007-2008 School Year		
Yes	36	94.7
No	2	5.3
Factors that Influence Decision to Return to Current Position		
Near Retirement	3	7.9
Job Satisfaction	19	50.0
Job Security	3	7.9
Relationship with Coworkers	8	21.0
Compensation & Benefits	3	7.9
Significant Other's Job	2	5.3

The findings in Table 3 indicate that a majority of the special educators in the sample taught at the elementary school level (50%) and that close to half (47.4%) taught in resource-type classrooms. Most of the educators taught children with learning disabilities (39.5%). Almost all of the educators were qualified to be special educators (86.8%). A majority of the educators in this study also expressed a high satisfaction level (71.1%) with resiliency-building factors in their schools. Almost all of the special educators (94.7 %) planned to return to their positions for the 2007-2008 school year. Half of the special educators who planned to return to their current positions for the 2007- 2008 school year cited job satisfaction as the top factor influencing their decision.

Descriptive Statistics for Coded Survey Questions

Factor Four: provide caring and support

Descriptive statistics for each coded survey question that made up *the caring and support* subset of questions are provided in the following tables. Each table contains the number of times that each option was selected for the question as well as the corresponding percentages that each option was selected.

Table 4

<i>Response Data for Question 1- The degree to which the school administration deals tactfully with your problems</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	9	23.7	23.7	23.7
	neither	4	10.5	10.5	34.2
	satisfied	25	65.8	65.8	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 1, 23.7% of the participants responded that they were dissatisfied with the degree to which the school administration deals tactfully with their problems, while 65.8% said that they were satisfied with the degree to which the school administration deals tactfully with their problems. About a tenth (10.5%) of the participants

were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the degree to which the school administration deals tactfully with their problems.

Table 5

<i>Response Data for Question 4- The amount of support provided to you by your administrators</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	8	21.1	21.1	21.1
	neither	5	13.2	13.2	34.2
	satisfied	25	65.8	65.8	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 4, 21.1% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the amount of support provided to them by their administrators, while 65.8% said that they were satisfied with the amount of support provided to them by their administrators, and 13.2% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the amount of support provided to them by their administrators.

Table 6

<i>Response Data for Question 5- The level of interest shown by administrators about your concerns and problems</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	8	21.1	21.1	21.1
	neither	6	15.8	15.8	36.8
	satisfied	24	63.2	63.2	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 5, 21.1% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the level of interest shown by administrators about their concerns and problems, while 63.2% said that they were satisfied with the level of interest shown by administrators about their concerns and problems, and 15.8% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the level of interest shown by administrators about their concerns and problems.

Table 7

<i>Response Data for Question 6- The amount of recognition provided by the administrators for your work</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	4	10.5	10.5	10.5
	neither	10	26.3	26.3	36.8
	satisfied	24	63.2	63.2	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 6, 10.5% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the amount of recognition provided by the administrators for their work, while 63.2% said that they were satisfied with the amount of recognition provided by the administrators for their work, and 26.3% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the amount of recognition provided by the administrators for their work.

Table 8

<i>Response Data for Question 27- The extent to which curriculum, course content and course outlines are up-to date</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	7	18.4	18.4	18.4
	neither	9	23.7	23.7	42.1
	satisfied	22	57.9	57.9	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 27, 18.4% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the extent to which curriculum, course content and course outlines are up-to date, while 57.9% said that they were satisfied with the extent to which curriculum, course content and course outlines are up-to date, and 23.7% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the extent to which curriculum, course content and course outlines are up-to date.

Table 9

<i>Response Data for Question 34- The quality of your relationship with coworkers</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	1	2.6	2.6	2.6
	satisfied	37	97.4	97.4	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 34, 2.6% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the quality of your relationship with coworkers, while 97.4% said that they were satisfied with the quality of your relationship with coworkers.

Table 10

<i>Response Data for Question 35- The extent to which your co-workers stimulate and support you in your work</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	neither	4	10.5	10.5	10.5
	satisfied	34	89.5	89.5	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 35, 89.5% of the participants said that they were satisfied with the extent to which their co-workers stimulate and support them in their work, and 10.5 % were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the extent to which their co-workers stimulate and support them in their work.

Table 11

<i>Response Data for Question 41- The extent to which parents/community are supportive of the school and programs</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	15	39.5	39.5	39.5
	neither	10	26.3	26.3	65.8
	satisfied	13	34.2	34.2	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 41, 39.5% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the extent to which parents and community are supportive of the school and its programs, while 34.2% said that they were satisfied with the extent to which

parents and community are supportive of the school and its programs, and 26.3% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the extent to which parents and community are supportive of the school and its programs.

Table 12

<i>Response Data for Question 43- The availability of supplies for classroom and instructional use</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	12	31.6	31.6	31.6
	neither	5	13.2	13.2	44.7
	satisfied	21	55.3	55.3	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 43, 31.6% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the availability of supplies for classroom and instructional use, while 55.3% said that they were satisfied with the availability of supplies for classroom and instructional use, and 13.2% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the availability of supplies for classroom and instructional use.

Table 13

<i>Response Data for Question 44- The quality of school library and media materials</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	5	13.2	13.2	13.2
	neither	6	15.8	15.8	28.9
	satisfied	27	71.1	71.1	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above in Table 13, 13.2% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the quality of school library and media materials, while 71.1% said that they were satisfied.15.8% said they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the quality of school library and media materials.

Table 14

<i>Response Data for Question 45- The number and quality of available school facilities</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	10	26.3	26.3	26.3
	neither	9	23.7	23.7	50.0
	satisfied	19	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above in Table 14, 26.3% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the number and quality of available school facilities, while 50.0% said that they were satisfied. 23.7% said that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the number and quality of available school facilities.

Table 15

<i>Response Data for Question 46- The quality of maintenance of the school grounds</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	5	13.2	13.2	13.2
	neither	7	18.4	18.4	31.6
	satisfied	26	68.4	68.4	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 46, 13.2% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the quality of maintenance of the school grounds, while 68.4% said that they were satisfied with the quality of maintenance of the school grounds, and 18.4% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the quality of maintenance of the school grounds.

Table 16

<i>Response Data for Question 47- The quality of maintenance of the school buildings</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	12	31.6	31.6	31.6
	neither	4	10.5	10.5	42.1
	satisfied	22	57.9	57.9	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 47, 31.6% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the quality of maintenance of the school buildings, while 57.9% said

that they were satisfied with the quality of maintenance of the school buildings, and 10.5% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the quality of maintenance of the school buildings.

Table 17

<i>Response Data for Question 48- The speed with which needed repairs are made</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	13	34.2	34.2	34.2
	neither	6	15.8	15.8	50.0
	satisfied	19	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 48, 34.2% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the speed with which needed repairs are made, while 50.0% said that they were satisfied with the speed with which needed repairs are made, and 15.8% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the speed with which needed repairs are made.

Table 18

<i>Response Data for Question 54- The ease with which you can communicate with school administrators</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	5	13.2	13.2	13.2
	neither	4	10.5	10.5	23.7
	satisfied	29	76.3	76.3	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 54, 13.2% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the ease with which they can communicate with school administrators, while 76.3% said that they were satisfied. 10.5% stated that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the ease with which they can communicate with school administrators.

Factor Five: set and communicate high expectations

Descriptive statistics for each coded survey question that made up *the high expectations* subset of questions are provided in the following tables. Each table contains the

number of times and corresponding percentages that each option was selected for the question.

Table 19

<i>Response Data for Question 3- The quality of feedback you receive from administrators about your performance</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	5	13.2	13.2	13.2
	neither	4	10.5	10.5	23.7
	satisfied	29	76.3	76.3	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 3, 13.2% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the quality of feedback they receive from administrators about their performance, while 76.3 % said that they were satisfied with the quality of feedback they receive from administrators about their performance, and 13.2% of the participants were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the quality of feedback they receive from administrators about their performance.

Table 20

<i>Response Data for Question 26- The extent in which you find your job challenging</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	3	7.9	7.9	7.9
	neither	11	28.9	28.9	36.8
	satisfied	24	63.2	63.2	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 26, 7.9% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the extent in which they find their job challenging, while 63.2% said that they were satisfied with the extent in which they find their job challenging, and 28.9% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the extent in which they find their job challenging.

Table 21

<i>Response Data for Question 31- The competence of the teachers in your school and district</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	2	5.3	5.3	5.3
	neither	4	10.5	10.5	15.8
	satisfied	32	84.2	84.2	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 31, 5.3% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the competence of the teachers in their school and district, while 84.2% said that they were satisfied and 10.5% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied the competence of the teachers in their school and district.

Table 22

<i>Response Data for Question 32- The extent to which teachers and staff members support school improvement</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	4	10.5	10.5	10.5
	neither	6	15.8	15.8	26.3
	satisfied	28	73.7	73.7	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in Table 22, 10.5% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the extent to which teachers and staff members support school improvement, while 73.7% said that they were satisfied and 15.8% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the extent to which teachers and staff members support school improvement.

Table 23

<i>Response Data for Question 33- The degree to which teachers/staff show concern for student learning and the general welfare of students</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	3	7.9	7.9	7.9
	neither	4	10.5	10.5	18.4
	satisfied	31	81.6	81.6	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 33, 7.9% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the degree to which teachers/staff show concern for learning and the general welfare of students, while 81.6.4% said that they were satisfied. 10.5% of the teachers were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the degree to which teachers and staff show concern for learning and the general welfare of students.

Table 24

<i>Response Data for Question 55- The clarity of school forms and procedures</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	8	21.1	21.1	21.1
	neither	7	18.4	18.4	39.5
	satisfied	23	60.5	60.5	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 55, 21.1% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the clarity of school forms and procedures, while 60.5% said that they were satisfied with the clarity of school forms and procedures, and 18.4% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the clarity of school forms and procedures.

Factor Six: provide opportunities for meaningful participation

Descriptive statistics for each coded survey question that made up *the meaningful participation* subset of questions are provided in the following tables. Each table contains the number of times and corresponding percentages that each option was selected for the question.

Table 25

<i>Response Data for Question 2- The amount of input you have in administrative decisions that affect you and your classroom</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	6	15.8	15.8	15.8
	neither	10	26.3	26.3	42.1
	satisfied	22	57.9	57.9	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 2, 15.8% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with their amount of input in administrative decisions, while 57.9% said that they were satisfied with the amount of input that they have, and 26.3% indicated that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the amount of input that they have.

Table 26

<i>Response Data for Question 14- The number of opportunities for advancement within your school/ district</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	12	31.6	31.6	31.6
	neither	14	36.8	36.8	68.4
	satisfied	12	31.6	31.6	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 14, 31.6% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with their number of opportunities for advancement within the school/district, while 31.6% said that they were satisfied with the number of opportunities for advancement within the school/ district, and 36.8% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the number of opportunities for advancement within the school/district.

Table 27

<i>Response Data for Question 15- The extent to which increasing skills will increase chances for advancement</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	8	21.1	21.1	21.1
	neither	14	36.8	36.8	57.9
	satisfied	16	42.1	42.1	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 15, 21.1% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the extent to which increasing their skills will increase their chances for advancement, while 42.1% said that they were satisfied with the extent to which increasing their skills will increase their chances for advancement, and 36.8% were neither

satisfied nor dissatisfied with the extent to which increasing their skills will increase their chances for advancement.

Table 28

<i>Response Data for Question 51- The quality of information you receive about policies and activities in school and district</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	6	15.8	15.8	15.8
	neither	5	13.2	13.2	28.9
	satisfied	27	71.1	71.1	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 51, 15.8% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the quality of information that they receive about policies and activities in their school and district, while 71.1% said that they were satisfied and 13.2% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the quality of information that they receive about policies and activities in their school and district.

Table 29

<i>Response Data for Question 52- The speed with which administration communicates important information</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	7	18.4	18.4	18.4
	neither	5	13.2	13.2	31.6
	satisfied	26	68.4	68.4	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 52, 18.4% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the speed with which administration communicates important information to them, while 68.4% said that they were satisfied with which administration communicates important information to them, and 13.2% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with which administration communicates important information to them.

Table 30

<i>Response Data for Question 53- The extent to which you are given advance notice of topics to be discussed at meetings of the school board or administrative council</i>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
valid	dissatisfied	8	21.1	21.1	21.1
	neither	8	21.1	21.1	42.1
	satisfied	22	57.9	57.9	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	

As shown in the above table for question 53, 21.1% of the participants said that they were dissatisfied with the extent to which they are given advance notice of topics to be discussed at meetings of the school board or administrative council, while 57.9% said that they were satisfied with the extent to which they are given advance notice of topics to be discussed at meetings of the school board or administrative council, and 21.1% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the extent to which they are given advance notice of topics to be discussed at meetings of the school board or administrative council.

Breakdown of Coded Question Subsets by Satisfaction Level

The satisfaction averages for each subset of coded questions are found below in order from highest to lowest:

1. Set and communicate high expectations (73.1%)
2. Provide caring and support (64.4%)
3. Provide opportunities for meaningful participation (54.8%)

The top two questions with the greatest satisfaction averages for each subsection of coded questions appear in the next table.

Table 31

<i>Top Satisfaction Averages</i>		
Provide caring and support		
Question # 34	The quality of your relationship with coworkers	97.4%
Question #35	The extent to which your co-workers stimulate and support you in your work	89.5%
Set and communicate high expectations		
Question #31	The competence of the teachers in your school and district	84.2%
Question #33	The degree to which teachers and staff show concern for student learning and the general welfare of students	81.6%
Provide opportunities for meaningful participation		
Question #51	The quality of information you receive about policies and activities in school and district	71.1%
Question #52	The speed with which administration communicates important information	68.4%

According to the table, question #34, the quality of your relationship with co-workers, had the highest satisfaction rating of all the coded questions presented.

The dissatisfaction averages for each subset of coded questions appear below in order from highest to lowest:

1. Provide opportunities for meaningful participation (20.63%)
2. Provide caring and support (20.01%)
3. Set and communicate high expectations (11.00%)

The top two questions with the greatest dissatisfaction averages for each subsection of coded questions appear in Table 32.

Table 32

<i>Top Dissatisfactions Averages</i>		
Provide caring and support		
Question # 41	The extent to which parents and community are supportive of the school and its programs	34.2%
Question #48	The speed with which needed repairs are made	31.6%
Set and communicate high expectations		
Question #55	The clarity of school forms and procedures	21.1%
Question #3	The quality of feedback you receive from administrators about your performance	13.23 %
Provide opportunities for meaningful participation		
Question # 14	The number of opportunities for advancement within your school/ district	31.6%
Question #15 & 53	(15)The extent to which increasing skills will increase chances for advancement (53) The extent to which they are given advance notice of topics to be discussed at meetings of the school board or administrative council	21.1%

According to the table, question #41, the extent to which parents and community are supportive of the school and its programs, had the highest dissatisfaction rating of all the coded questions presented.

Statistical Significance Tests for Each Research Question

After a review of the description of the sample and study variables, several variables were adjusted prior to running the data analysis tests used to test the three proposed research questions. These variables are (1) the disability that was taught and (2) the education the teachers had obtained. The disability taught has 6 disability categories, which had fewer than 4 teachers who taught them. To adjust for this small sample, the disabilities with fewer than four teachers were combined into one category so that the resulting categories for the disabilities taught were (1) cross-categorical, (2) other, and (3) learning disabled. The other

variable that was addressed is the education of the teachers. Since only one participant had a Ph. D., the data from that respondent were not included in the data analysis for the three proposed research questions.

Research Question 1: Does a relationship exist between special educators' degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in their schools and the number of years that they stay in their current teaching positions?

To test this research question, a logistic regression model was fit to the data with degree of satisfaction with resiliency as the response variable and number of years that the teachers stay in their current teaching positions as the dependent variable. The results of this analysis appear in Table 33.

Table 33

<i>Parameter Estimates for Research Question 1</i>							
Parameter	B	Std. Error	95% Wald Confidence Interval		Hypothesis Test		
			Lower	Upper	Wald Chi-Square	df	Sig.
(Intercept)	.315	.5725	-.807	1.437	.303	1	.582
current	.147	.1085	-.065	.360	1.839	1	.175
(Scale)	1 ^a						

As shown in Table 33, the number of years that the teachers spent at their current positions did not have a significant relationship with their degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in their schools (p-value = 0.175). This result would provide no evidence to support the first research question brought forth.

Research Question 2: Do significant differences exist between various groups (school level, classroom type, primary disability taught, certification held) of special educators, in terms of their degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in their schools?

To examine this research question, the researcher conducted a multiple logistic regression test that contained the school level, classroom type, primary disability taught, and qualification status. The results of the test appear on the next page in Table 34.

Table 34

<i>Parameter Estimates for Research Question 2</i>							
Parameter	B	Std. Error	95% Wald Confidence Interval		Hypothesis Test		
			Lower	Upper	Wald Chi-Square	df	Sig.
(Intercept)	-.146	1.4435	-2.976	2.683	.010	1	.919
[level that is taught= elem]	.229	1.0706	-1.870	2.327	.046	1	.831
[level that is taught=high]	-.841	1.2637	-3.318	1.636	.443	1	.506
[level that is taught=middle]	0 ^a	.	.	.	.	.	.
[class type= inclusion]	-.393	1.6801	-3.686	2.900	.055	1	.815
[class type= resource]	.923	1.2164	-1.461	3.308	.576	1	.448
[class type=self-contained]	0 ^a	.	.	.	.	.	.
[disability taught=cross-categorical]	2.280	1.4321	-.527	5.087	2.535	1	.111
[disability taught=learn disabled]	.845	1.1597	-1.428	3.118	.531	1	.466
[disability taught=other]	0 ^a	.	.	.	.	.	.
[highly qualified=no]	1.116	1.5290	-1.881	4.113	.533	1	.465
[highly qualified=yes]	0 ^a	.	.	.	.	.	.
(Scale)	1 ^b						
Dependent Variable: Satisfaction level w/ resiliency building factors in current school							
Model: (Intercept), level that is taught, class type, disability taught, highly qualified							
a. Set to zero because this parameter is redundant. b. Fixed at the displayed value.							

As shown in Table 34, none of the variables were significant at the 0.05 level of significance. Based on the overall main effects model, no evidence supports the research question regarding the significant differences between the different groups in terms of their degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in their schools.

Research Question 3: Do significant differences exist between various groups (school level, classroom type, primary disability taught, certification held) of special educators in terms of the number of years that they remain in their current teaching positions?

To examine this research question, the researcher conducted a multiple linear regression test with the model containing school level, classroom type, primary disability taught, and teacher qualification status as independent variables and the number of years spent at their current teaching position as the dependent variable. The results of this analysis appear on the next page in Table 35.

Table 35

<i>Multiple Linear Regression Test Results for Research Question 3</i>							
Parameter	B	Std. Error	95% Wald Confidence Interval		Hypothesis Test		
			Lower	Upper	Wald Chi-Square	df	Sig.
(Intercept)	-1.153	1.0006	-3.114	.808	1.328	1	.249
[level that is taught=elem]	2.599	.4169	1.782	3.416	38.869	1	.000
[level that is taught=high]	.663	.5167	-.350	1.675	1.644	1	.200
[level that is taught=middle]	0 ^a	.	.	.	.	.	.
[class type=Inclusion]	-2.696	.6848	-4.038	-1.354	15.501	1	.000
[class type=resource]	-.305	.4655	-1.217	.608	.429	1	.513
[class type=self-contained]	0 ^a	.	.	.	.	.	.
[disability taught=cross-cat]	2.674	.4904	1.713	3.636	29.748	1	.000
[disability taught=learn disabled]	.327	.4720	-.599	1.252	.479	1	.489
[disability taught=other]	0 ^a	.	.	.	.	.	.
[highly qualified=no]	-1.727	.5153	-2.737	-.717	11.232	1	.001
[highly qualified=yes]	0 ^a	.	.	.	.	.	.
age	.125	.0194	.087	.163	41.375	1	.000
(Scale)	1 ^b						
Dependent Variable: current Model: (Intercept), level that is taught, class type, disability taught, highly qualified status, age a. Set to zero because this parameter is redundant. b. Fixed at the displayed value.							

Based on the results found in Table 35, some significant factors did effect the time that the special education teachers spent in their current teaching positions. As shown in the table, adjusting for the other variables in the model reveals a significant difference between elementary school teachers and middle school teachers with respect to the time spent in their current positions. In fact, the model indicates that elementary school teachers spent on average 2.60 more years teaching in their current positions than middle school teachers.

As shown in the table, an adjustment for the other variables in the model reveals a significant difference between inclusion classes and self-contained classes with respect to the time teachers spent in their current positions. In fact, the model indicates that inclusion teachers spent on average 2.70 fewer years teaching in their current positions than self-contained teachers.

After an adjustment for the other variable in the model, Table 35 also shows a significant difference between teachers who taught students with a variety of disabilities in cross-categorical classrooms and those who taught other types of disabilities in more specialized classrooms with respect to the time spent in the current positions. In fact the model indicates that teachers in cross-categorical classrooms spent on average 2.67 years longer teaching in their current positions than teachers who teach other types of disabilities in more specialized classrooms.

After an adjustment for the other variable in the model, a significant difference also appears between teachers who were not qualified and teachers who were qualified with respect to the time spent in their current positions. The model indicates that teachers who were not qualified spent on average 1.73 fewer years teaching in their current positions than teachers who are highly qualified.

Finally, after an adjustment for the other variable in the model, the table shows a significant difference in a teacher's age with respect to the time spent at her current position. The model indicates that, for every yearly increase in the teacher's age, the time spent in her current position increased by 0.125 years.

Trends in Participants' Responses to Open Ended Questions

In addition to the survey, four open-ended questions were given to the participants to uncover unique issues that special educators face. These four open-ended questions were as follows:

1. What are the greatest challenges you face as a special education teacher?
2. What are the greatest rewards of being a special education teacher?
3. Do you feel that the rewards outweigh the challenges that you face as a special education teacher? Explain.
4. What do you feel are the best strategies for retaining special education teachers?

The participants' responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed to determine if any trends exist in the response data. The participants' responses to each question were categorized, and the answers that appeared with the most frequency were considered a trend.

The trends found in the participants' responses to open-ended question number one are outlined in Table 36. The findings therein suggest that paperwork and lack of curricular resources and planning time were the most common challenges cited by the participants in response to question number one.

Table 36

<i>Trend Analysis Results for Participant Response to Open-ended Question 1</i>		
Question #1	Response	Frequency
What are the greatest challenges you face as a special education teacher?	Paperwork requirements	53% of respondents indicated that paperwork was a challenge
	Lack of curricular resources and planning time	16% of respondents indicated that lack of curricular resources, and planning time were challenges

The trends found in the participants' responses to open-ended question two are outlined in Table 37. The findings therein suggest that seeing a student reach his or her potential and having a positive rapport with his or her students and family were the most common rewards cited by participants in response to question two.

Table 37

<i>Trend Analysis Results for Participant Response to Open-ended Question 2</i>		
Question #2	Response	Frequency
What are the greatest rewards of being a special education teacher?	Seeing a student reach his/her potential	66% of respondents indicated that students reaching his/her potential is the greatest reward
	A positive rapport with students and families	13% of respondents indicated that a positive rapport with students/families was the greatest reward

The trends found in the participants' responses to open-ended question three are outlined in Table 38. The findings therein suggest that the majority of participants feel as though the rewards of their jobs outweigh the challenges that they face.

Table 38

<i>Trend Analysis Results for Participant Response to Open-ended Question 3</i>		
Question #3	Response	Frequency
Do you feel that the rewards outweigh the challenges that you face as a special education teacher? Explain.	Yes	68% of respondents indicated that yes, the rewards do outweigh the challenges.
		Most common explanations given for the yes responses were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm here for the children • I feel good making a difference
	No	32% of respondents indicated that no, the rewards do not outweigh the challenges.
		Most common explanations given for the no responses were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Child Left Behind Act is making my job too difficult • I feel like there is too much paperwork and expectations • I feel overwhelmed

The trends found in the participants' responses to open-ended question four are outlined in Table 39. The findings therein suggest that greater support from the administration and central office and greater comp time provided to special education teachers for the extra time that they spend on paperwork and working as department chairpersons are the most common strategies cited by the participants in response to question four.

Table 39

<i>Trend Analysis Results for Participant Response to Open-ended Question 4</i>		
Question #4	Response	Frequency
What do you feel is the best strategy for retaining special education teachers?	Greater administrative support	47% of respondents indicated that greater administrative support would be one of the best strategies
	Greater central office support	32% of respondents indicated that greater central office support would be one of the best strategies
	Comp time provided to EC teachers for the extra time that they spend on paperwork and working as depart. chairperson.	21% of respondents indicated that Comp time provided for paperwork and added duties would be one of the best strategies

Section Summary

Descriptive statistics show that all the special educators in the sample were female and that most of them were White. About half had Bachelor's degrees while the other half had Master's degrees. The sample encompassed a wide range of ages. On average, the sample appeared to consist of veteran special educators. The mean number of EC years taught was 11.03. The majority of the special educators in the sample taught at the elementary school level (50%), and close to half (47.4%) taught in resource-type classrooms. Most of the educators taught children with learning disabilities (39.5%). Almost all of the educators were qualified to be special educators (86.8%). A majority of the educators also expressed high satisfaction level (71.1%) with resiliency-building factors in their schools. Almost all of the special educators (94.7) planned to return to their positions for the 2007-2008 school year. Half of the special educators who planned on returning to their current positions for the 2007- 2008 school year cited job satisfaction as the top factor influencing their decision to return.

Descriptive statistics for each coded survey question show that the satisfaction average ratings for each subset of coded questions were: (1) Set and communicate high expectations (73.1%), (2) Provide caring and support (64.4%), and (3) Provide opportunities for meaningful participation (54.8%). Question #34, the quality of the relationships with co-workers, had the highest satisfaction rating of all the coded questions presented. The dissatisfaction average ratings for each subset of coded questions were: (1) Provide opportunities for meaningful participation (20.63%), (2) Provide caring and support (20.01%), and (3) Set and communicate high expectations (11.00%). Question #41, the

extent to which parents and community are supportive of the school and its programs, had the highest dissatisfaction rating of all the coded questions.

A logistic regression model found that the number of years that the teachers spent in their current positions did not have a significant relationship with their degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in their schools ($p\text{-value} = 0.175$). Therefore, this study could not provide evidence to support the first research question presented.

A multiple logistic regression test found no evidence to support the research question about significant differences between the different groups in terms of their degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building-factors in their schools. The test found that no variables were significant at the 0.05 level of significance.

A multiple linear regression test found that some significant factors are significant in their effects on the time that the teachers spent in their current teaching positions. A significant difference appears between elementary school teachers and middle school teachers with respect to the time spent in their current positions. The results indicate that elementary school teachers spent on average 2.60 more years teaching in their current positions than middle school teachers. A significant difference also appears between inclusion classes and self-contained classes with respect to the time teachers spent in their current positions. The results indicate that inclusion teachers spent on average 2.70 fewer years teaching in their current positions than self-contained teachers. The results also indicate a significant difference between teachers who taught students with a variety of disabilities in cross-categorical classrooms and those who taught other types of disabilities in more specialized classrooms with respect to the time spent in the current positions. The model indicates that teachers in cross-categorical classrooms spent on average 2.67 years more

teaching in their current positions than teachers who teach other types of disabilities in more specialized classrooms.

A significant difference also appears between teachers who were not qualified and teachers who were qualified with respect to the time spent in their current positions. The results indicate that teachers who were not qualified spent on average 1.73 fewer years teaching in their current positions than teachers who were highly qualified. A significant difference also appears with the teacher's age with respect to the time spent at her current position. The model indicates that, for every yearly increase in the teacher's age, the time spent in her current position increased by 0.125 years.

The most common items cited in the participants' responses to open-ended question number one indicate that too much paperwork, a lack of curricular resources, and minimal amounts of planning time were the greatest challenges that they face as special educators. The most common item cited in the participants' responses to open-ended question number two indicates that seeing a student reach his or her potential was the greatest reward of being a special educator. The most common response to open-ended question number three indicates that the majority of the participants believe that the rewards of being a special educator outweigh the challenges. The most common strategies that the participants gave for retaining special education teachers were providing greater administrative support, providing greater central office support, and giving comp time to special education teachers for the extra time that they spend on paperwork and working as department chairpersons.

Chapter V

Summary and Discussion

This chapter summarizes and discusses the results of this dissertation. It is divided into four sections: (1) Background and Statement of Purpose, (2) Review of Methodology, (3) Summary of the Results, and (4) Discussion of the Results. Section four is further broken down into the following subsections: Interpretation of the Results, Limitations of the Study, Implications for Practice, and Recommendations for Future Research.

Background and Statement of Purpose

National, state, and district statistics indicate that a teacher shortage is quickly approaching. Due to this impending teacher shortage, teacher retention is crucial, especially in special education. Teacher turnover has been identified as not only contributing to an overall shortage of teachers but also as being responsible for diverting valuable resources away from students and leading to increased instability in schools.

Although numerous research studies have focused on special educators who have left the field, little research has examined the teachers who remain. More specifically, what makes these special education teachers resilient?

Resiliency research to date has focused primarily on children and what little research has been done with teachers has been geared only toward general educators (Malloy, 2005; Roman-Oertwig, 2004). A large gap currently exists between special education teacher retention research and special education teacher resiliency research. This gap in the literature has prompted this study, which examined the relationship between special educators' degrees

of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors found in schools and special education teacher retention.

The purpose of this research was to relate special educators' degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors found in schools to special education teacher retention.

Resiliency, as defined in this study, is the ability to bounce back, to cope, to adapt, and to develop social competence despite adversity. *Resiliency-building factors*, as defined in this study, are those factors that provide teachers with meaningful participation, high expectations, and caring/support in the work environment.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following three research questions:

1. Does a relationship exist between special educators' degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in their schools and the number of years that they stay in their current teaching positions?
2. Do significant differences exist between various groups (school level, classroom type, primary disability taught, certification held) of special educators in terms of their degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in their schools?
3. Do significant differences exist between various groups (school level, classroom type, primary disability taught, certification held) of special educators in terms of the number of years that they remain in their current teaching positions?

Review of the Methodology

The design of this study is quantitative. Through the use of a survey instrument, this study collected data to examine the relationship between special educators' degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors found in schools and special education teacher retention. A statistical analysis of the survey response data determined if and to what extent a relationship existed between special educators' degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in schools and special educator retention.

The research design was non-experimental and was, therefore, conducted in a natural setting (Creswell, 2005). The researcher used causal-comparative research methods to study identified variables after they occurred in search of possible effects (Creswell, 2005). The researcher did not manipulate the research environment because the variables that she intended to study could not easily be manipulated.

Post School District teacher assignment data showed that approximately 140 teachers were identified as teaching within the special education department, so the target population of this study was all 140 of those special educators. The researcher distributed an interest letter to every special educator who was teaching in the school district. The sample size for the study was determined by using self-selected sampling, meaning that the participants of this study were selected because they were willing to participate. Fifty special educators sent back their interest letters indicating that they were interested in receiving a survey pack. Of those 50 who received a survey pack, 38 returned it completed, thus presenting a final sample size of $n=38$. This study collected and analyzed data from 27% of the target population.

This research study collected data by using one survey instrument, the *National Association of Secondary Principals' Teacher Satisfaction Survey* and a series of open-ended

questions. The *National Association of Secondary Principals' Teacher Satisfaction Survey* is found within the Comprehensive Assessment of School Environment (CASE) battery (1987). The survey is a nationally recognized instrument that collects data about teacher satisfaction on nine subscales (CASE, 1987). The *Teacher Satisfaction Survey* was administered to more than 1,500 teachers during the national pilot and normative studies (CASE, 1987). Consistency coefficients were calculated for each subscale of the survey based on data from these pilot studies (CASE, 1987). The survey subscale average was determined to be 0.88, with a range of 0.80-0.93 (CASE, 1987). Factor analyses and pilot tests support strong content and construct validity for the survey instrument (CASE, 1987).

For the purposes of this study, the researcher coded the *Teacher Satisfaction Survey* statements that related to teacher resiliency-building factors by using Henderson and Milstein's (2003) definitions of each of the three factors. Statements 2, 14, 15, 51, 52, and 53 were coded to indicate practices that provide meaningful participation. Statements 3, 26, 31, 32, 33, and 55 were coded to indicate practices that communicate high expectations. Statements 1, 4, 5, 6, 27, 34, 35, 41, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48 and 54 were coded to indicate practices that provide a caring and supportive environment. The coded questions were previously piloted with seven special educators who were not targeted for this study. The participants in the pilot study were given Henderson and Milstein's definitions of each resiliency-building factor and a copy of the survey. They were instructed to select the survey questions that best indicated satisfaction with each of the resiliency-building areas. Once the participants were finished, their responses were analyzed. A factor analysis of the survey pilot test's results supported strong validity and reliability for the coded questions as they

related to satisfaction with resiliency-building factors. Consistency coefficients calculated for each coded question ranged from .82-.90.

In addition to the survey, four open-ended questions were added that addressed unique issues that special educators face. These four questions were also previously piloted with seven special educators who were not targeted for this study. The participants in the pilot test were instructed to dissect the four open-ended questions and to report any concerns in regard to the questions' readability, clarity, and meaning. Once the participants were finished, their responses were analyzed. A factor analysis of the open-ended question pilot test results supported strong content/construct validity and reliability for the tested open ended questions. Consistency coefficients calculated for each additional question ranged from .89-.95.

The data were processed with a statistical computer program called SPSS 11.0. The researcher employed a number of statistical tests to determine relationships between variables.

The following tests were used in this study:

- Descriptive statistics tests were used to summarize the overall trends/tendencies in the data, to provide information about the variability of scores, and to provide information about how one score compared to another.
- Multiple regression and logistic regression tests were used to examine the combined relationship of the multiple independent variables with the single dependent variable. Multiple regression and logistic regression tests were also used to analyze the combined effect of all independent variables. (Research Questions 2 & 3)

Trends in the participants' responses to open-ended questions were reviewed. The researcher analyzed all data to determine if a relationship exists between special educators' degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors found in schools to special education teacher retention.

Summary of the Results

Sample Statistics

Descriptive statistics show that all the special educators in the sample were female and most of them were White. About half had Bachelor's degrees while the other half had Master's degrees. The sample had a wide age range. On average, the sample appeared to consist of veteran special educators. The mean number of EC years taught was 11.03. The majority of the special educators in the sample taught at the elementary school level (50%), and close to half (47.4%) taught in resource-type classrooms. Most of the educators taught children with learning disabilities (39.5%). Almost all of the educators were qualified to be special educators (86.8%). A majority of the educators also expressed high satisfaction level (71.1%) with resiliency-building factors in their schools. Almost all of the special educators (94.7) planned to return to their positions for the 2007-2008 school year. Half of the teachers who planned on returning to their current positions for the 2007- 2008 school year cited job satisfaction as the top factor influencing their decision to return.

Statistics for Coded Survey Questions

Descriptive statistics for each coded survey question show that the satisfaction average ratings for each subset of coded questions were: (1) Set and communicate high expectations (73.1%), (2) Provide caring and support (64.4%), and (3) Provide opportunities for meaningful participation (54.8%). Question #34, the quality of relationships with co-

workers, had the highest satisfaction rating of all the coded questions presented. The dissatisfaction average ratings for each subset of coded questions were: (1) Provide opportunities for meaningful participation (20.63%), (2) Provide caring and support (20.01%), and (3) Set and communicate high expectations (11.00%). Question #41, the extent to which parents and community are supportive of the school and its programs, had the highest dissatisfaction rating of all the coded questions presented.

Statistics for Research Questions

Research Question #1: Does a relationship exist between special educators' degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in their schools and the number of years that they stay in their current teaching positions?

A logistic regression model found that the number of years that the teachers spent in their current positions did not have a significant relationship with their degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in their schools (p-value = 0.175). Therefore, this study could not provide evidence to support the first research question presented.

Research Question # 2: Do significant differences exist between various groups (school level, classroom type, primary disability taught, certification held) of special educators, in terms of their degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in their schools?

A multiple logistic regression test found no evidence to support the research question regarding significant differences between the different groups in terms of their degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in their schools. The test found that there none of the tested variables were significant at the 0.05 level of significance

Research Question # 3: Do significant differences exist between various groups (school level, classroom type, primary disability taught, certification held) of special educators in terms of the number of years that they remain in their current teaching positions?

A multiple linear regression test found that some significant factors affected the time that teachers spent in their current teaching positions. A significant difference was found between elementary school teachers and middle school teachers with respect to the time spent in their current positions. The results indicate that elementary school teachers spent on average 2.60 more years teaching in their current positions than middle school teachers. A significant difference was also found between inclusion classes and self-contained classes with respect to the time teachers spent in their current positions. The results indicate that inclusion teachers spent on average 2.70 fewer years teaching in their current positions than self-contained teachers. The results also indicate a significant difference between teachers who taught cross-categorical disabilities and those who taught other types of disabilities with respect to the time spent in their current positions. The results indicate that cross-categorical disabilities teachers spent on average 2.67 years longer teaching in their current positions than teachers who teach other types of disabilities. Another significant difference was also found between teachers who were not qualified and teachers who were qualified with respect to the time spent in their current positions. The results indicate that teachers who were not qualified spent on average 1.73 fewer years teaching in their current positions than teachers who were highly qualified. The age of a teacher also showed a significant difference with respect to the time spent at her current position. The model indicates that, for every yearly increase in the teacher's age, the time spent in her current position increased by 0.125 years.

Open-ended Survey Question Findings

The most common items cited in the participants' responses to open-ended survey question number one indicate that too much paperwork, a lack of curricular resources, and minimal amounts of planning time were the greatest challenges that they face as special educators. The most common item cited in the participant response to open-ended survey question number two indicates that seeing a student reach his or her potential is the greatest reward of being a special educator. The most common participant response to open-ended question number three indicates that the majority of the participants believe that the rewards of being a special educator do outweigh the challenges. The most common strategies that the participants gave for retaining special education teachers were providing greater administrative support, providing greater central office support, and giving comp time to special education teachers for the extra time that they spend on paperwork and working as department chairperson.

Discussion of the Results

Although teacher turnover is a concern in all educational areas, the teacher shortage is significantly felt in special education. Understanding the factors behind why special educators stay in the field is very important to school leaders, given that large amounts of time and money are spent attracting and training new teachers when teachers leave.

Building upon the previous research conducted by Roman-Oertwig (2004), this study specifically extended the focus of teacher resiliency research to special education teachers. Not only did the researcher seek to add to the body of literature regarding teacher resiliency as a whole, but she also sought to examine resiliency in a population that is well known for being at risk for burn-out and turnover.

As was pointed out in Chapter 2, burn-out and stress have been repeatedly identified as reason leading to special education turnover (Singer, 1992; Zabel & Zabel, 1982). Stress and the emotional and physical effects that come with it can manifest itself in a variety of ways. Individuals under stress often feel physically and emotionally drained. Workplace stress that is sustained over time can lead to job dissatisfaction and burn-out. Meeting the demands of challenging students, difficult parents, mounting regulations, and overwhelming circumstances make special educators highly susceptible to burn-out, which can manifest into a decision to leave the field.

The special education teacher population of Post County School lends itself well to a study about teacher resiliency and retention because its special educators are faced with a barrage of stressors on a daily basis and because the district has historically had teacher turnover rates greater than the state average. Although this study was fairly small, the findings from this research can be useful to school and district leaders, in and outside of Post County, who wish to develop and to maintain effective special education teacher retention and resiliency-building programs. This study is also useful to those who would like to conduct further research on special education teacher resiliency and retention.

Interpretation of the Results

Although linking this study to other similar studies was challenging due to the limited number of published data on general education teacher and special education teacher resiliency, this study's findings are consistent with previous general education and special education teacher retention literature.

Links to Previous General Education Teacher Retention Literature

This study has gathered data to suggest that, despite the findings, no significant relationship exists between special educators' satisfaction with resiliency-building factors and the number of years that they remain in their current teaching positions, a relationship may still be found between the special educators' satisfaction with resiliency-building factors and special education teacher retention. The following key pieces of data were found in this study:

- The majority (94.7 %) of the participants surveyed reported that they were planning on returning to their positions for the 2007-2008 school year
- 71.1% of the teachers who were coming back indicated that they were also highly satisfied with resiliency-building factors found in their school.
- Teachers who reported that they would not be coming back to their positions for the 2007- 2008 school year all had low satisfaction ratings for resiliency-building factors in their schools .

In looking at these data, one could logically infer that the majority of this study's participants who planned on returning to their positions for the following year had high satisfaction levels with resiliency-building factors, whereas those teachers who were planning on leaving their positions had low satisfaction levels. If this inference is correct, then this study would present data that are consistent with Roman-Oertwig's (2004) and Malloy's (2005) research findings in general education, which indicate that lower teacher turnover rates can be found in schools that maintain adequate levels of resiliency-building.

Furthermore since the majority (50%) of the special educators who planned on returning to their current positions for the 2007-2008 school year cited job satisfaction as the

top factor influencing their decision to return, this research is consistent with previous general education literature. More specifically, it supports Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin's (2004) contention that a teacher's decision to teach in a school is driven primarily by job satisfaction with the working conditions found in the school. This study is also in line with Ingersoll and Smith's (2003) and Inman and Marlow's (2004) research findings that indicate that working conditions weigh heavily into a teacher's decision to remain in or to leave his or her teaching position.

The findings of this study also suggest that the resiliency-building factors, (a caring/supportive work environment, opportunity for meaningful participation, and the communication of high expectations) are some of the most important reasons influencing teacher resiliency and retention, far more important than monetary compensation and/or teacher/classroom characteristics. Therefore, these findings are consistent with Ingersoll and Smith's (2003) research in general education, which found that, although monetary benefits may help the teacher retention problem, a focus on improving the working conditions through greater administrative support, teacher collegiality, and teacher participation in the decision-making process would yield the same if not better results and would be far less expensive. Furthermore, the participants' response data also mirror the findings found within The Charlotte Advocates for Education's report *The Role of Principal Leadership in Increasing Teacher Retention: Creating a Supportive Environment* (2004), which found that schools with high overall (general and special education combined) teacher retention rates create social opportunities within the staff to build a sense of collegiality, include teachers in the decision making process, and make certain that teachers understand what is expected of them. The participants' responses to open-ended question number four further emphasized

the point that support in the work environment is a key factor leading to special education teacher retention. Whether such support comes directly from administration or the central office or in the form of recognition for the extra work that special educators are required to do, the participants' responses are consistent with Henderson and Milstein's (2003) claims that *all* teachers need to work in schools where they feel supported.

Links to Previous Special Education Teacher Retention Literature

Trends in the participants' open-ended question responses also mirror previous research regarding the challenges that face special educators. The most common items cited in the participants' responses to open-ended question number one indicate that too much paperwork, a lack of curricular resources, and minimal amounts of planning time were the greatest challenges that they face as special educators. Such findings are consistent with Zabel and Zabel's (2001) study, which found that the most common factor influencing job dissatisfaction among special educators was the newly added responsibilities to their jobs that drew them away from working with their students and colleagues. This study is also consistent with Kaff's (2004) findings that special educators today have greater job frustration because their roles have shifted from direct instruction to paperwork tasks.

This study found that the greatest areas of satisfaction for the participants of this study were the relationships that they had with their colleagues and the stimulation/support they received from them. This finding is consistent with Billingsley's (2004) research, which found that greater teacher retention occurs within a positive work environment that includes a positive school climate, administrative support, and collegial support.

This study also found that one of the greatest areas of dissatisfaction for the participants was the lack of clarity of school forms and procedures. This finding supports

Billingsley's (2004) claim that ambiguity in special education teacher roles leads to increased job dissatisfaction and more teachers leaving the field.

The open-ended question response data also mirror *The Study of the Personnel Needs in Special Education* (SPeNSE) findings in which special education teachers consistently indicated that they were more likely to continue working in education when caseloads were manageable, paperwork was reasonable and schools were supportive of staff and students (Westat, 2002). More specifically, the participants' responses to open-ended question number four indicated that the majority of the special education teachers in the study believed that the support of the principal and central office staff is crucial to retaining special education teachers. These findings are in line with Billingsley's (2004) research, which found that both principals and central office staff are influential in special education teacher retention because such administrators determine the climate of the school/district, play a key role in establishing local policies, monitor IDEA regulations, and determine how special education services are delivered.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. One such limitation is that it was conducted in only one school district. Therefore, the findings from this study may not be applicable to teachers in other districts.

Another limitation is that the study included only educators in the Post School District who were classified as special educators. Hence, the findings are not applicable to general education teachers in the same district.

The study was also limited by the very nature of survey studies. In survey studies, respondents do not have the opportunity to gain clarification about the survey questions. Thus, possible response confusion may occur.

The study may have also been limited by the fact that the researcher was a school administrator in the school district in which the research was conducted in. The possibility of influence may have existed because the researcher had professional relationships with several of the potential respondents due to her past and current position in the school district. Due to this, respondents may not have answered according to how they actually felt but rather according to how they believed the researcher wanted them to answer. The researcher's position in the school district may have also affected the response rate. Teachers may have chosen not to participate in the research because of the researcher's role in the school district.

The last limitation of this study stems from how the sample was selected. The sample for the study was determined by using self-selected sampling, meaning that the participants of this study were selected because they were willing to participate. Since the design of the study allowed for the participants to self-select whether or not to participate in the study, the extent to which this sample represents the traits or behaviors of the general population cannot fully be known. Historically, sampling voluntary participants as opposed to random sampling the general population has introduced voluntary response bias because often only the people who care strongly enough about the subject one way or another tend to participate (Dorofeev & Grant, 2006).

Implications for Practice

Although linking this study to other similar studies is challenging due to the limited number of published data on special education teacher resiliency, the findings of this study

are consistent with previous research conducted in general education and special education. Since the ultimate goal for this research study was to add to the body of literature regarding teacher resiliency and to spark future research, it is important to note that this study may have implications for teachers, school leaders, parents, and universities. In the following section such implications are explored.

Teachers

This study found that special education teachers were most satisfied with the positive relationships that they had with their colleagues. In light of this, teachers not only must build and maintain their own resiliency but also look to find ways to build it in their colleagues. Those teachers who remain in the teaching profession are considered more resilient than those who do not (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Resilient special educators need to take the lead in identifying and mentoring colleagues who are struggling. By creating a support system for one another, special educators can share best practices for managing caseloads, using time, and obtaining curricular resources.

School Leaders

The findings of this study suggest that caring/support in the work environment, providing opportunities for meaningful participation, and communicating high expectations are considered some the most important factors for building special education teacher resiliency and promoting retention, far more important than monetary compensation and or teacher/classroom characteristics. The participants' responses to survey and open-ended questions in this study indicate that they believed that all three resiliency-building factors help special education teachers remain in their positions.

In light of these results, school leaders wishing to build a resilient workforce and to improve teacher retention need to provide special educators with environments that have caring and supportive working conditions, opportunities for meaningful participation, and clear communication of high expectations. Caring and support, meaningful participation, and clear communication of high expectations can come in many forms. Frequent feedback, ample training, adequate resources and planning time, clarity of school forms and procedures, opportunities for teacher participation, and manageable workloads are all ways in which school leaders can foster resiliency-building in their schools.

Frequent Feedback

One of the top areas of dissatisfaction that the teachers in this study expressed was the quality of feedback that they receive from administrators. Henderson and Milstein state, “They [teachers] need to get feedback from supervisors and peers, that communicates that they are doing their jobs well- or they may interpret the silence as an indication of failure” (2003, p.42), suggesting that feedback needs to be given much more often than at formal observation time. School leaders need to be a visible presence in the school, constantly available to offer feedback. They need to know what is happening in special education classrooms and the challenges that special educators face. Henderson and Milstein (2003) suggest that leaders recognize the importance of observation as a means to provide positive feedback and should try to give such feedback to teachers in a meaningful way.

Ample Training

One of the most common explanations given by the study’s participants who felt like the rewards of being a special educator did not outweigh the challenges that they face was that teachers felt overwhelmed. Given this, it is important that school leaders understand that

their role is changing from being a manager to being more of a coach. As a coach, a school leader must actively seek to prevent special educators from feeling overwhelmed and guide them toward competence and confidence by providing them with ample training. According to Hudson in *The Handbook of Coaching*, a coach is “someone trained and devoted to guiding others into increased competence, commitment and confidence” (1999, p.6). Just as a basketball coach would not send a player to the free throw line without practice, a school leader must not send a special educator into the classroom without practice. The Charlotte Advocates for Education’s report *The Role of Principal Leadership in Increasing Teacher Retention: Creating a Supportive Environment* (2004) suggests that principals, who achieve high teacher retention rates, provide a variety of in-house and off-site professional development opportunities.

Adequate Resources and Planning Time

“Trying to start a car without a key,” is how one participant of this study articulated the challenges that she faces when planning a lesson with little planning time, poor facilities, and few curricular resources. Appropriate resources and excellent teaching go hand-in-hand when working toward academic success. Without adequate time to plan for lessons, appropriate curricular resources, and facilities in good repair, special educators are forced to teach in substandard conditions.

Securing resources, maintaining appropriate facilities, and providing planning time for special education teachers takes creativity and forethought. School leaders need to recognize that special educators, by the very nature of their jobs, have additional responsibilities and considerations that their general education counterparts do not. Due to

these differences, special educators must receive the same curricular resources, planning time, and quality of facilities that their general education counterparts receive.

The Charlotte Advocates for Education's report *The Role of Principal Leadership in Increasing Teacher Retention: Creating a Supportive Environment* (2004) indicates that the principal is responsible for removing obstacles to teaching and for providing the resources needed for teachers to be successful. In other words, the school leader is responsible for providing the keys to the vehicle of success. By doing so, leaders communicate to special educators and the educational community at large that investing in special education is as important as investing in general education.

Clarity of School Forms and Procedures

This study found that one of the greatest areas of dissatisfaction for the special educators in this study was the lack of clarity of school forms and procedures. Just as a school leader would not be successful without knowing how to complete the forms and carrying out the procedures of his or her job, a special educator will also struggle to be successful if he or she does not know how to appropriately complete forms and carry out the procedures of his or her job. Without clarity of forms and procedures, teachers are left to fumble around, wasting valuable time trying to figure out what they must do. It is far more cost-effective to not only show new special educators how to fill out forms and carry out procedures but also to periodically review changes to forms and procedures with the entire special education department. By doing so, school leaders will head off potential problems, make paperwork tasks more bearable, and communicate that they support and value the job that special educators do.

Opportunities for Teacher Participation

This study found that the special educators were dissatisfied with the opportunities that were given to them for meaningfully participating in their schools and school district. The majority of participants in this study indicated that they were dissatisfied with the number of opportunities for advancement within their school/district, the extent to which increasing their skills will increase their chances of advancement, and the extent to which they are given advance notice of the topics to be discussed at school/ district leadership team meetings.

Henderson and Milstein state that “Resiliency is fostered when they [teachers] are given opportunities to offer their skills and energies to their worksites” (2003, p.43). School leaders looking to promote resiliency-building in their schools and school districts must create opportunities for teachers to be involved in decision making and to advance if they choose to in their careers. Teacher leadership councils and district level committees not only give special education teachers a place to voice their concerns but also give them the opportunity to take an active role in making important decision about things that directly effect them in their classrooms. Providing financial support for graduate work and/or national board teaching certification and making every effort to promote people from within the school district for leadership roles sends the message that school leaders want employees to be meaningful participants in the greater organization.

Manageable Workloads

One of the most common explanations given by the study’s participants who felt like the rewards of being a special educator did not outweigh the challenges that they face was the belief that they had too much paperwork and too many expectations. Regulations and large

caseloads were identified as contributing to the participants' belief that they had too much paperwork and too many expectations.

The Study of the Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE) found that school climate, the extent to which teachers perceive their schools as caring and supportive, is tied to workload manageability (Westat, 2002). Due to this finding, school leaders must be the conscious of the extra tasks and duties that they give special educators and of how many students that each teacher has on his or her caseload. This study found that the number of students on each participant's caseload ranged from 6 to 50 with a mean for this variable of 19.92 students.

Often school leaders look at student enrollment on paper and forget that each special education student requires writing, implementing, and managing an IEP. When determining the allotment of special education teacher positions, school leaders must take into consideration the time and energy required to create, implement, and effectively manage an IEP for each student on a special educator's caseload. Twenty students on a general education teacher's roster may seem extremely manageable, but twenty students on a special education teacher's roster may be overwhelming due to the intensive social, academic, and behavioral needs that special education students may have. School leaders must look at creative ways to secure additional teaching positions and to share caseloads rather than overburdening special education teachers with large caseloads.

The results of this study also indicate that certain special education teachers (elementary, self-contained, cross-categorical, and highly qualified) on average spend more time in their current positions than other special educators. School leaders looking to retain special educators should make an effort to create an ongoing dialog with special educators to

determine what each teacher's needs are for the setting in which he or she teaches. By doing so, school leaders can systematically address the obstacles that drive special educators from their positions and in turn replicate conditions that are optimal for retaining teachers.

Parents of Students with Disabilities

In this study, the participants stated that one of the greatest rewards of their jobs is a positive rapport with students and families; however, the individual question response data show that 34.2% of the participants reported that they were dissatisfied with the extent to which parents and the community are supportive of the school and its programs. This discrepancy indicates that, although teachers enjoy having a positive rapport with students and families, they often do not feel supported by parents and the community.

Although this discrepancy has no clear cause, it is not surprising that the parent/teacher relationship is often challenging given the tumultuous past of special education. In looking at the past, one can see that parental dissatisfaction with special education services was a key factor in promoting the passage of PL 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997). Since that time, many parents of children with disabilities have become advocates fueled by the belief that their children with disabilities are being shortchanged by schools and special educators (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997). In many cases, a parent's distrust can taint the parent/teacher relationship and send the message to special education teachers that parents do not support them.

Given that a positive rapport between teachers and parents is essential for achieving maximum success for students with disabilities, parents must make an effort to build a relationship with their child's teacher. Parents need to find ways to effectively communicate their child's needs to teachers and be willing to enter into a relationship with their child's

teacher with an open mind, giving the teacher a fair chance to prove him- or herself. Doing so shows special educators that parents of students with disabilities support their efforts and value what they do for their children.

Universities and Colleges

As previously stated, one of the most common explanations given by the study's participants who felt like the rewards of being a special educator did not outweigh the challenges that they face was that they felt overwhelmed. Because universities and colleges are the first level of preparation for special educators, teacher preparation programs must realistically depict and provide opportunities for students to comprehend what a special educator's job entails prior to beginning student teaching. Seminars on effective IEP writing, classroom management, and differentiated instruction need to become mandatory for all special education student teachers. Universities and colleges must take steps to make sure that prospective teachers have a wealth of meaningful experiences within special education classrooms prior to beginning student teaching. Student teaching should not be the first time that a prospective special education teacher steps into a special education classroom.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although studies like Malloy's (2005), Roman-Oertwig's, (2004), and the current study have provided insight into teacher resiliency, a large hole continues to persist in the research base regarding this topic. Therefore, much more research is needed to have a complete understanding of the factors involved in building resiliency in teachers and promoting teacher retention. For those who are interested in researching this topic, the following recommendations are offered: (1) Use a different sampling procedure, (2) use a mixed methods approach to data collection, (3) conduct the research in a variety of school

districts throughout the country, (4) incorporate additional research questions, and (5) look at a variety of other factors that may influence teacher resiliency and retention .

Use a Different Sampling Procedure

Due to the regulations set forth by the school district in its agreement with the researcher and the Institutional Review Board governing this study, the participant recruitment process for this study had to be completely voluntary. Therefore, the sample for the study was determined by using self-selected sampling, meaning that the participants of this study were selected because they were willing to participate. Since the design of the study allowed for the participants to self-select whether or not to participate in the study, the extent to which this sample represents the traits or behaviors of the general population cannot fully be known. Future studies should look to find ways to employ random sampling procedures to ensure that its sample represents the traits or behaviors of the general population and that response bias is minimized.

Use a Mixed Methods Approach to Data Collection

This study was limited by the many problems associated with surveys that may have impacted the response rate. The researcher believes that the survey instrument may have failed to uncover all the factors that may have been relevant to this examination because respondents did not have the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and/or gain clarification about the survey questions. A mixed methods approach that encompasses surveys as well as interviews may allow future researchers to dig deeper into this topic and gain greater insight into the participants' responses.

Conduct the Research in a Variety of School Districts Throughout the Country

Because the study investigated such a small population in a limited setting, the findings from this study are narrow in scope. A larger study conducted in a variety of school districts could establish whether or not the findings from this study were unique or are a commonality found throughout the country.

Incorporating Additional Research Questions

Incorporating additional research questions may yield more significant results in future studies. The researcher suggests adding the following additional research questions to future studies:

- *Does a relationship exist between special educators' degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in their schools and their decision to return to their positions the following year?*
- *Do significant differences exist between special educators in this study versus special educators in other school districts in terms of their levels of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors found in schools?*
- *Do significant differences exist between special educators in this study versus special educators in other school districts in terms of their decision to return to their positions the following year?*

Research a Variety of Other Factors that may Influence Teacher Resiliency and Retention

Due to the fact that teacher resiliency and retention are such a complex subjects, future researchers may want to look at a variety of other factors that may influence teacher resiliency and retention. Such factors to include in future research are as follows; teacher pay,

burn-out and depression rates, school setting characteristics and differences in teacher preparation programs.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to relate special educators' degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors found in schools to special education teacher retention. This study attempted to answer three research questions regarding special education teacher resiliency by collecting data using one survey instrument, the *National Association of Secondary Principals' Teacher Satisfaction Survey*, and a series of open-ended questions.

Descriptive statistics show that all the special educators in the sample were female and that most of them were White. About half had Bachelor's degrees while the other half had Master's degrees. The sample had a wide age range. On average, the sample appeared to consist of veteran special educators. The mean number of EC years taught was 11.03. The majority of the special educators in the sample taught at the elementary school level (50%), and close to half (47.4%) taught in resource-type classrooms. Most of the educators taught children with learning disabilities (39.5%). Almost all of the educators were qualified to be special educators (86.8%). A majority of the educators also expressed high satisfaction level (71.1%) with resiliency-building factors in their schools. Almost all of the special educators (94.7%) planned to return to their positions for the 2007-2008 school year. Half of the special educators who planned on returning to their current positions for the 2007-2008 school year cited job satisfaction as the top factor influencing their decision to return.

Descriptive statistics for each coded survey question show that the satisfaction average ratings for each subset of coded questions were: (1) Set and communicate high expectations (73.1%), (2) Provide caring and support (64.4%), and (3) Provide opportunities

for meaningful participation (54.8%). Question #34, the quality of relationships with co-workers, had the highest satisfaction rating of all the coded questions presented. The dissatisfaction average ratings for each subset of coded questions were: (1) Provide opportunities for meaningful participation (20.63%), (2) Provide caring and support (20.01%), and (3) Set and communicate high expectations (11.00%). Question #41, the extent to which parents and community are supportive of the school and its programs, had the highest dissatisfaction rating of all the coded questions presented.

A logistic regression model found that the number of years that the teachers spent in their current positions did not have a significant relationship with their degree of satisfaction with resiliency-building factors in their schools ($p\text{-value} = 0.175$). Therefore, this study could not provide evidence to support the first research question presented.

A multiple logistic regression test found no evidence to support the research question regarding significant differences between the different groups in terms of their degrees of satisfaction with resiliency-building-factors in their schools. The test found that no variables to be significant at the 0.05 level of significance.

A multiple linear regression test found that some significant factors affected the time that the teachers spent in their current teaching positions. A significant difference was found between elementary school teachers and middle school teachers with respect to the time spent in their current positions. The results indicate that elementary school teachers spent on average 2.60 more years teaching in their current positions than middle school teachers. A significant difference was also found between inclusion classes and self-contained classes with respect to the time teachers spent in their current positions. The results indicate that inclusion type teachers spent on average 2.70 fewer years teaching in their current positions

than self-contained teachers. The results also indicate that that a significant difference exists between teachers who taught students with a variety of disabilities in a cross-categorical classroom and those who taught other types of disabilities in more specialized classrooms with respect to the time spent in the current positions. The model indicates that teachers in cross-categorical classrooms spent on average 2.67 years more teaching in their current position than teachers who teach other types of disabilities in more specialized classrooms.

A significant difference was also found between teachers who were not qualified and teachers who were qualified with respect to the time spent in their current positions. The results indicate that teachers who were not qualified spent on average 1.73 fewer years teaching in their current positions than teachers who were highly qualified. A significant difference in the teacher's age was also found with respect to the time spent at her current position. The model indicates that, for every yearly increase in the teacher's age, the time spent in her current position increased by 0.125 years.

The most common items cited in the participants' responses to open-ended question number one indicated that too much paperwork, a lack of curricular resources, and minimal amounts of planning time were the greatest challenges that they face as special educators. The most common item cited in the participant response to open-ended question number two indicated that seeing a student reach his or her potential was the greatest reward of being a special educator. The most common response to open-ended question number three indicates that the majority of the participants believe that the rewards of being a special educator outweigh the challenges. The most common strategies that the participants gave for retaining special education teachers were providing greater administrative support, providing greater

central office support, and giving comp time to special education teachers for the extra time that they spend on paperwork and working as department chairpersons.

Despite its findings that no significant relationship is shown to exist between special educators' satisfaction with resiliency-building factors and the number of years that they remain in their current teaching positions, a relationship may still be found between the special educators' satisfaction with resiliency-building factors and special education teacher retention. The data indicate that the majority of special education teachers who planned on returning to their positions for the following year had high satisfaction levels with resiliency-building factors, whereas those teachers who were planning on leaving their positions had low satisfaction levels

The findings of this study suggest that caring/support in the work environment, providing opportunities for meaningful participation, and communicating high expectations are considered to be some of the most important factors for building special education teacher resiliency and promoting retention, far more important than monetary compensation and/or teacher/classroom characteristics. The participants' responses to survey and open-ended questions in this study indicated that they believed that all three resiliency-building factors help special education teachers remain in their positions. Given the results of this study, teachers, school leaders, parents of students with disabilities, and universities/colleges should understand the importance of taking steps to promote resiliency-building for special educators in today's schools.

Appendix

Demographic Sheet

Survey #: _____

Gender: _____ Age: _____ Race: _____

Education Level (please circle: BA MA PhD

Level that you teach in (please circle):
elementary middle high

Classroom type that you teach in (please circle):
self- contained inclusion resource other (specify) _____

Number of students you serve: _____

Primary disability category of students in your class (please mark only one):
☐ Autism ☐ Deaf/Hard of Hearing ☐ Deaf/Blind ☐ Learning Disabled
☐ Behaviorally/ Emotionally Disabled ☐ Visually Impaired
☐ Severe/Profound & Multi-Handicapped ☐ Speech/Language
☐ Cross Categorical ☐ Other (specify): _____

Highly Qualified status in the primary disability category that you teach (please circle):
Yes or No

Total number of years as a teacher: _____; as an EC teacher _____

Number of years as an EC teacher in your current school _____

Plan to return to your current position for the 2007- 2008 school year
(please circle): Yes or No

If yes, what factors influence your decision to remain in your current EC position?
(please select the three factors that influence your decision the greatest and number them 1-3 with 1 being the greatest factor that influences you decision):

☐ job security ☐ significant other's job nearby ☐ compensation and benefits
☐ relationship with colleagues ☐ school leadership ☐ near to retirement ☐ location
☐ the students ☐ working conditions ☐ work hours ☐ Job satisfaction
☐ relationships with parents and the community ☐ professional development
☐ other (specify): _____

Please include this sheet in your returned survey packet. Thank you!

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