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# Performance Appraisals for Special Education Teachers: Examining the Need for Separation and Alignment

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PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS:  
EXAMINING THE NEED FOR SEPARATION AND ALIGNMENT

by

Iyuna K. Harris

Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of

Olivet Nazarene University

School of Graduate and Continuing Studies

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Ethical Leadership

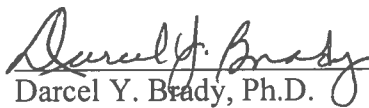
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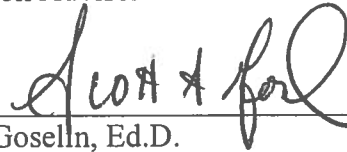
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Even in his strongest times, Jesus welcomed others to join in his endeavors. God created us as communal beings to accomplish things beyond our individual strength. Embedded in the accomplishment of this dissertation lays the foundation of the collective and collaborative actions and support received from individuals who value the growth of the individual person and professional.

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## DEDICATION

The hard work required to complete this research project is dedicated to all of my next generation family members. Know that there is nothing that you cannot do, regardless of where you come from. Know that you can create your own path based on the blessings that God grants you. Find your passion and stick with it!

## ABSTRACT

This study explored the current practices used to evaluate special education teachers in the Midwest in order to examine the need for separation and alignment as it relates to performance appraisals. There is limited research available regarding special education teacher evaluation. The research that has been accomplished shows that the roles and responsibilities between special education and general education teachers are different and therefore there exists a need to have different evaluation criteria. In order to accomplish the exploration of the current practices used to evaluate special education teachers, the researcher examined the current evaluation process, evaluation tools, and job descriptions used for the positions of special education teachers and general education teachers in the Midwest. The themes from the job descriptions of the general education and special education teachers were examined to explore the current expectations that are communicated based on the job title for general education and special education teachers. The current tools used to evaluate special education teachers were examined to describe the measured behaviors. The alignment between the job descriptions and the evaluation tools were described to determine the alignment that currently exist between the expectations and the evaluation criteria. The findings indicate that typically the same job description, evaluation tool, and evaluation process is used for both special education and general education teachers although the day to day responsibilities differ.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Teach the deaf. Teach the learning disabled. Teach the visually impaired. Teach the intellectually disabled. Teach the traumatic brain injured. Teach the physically impaired. Teach the deaf and blind. Teach the multiple disabled. Teach the Autistic. Teach the hearing impaired. Teach the speech and language impaired. Teach the developmentally delayed. Teach the emotionally disturbed. These are just some of the responsibilities that special education teachers are challenged with each day.

Most schools have both special education and general education teachers. Although the name sounds similar, they are two very different positions with distinct roles and responsibilities. Differences that exist between special education and general education teachers are identified in assigned roles, responsibilities, job descriptions, and education preparation programs. Although special education and general education teachers may share some similarities in tasks, special education teachers often have additional roles and responsibilities that general education teachers do not have. Special education teachers have distinct roles they are responsible for or assigned including supporting, collaborating, and consulting with general education teachers. Although these differences have been identified, special education teachers seem to be viewed as compatible or equal to general education teachers for performance appraisals. If the jobs are different, should the performance appraisal criteria be different? The need for more

special education teachers continue to increase as the number and severity of students with identified disabilities increase. However, the attrition of special education teachers also continues to increase over time. Administrators and evaluators may be able to increase the stability and performance of special education teachers by providing clarity to the role of special education teachers and by examining their daily tasks and aligning them with their performance appraisals that are used for feedback and continuous improvement.

The role of a special education teacher typically encompasses the roles and responsibilities of a general education teacher with additional roles and responsibilities focusing on serving a special population of students with disabilities, supporting in various settings with additional tasks as assigned and supporting colleagues such as general education teachers (Holdheide, Goe, Croft, & Reschly, 2010). It is imperative that clarity and alignment between the roles are realized in order to provide special education teachers with the appropriate focus, feedback, and support that they need to continue to grow. Evaluations can be beneficial in supporting the growth of special education teachers; however, it is vital that the tools used to focus on that growth include criteria that are relevant to the roles and responsibilities identified in their position job descriptions and not the job description of others such as general education teachers.

As the number of students who require special education services are on the rise, the need for special education teachers also increases. Students who require special education services increased from 8.3 % in 1977 to 13.8 % in 2005 (Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). There is diversity in the learning processes and supports required to service the needs of

students who require special education. The prescription of the services is based on the individual needs of the student with the disability. The severity of identified disabilities may also contribute to the amount of special education services needed. Many school districts have found it difficult to find quality special education teachers to fill these critically needed positions (Holdheide et al., 2010). Special education teachers often co-teach with general education teachers to deliver substantial instruction within the same space to a group of special education and non-special education students (Friend & Cook, 1995).

Although there appears to be an abundance of general education teachers available, they do not have the training required to understand the diverse needs of students who have been identified as requiring special education services. Holdheide and Reschly (2010) found that 84% of state and local administrators reported that special education teachers require expertise and skills that general education teachers typically do not have. A separation between special education and general education would be appropriate.

Although general educators and special educators are both classified as teachers, their education, roles, and responsibilities can be very different. This begs the question, are special education teachers really teachers? Evaluation tools designed for general education teachers are used to evaluate special education teachers although their roles differ significantly (Moya & Gay, 1982). Holdheide and Reschly (2010) found that only 32% of state and local administrators agreed or strongly agreed that general education teachers and special education teachers should be evaluated using the same tool. The intensity and responsibility differs between special education teachers and general

education teachers (Holdheide et. al, 2010). Evaluation systems have been developed to address overall teaching skills and competencies and do not differentiate in the criteria or consideration for special education teachers who work to serve the needs of students with varying disabilities and classifications (Chait, 2009a; Toch & Rothman, 2008).

Appropriate feedback focused on the respective roles and responsibilities of special education teachers could support the growth and retention of special education teachers.

### Statement of the Problem

There is an urgent need for valid and reliable evaluation models that support and foster professional growth of all teachers (Benedict, Thomas, Kimerling, & Leko, 2013). Evaluation tools designed for general education teachers are used to evaluate special education teachers although their roles differ significantly (Moya & Gay, 1982). Since special education teachers and general education teachers have differing roles, special education teachers need evaluation tools and criteria related to their roles and responsibilities (Moya & Gay). There are studies that have examined the effectiveness of the evaluation process for teachers, but studies examining the evaluation of special education teachers are scarce. The purpose of this study was to examine the current evaluation tools, systems, and criteria used for the performance appraisals of special education teachers in order to explore what changes, if any, could contribute to an improved performance appraisal tool, system, and criteria used to evaluate special education teachers.

### Background

Special education teaching is a field that has a very high turnover (Ingersoll, 2002). The field of special education is challenged with the task of developing a qualified

workforce and creating work environments that sustain special educators' involvement and commitment (Billingsley, 2004). The work environment for special education teachers can sometimes be ever changing, which may increase the difficulty in recruiting for special education teacher positions. There seems to be far more general education teacher candidates than there are special education candidates. Some reasons offered have been related to the workload, salary compensation, and support. Districts across the nation face shortages between 9% and 11% yearly (Leko & Smith, 2010).

The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) requirements are for all students to have a highly qualified teacher; however, it has become increasingly difficult for school districts to hire candidates with the minimum qualification for teaching certifications. Policymakers and administrators have been concerned about the special education teacher shortage for decades. Teacher quality is considered one of the most significant predictors of student success, but many school districts have demonstrated difficulty in focusing on quality due to the shortage (Goldhaber & Anthony, 2004). Teacher quality is often determined and impacted based on a performance appraisal to evaluate effectiveness (Medley & Coker, 1987; Milanowski, 2004).

Due to the shortage of recruiting special education teachers, some states have minimized and reduced their criteria for teaching licensure which has encouraged a plethora of alternative routes to teacher certification and the classroom (Brownell, Ross, Colón, & McCallum, 2005). Alternative programs to teaching are offered in lieu of the traditional four year programs. The alternative programs typically are shorter programs sometimes consisting of a short summer program before full teacher responsibilities are



expected (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow 2002). Darling-Hammond et al. also found that those who took an alternative route to teaching rated their preparedness for teaching lower than those who took the traditional routes. Although alternative routes to teaching are commonly used to reduce the impact of the shortage in special education, there are concerns. Alternative teacher certification programs came at a time when teacher accountability is a large focus from the federal, state, and district level.

Some districts have reduced services and increased the sizes of the special education classroom to address the lack of qualified teachers (Billingsley, 1993). Issues such as too many students and increased documentation negatively impacts and weakens special education teachers' ability to be effective and identify the internal perks that are important to them (Billingsley, Pyecha, Smith-Davis, Murray, & Hendricks, 1995). The shortage has detrimental implications and effects on students with disabilities. Some of the implications that penalize students with disabilities include inadequate educational experiences for students, reduced student achievement levels, and insufficient competence of graduates in the workplace (Darling-Hammond & Scanlan, 1996). Heward (2003), stated "certain contemporary notions about teaching and learning hinder the effectiveness of special education as experienced by students and their families" (p.186). On average, students with disabilities perform 32 points below their general education peers (Cortiella, 2007).

Special education teacher preparation programs were to focus on teaching "future teachers to learn to respond on an individual basis to children who have limitations in their learning capacity or significant variations in the manner in which they process information and retain knowledge and act upon the world" (Brown & Celeste, 2006 p.

474). Special education preparation programs have focused on preparing special education teachers to meet the diverse needs of their students. Many special education teachers teach across the curriculum and to multiple grade levels, although they have not been prepared in their education journey on how this should look (Kilgore, Griffin, Otis-Wilborn, & Winn, 2003). There is disagreement regarding teacher education programs not being challenging and not contributing to improved student achievement (Finn & Kanstroom, 2000; Walsh, 2001).

Ambiguity in the roles and responsibilities in the special education teacher position can impact teacher performance. Special education teachers can have many responsibilities which can be overwhelming and sometimes competing against each other (Wasburn-Moses, 2005). Some may teach within an early childhood setting, while others may teach elementary, middle school, or high school. Special education teachers may offer services in a co-teaching or inclusion environment, resource, or a self-contained classroom. There may be similarities and differences between each of the positions, settings, and level of teaching; however, there are other factors such as location and size of special education populations that impact responsibilities (McLaughlin, Embler, Hernandez, & Caron, 2005).

Although special education teacher roles are different from general education teachers, there are also variations between special education teacher roles. Special education teachers function in different roles as self-contained teachers, co-teachers, and resource teachers. Special education teachers often co-teach with general education teachers to deliver substantial instruction within the same space to a group of special education and non-special education students (Friend & Cook, 1995). Idol (2006) found

that most classroom teachers want a co-teacher to help with the instruction and classroom functions although they believe that students with disabilities are best helped when they are removed from the classroom to get assistance from a resource teacher. Resource teachers pull students out of their general education classroom to provide support that is generally surrounding the grade level curriculum. Special education resource teachers typically provide services in a setting away from the general education classroom to provide specific instruction on a regular basis (Idol). A special education teacher who participates in co-teaching and resource collaborate with the general education teacher. Resource collaboration typically focuses on ensuring that the resource room instruction supports the general education curriculum in order to have the skills to transfer and impact performance in the general education classroom (Idol).

Some special education teachers have difficulty with the changing roles and shifts in responsibilities. Heward (2003) stated, “the special educator’s primary responsibilities are to design, implement, and evaluate instruction that helps students with disabilities acquire, generalize, and maintain knowledge and skills to improve the quality of their lives in school, home, community, and workplace settings” (p.186). In addition to the teaching responsibilities, special education teachers must also develop Individualized Education Plans (IEP), evaluate students who are suspected of having a disability, and complete behavioral assessments (Billingsley, 2004). Special education teachers, legally have an obligation to develop appropriate IEPs for students based on their individual special needs, to advocate for the individuals with special needs, and to maximize the amount of time they spend in general education classrooms (Youngs, Jones, & Low, 2011). Special education teachers may also be responsible for aligning their instruction

with that of general education teachers. Role problems have been found to create stress in special education teachers (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001) and decrease their job satisfaction (Cross & Billingsley, 1994; Gersten et al.).

General education and special education teacher positions are challenged with the tasks of ensuring that all children learn. Although the challenge is equally distributed, the process to accomplish this challenge varies. Although there are some similarities, the differences between the roles and responsibilities of general education and special education teachers should be noted. The instruction provided by special education teachers is typically different from the structures of general education teachers and may include systematic instruction, interventions, and highly repetitive instruction; which require specialized skills (Benedict et al., 2013).

Special education and general education teachers may have some responsibilities that are identical, but they also have drastically different roles and responsibilities related to the populations that they serve. Moya and Gay (1982) contend that due to the differences in the roles and responsibilities, the evaluation of general education and special education teachers should also be different. Appropriate feedback and evaluation is needed for special education teachers (Moya & Gay). Although some of the responsibilities of special education teachers are similar to general education teachers, there are also very separate responsibilities that should be noted (Garcia & Potemski, 2009; McGraner, 2009). The intensity and responsibility differs between special education and general education teachers, however evaluation tools designed for general education teachers are used to evaluate special education teachers (Holdheide et al., 2010; Moya & Gay).

The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) indicate that all teachers should be evaluated and the evaluation should include student achievement. The ambiguous roles of special education teachers may create some significant hurdles in accomplishing this. Evaluations are typically used throughout educational organizations to increase accountability on all levels. Evaluations should be based on the roles and responsibilities that are assigned to the fulfilled positions. The federal government pressures states and districts to ensure that every child has a highly qualified teacher who demonstrates the ability to ensure student learning, with all the performance appraisals including student achievement data.

Some states have incorporated state-wide evaluation systems to create uniformity when assessing a teacher's effectiveness and performance. Teacher evaluations have been found to be an advantageous tool in increasing teacher effectiveness and student achievement. When considering the benefits of teacher evaluations, it is imperative to review the tool and criteria used as well as process and procedures. There are many factors that have been found to impact the value of an evaluation. These factors include the relatedness of the criteria used as it pertains to the actual roles and responsibilities, the type of procedures such as number of observations, and the level of comfort and knowledge of the assessor (Kyriakides, Demetriou, & Charalambous, 2006).

Evaluations are often used to make personnel and compensation decisions. This practice drastically impacts special education teachers. According to Milanowski (2004), there are consequences such as termination for poor evaluations and advancement for positive evaluations. Various evaluation approaches have been used to ascertain the best assessment of teacher performance. Benedict et al. (2013) stated, "there is an urgent need

for evaluation models that support all teachers in fostering professional growth and are valid and reliable” (p. 61).

Improved tools, processes, and procedures in teacher evaluation will increase teacher efficacy and thereby increase student achievement (Dolmans, Wolfhagen, Scherpbrier, & Van Der Vleuten, 2003; Moya & Gay, 1982). Holdheide et al. (2010) stated, “comprehensive teacher evaluation frameworks that are fair, objective, reliable, transparent, focused on instruction, and linked to professional development hold promise in improving the effectiveness of special education teachers” (p. 4). Evaluation ratings are used to demonstrate teacher performance and can drastically impact personnel and compensation determination by impacting termination, continued employment, and even merit pay (Blanton, Sindelar, & Correa, 2006; Little, 2009).

Administrators do not always feel that they have the expertise required to appropriately evaluate special education teachers. Principals demonstrate some limitations in their ability to adequately rate teachers’ performance regardless of general education or special education teacher title (Eady & Zepeda, 2007; Jacob & Lefgren, 2006). In a study conducted by Holdheide and Reschly (2010), 92% of state and local administrators agreed or strongly agreed that evidence-based practices should be a part of the special education teacher evaluation.

It is increasingly important that we focus on evaluation systems that consider the diverse teacher roles and responsibilities that are experienced by special education teachers. Most of the research that has been conducted regarding special education teachers focus on self-efficacy, the certification process, and the experiences that special

education teachers have had (Blanton et al., 2006; Carlson, Lee, & Schroll, 2004; Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000; Greenwald, Hedges & Lane, 1996).

Although evaluation systems can serve multiple purposes, most evaluation systems have been developed to address overall teaching skills and competencies and do not differentiate in the criteria or consideration for special education teachers who work to serve the needs of students with varying disabilities and classifications (Chait, 2009b; Toch & Rothman, 2008). Many evaluations do not have established processes or procedures, which may result in inconsistencies in the benefits associated with teacher evaluations (Blanton et al., 2006; Stuhlman, Hamre, Downer & Pianta, n.d.).

Moya and Gay (1982) suggested that evaluators develop a basic philosophy regarding evaluation of special education teachers using the special education teacher job description to inform criteria for the evaluation. Moya and Gay found that many districts used the same evaluation criteria for both special and general education teachers. Evaluations are valuable to professional growth and development. Moya and Gay suggested that differences between general and special education teachers' job descriptions, competencies, and character attributes demonstrated the need for special considerations related to the learning environment that special education teachers teach in should be explored.

When utilizing student achievement data as a component of the teacher evaluation process, there is little to no research on the impact that student achievement data of students with disabilities have on the evaluation process of special education teachers. Students with disabilities often require additional support through accommodations and modifications to increase their ability to demonstrate their learning. According to

Holdheide et al. (2010), students with disabilities' scores can drastically impact a teacher evaluation if student achievement is a strong factor.

The principal was named primarily responsible for completing the special education teacher evaluations (Moya & Gay, 1982). Administrators devote a significant amount of time to teacher evaluation; however, they do not perceive the tools to be effective (Kersten & Israel, 2005). Further research is recommended to examine the reduced confidence in the evaluation methods (Kersten & Israel, 2005; Moya & Gay).

The evaluation of special education teachers can be impacted by the value of the tool or process used. It can also be impacted by the perception or ability of the evaluator to accurately rate the performance of a teacher. Evaluations can be very time-consuming for both the evaluator and the teacher being evaluated. There are many factors that impact the evaluation of a teacher, but there is a heightened impact related to the tool used in evaluation of special education teachers.

#### Research Questions

This study investigated the following questions:

1. What differences are there in the systematic approach to evaluating special education teachers in the Midwest?
2. What differences exist between evaluation tools utilized for special education teachers and general education teachers in the Midwest?
3. What differences exist between the job descriptions and performance appraisal tools used for special education teachers in the Midwest?



## Description of Terms

*Highly qualified.* Federal legislation status that requires a teacher to have at least a bachelor's degree; be licensed to teach in a state, demonstrate a high level of competency in their subject matter, and use of an individual professional development plan (Lu, Shen, & Poppink, 2007).

*Perception.* Viewpoints, opinions, intentions, and attitudes (Gurgur, & Uzuner, 2010).

*Evaluation process.* Process of assessing that safeguard of academic standard in an institution to maintain the standard of teaching for the sake of the students (Terpstra & Honoree, 2009).

*Charlotte Danielson Framework.* A teacher evaluation framework developed by Charlotte Danielson that consists of four domains focusing on planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities (Danielson, 2013; Viviano, 2012).

*Co-teaching.* The partnering of a general education teacher and a special education teacher or another specialist for the purpose of jointly delivering instruction to a diverse group of students, including those with disabilities or other special needs, in a general education setting and in a way that flexibly and deliberately meets their learning needs (Friend, 2007).

*Resource.* "Any setting in the school to which students come to receive specific instruction on a regularly scheduled basis, while receiving the majority of their education elsewhere" (Idol, 2006 p. 78).

## Significance of the Study

The value of special education teacher evaluation has experienced a significant increase after the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) was enacted. The federal government has challenged states to improve the evaluation procedures used for all teachers to ensure that students are receiving instruction from highly qualified and effective teachers. Many states have minimal evaluation criteria for teachers regardless of their position, title, or duties. There may also be flexibility in the process and procedures that are utilized by different districts or schools. Since the evaluation tools that typically are used do not have any accommodations for teachers with diverse roles such as special education teachers, all teachers are measured using the same criteria. The criteria may not align with the standards for their profession or their primary roles, responsibilities, or job descriptions. This study examined the current evaluation tools and systematic approaches used in the evaluation of special education teachers in the Midwest. The relatedness of the special education teacher job descriptions and performance appraisal tools were measured to examine alignment. Suggested criteria were also provided. This study will contribute to the need for additional research in special education teacher evaluation.

## Process to Accomplish

This study was based on the qualitative descriptive research model. An email containing a formal letter was sent to 863 public schools in the Midwest to request evaluation tool templates used for the performance appraisals of special education and general education teachers. The job description for the special education teacher position was also requested. A completed questionnaire developed to ascertain the systematic approach used for special education teacher evaluation was requested from each district's

Human Resources Director. All requested documents were assigned a number code. A purposive convenience sample method was used based on the districts that returned the requested information. The sample was divided into two groups, those who indicated that the same tool was used for special education and general education teacher evaluation and those districts that indicated that different tools were used to evaluate special education and general education teachers. A simple random sampling method was then used to select 26 useable participants to serve as the sample for this study using the online tool Research Randomizer. Of the participants, 21 had the same tool used for the evaluation of special education and general education teachers and five had different tools used to evaluate special education and general education teachers.

The formal request letter introducing the purpose of the study was sent via email to each public school district in the sample area within the Midwest. The formal request letter explaining the purpose of the project and requesting completion of the District Demographic Questionnaire; special education and general education teacher evaluation templates; and special education teacher job descriptions was embedded in the formal request letter sent via email to the Human Resources Director of each district. If contact information for the human resources director was not available or did not exist, the request was sent to a person with a positional title such as superintendent or assistant superintendent. The formal request letter included a link where participants could complete the systematic approach to special education teacher evaluation questionnaire and upload the requested documents.

The semi-structured questionnaire was developed to obtain demographic information from each district and consisted of 12 questions with choices and an optional

field for an open response related to the district's focus on the systematic approach to the evaluation of special education teachers. The questionnaire was used to obtain information regarding the variety of tools that were used for the general education and special education teacher evaluations. A link was provided at the end of the survey to attach the special education and general education teacher evaluation templates and their respective job descriptions.

The systematic approach to special education teacher evaluation questionnaire was generated using Google Forms®. The link to the Google Forms® containing the systematic approach to special education teacher evaluation questionnaire was included on the website and sent to the representative of each school district in the population. The questionnaire consisted of 12 questions designed to elicit demographic informational data related to the systematic approach to special education teacher evaluation for each school district. The questions asked in the survey can be found in Appendix A.

A follow-up interview was conducted with the Human Resources Director using a subset of five school districts in each group within the sample participants. Convenience sampling method was used to identify the five districts within the subset that consented to a follow-up interview. The interviews were conducted via WebEx. Three follow-up questions were asked in order to gather additional descriptive information regarding the school district's systematic approach to the evaluation process for special education teachers. The follow-up interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

The response from the systematic approach to the special education teacher evaluation questionnaire received from each district was qualitatively analyzed for content. The responses were coded. The closed question response codes were used to

identify themes and were assigned to prefigured categories. The frequency of the codes was tallied to determine the most prevalent responses to the least prevalent responses. The open ended responses were used to identify themes and were used to generate emergent categories. The frequency of responses was tallied to determine the most prevalent responses to the least prevalent. The themes were used to describe the most used and least used systematic approaches to evaluating special education teachers in the Midwest.

The responses from the sample subset interviews were used to enhance the description of the systematic approach to special education teacher evaluation. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The interview responses were coded and assigned emergent categories. The responses were used to further describe information related to the systematic approach for the sample subset.

The evaluation tools and responses received from each district were qualitatively analyzed. Using the tools submitted by each district, each special education and general education teacher evaluation was analyzed using content analysis. Memos were used to note initial ideas in each special education and general education tool received. Memos were used to assign emergent codes to the areas assessed on the special education and general education teacher evaluation tools. The codes were aggregated and categorized to identify themes in the areas assessed on the special education and general education teacher evaluations. The themes were used to comprehensively describe the areas that were assessed in the general education and special education teacher evaluation templates. The themes were tabulated in order to describe the themes that emerged the most in the special education and general education teacher evaluation tool templates.

The themes were listed in order of most assessed areas to least assessed areas in order to describe what differences exist between evaluation tools utilized for special education teachers and general education teachers in the Midwest. A listing of the most assessed areas to the least assessed areas for the special education and general education teacher evaluation tool templates can be found in Appendix D.

The job descriptions provided by the districts were qualitatively analyzed to identify content themes related to the roles and responsibilities of a special education teacher according to his or her job descriptions. The job description for each district was analyzed, coded, and assigned an emergent categorical theme. The special education teacher job descriptions submitted by each district were analyzed using content analysis. Memos were used to note initial ideas in each special education teacher job description received for the sample. Memos were used to assign emergent codes to the themes used in the special education teacher job descriptions. The codes were aggregated and categorized to identify themes in the job descriptors used in the special education teacher job descriptions. The themes were used to describe the areas included in the job descriptions for special education teacher job descriptions. The thematic frequencies were tabulated in order to describe the most prevalent themes in the special education teacher job descriptions. The descriptive data obtained from the job descriptions were compared with the descriptive data obtained from the special education teacher evaluation tools to describe what difference exists between the special education teacher evaluation tool and the special education teacher job description. A 2x2 matrix was used to display the similarities and differences between the special education evaluation tool and the special education teacher job descriptions. The most frequent themes identified between the

special education teacher job descriptions and the special education teacher evaluations were used to describe potential themes that should be included in the tool used to evaluate special education teachers.

### Summary

Teacher evaluations have been found to be an effective tool in improving the practice and effectiveness of teachers. Although there is little known regarding the evaluations of special education teachers, Moya and Gay (1982), found that specific information that encompassed criteria as it related to the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers should be used. Although special education teachers do teach, their roles and responsibilities are different from general education teachers. Evaluation tools that are aligned with the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers may be beneficial in fostering growth and professional development and thereby impact student achievement. Identification of criteria that can be used to effectively rate the performance of special education teachers may impact the value of the feedback that a special education teacher receives and finds valuable in crafting his or her skills.

Chapter two will present a review of the limited literature available about special education teacher evaluation. The research conducted by Moya and Gay (1982) is one of the only research projects that focused on the needs of special education teacher evaluations. The literature review focused on the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers. Additionally, the literature addressed the need to differentiate the evaluation tool used for the performance appraisal of special education and general education teachers. Finally, the literature provided an overview of the systematic approaches used for the evaluation of teachers.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

According to Brandt, Mathers, Oliva, Brown-Sims, and Hess, (2007) “only two studies have examined teacher evaluation policies on a large scale” (p. 2). Most of the literature found was related to the overall theme of teacher evaluation and the need for teacher evaluations to include student achievement data (Holdheide et al., 2010). Rockoff (2004) found that “test scores do not capture all facets of student learning” (p. 251). There is limited research conducted on performance evaluations for special education teachers (Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000). The evaluation of the special education teacher can be impacted by the value of the tool or process used (Medley & Coker, 1987; Conderman & Katsiyannis, 2002; Milanowski, 2004; Vannest & Hagan-Burke, 2010).

Elizabeth, May, and Chee (2008) conducted a qualitative study to build a comprehensive model of teacher perception of their successes. Elizabeth et al. identified 13 personal teacher qualities that teachers should possess although the results indicated that the qualities may be based on cultural norms. The qualities that Elizabeth et al. indicated for teachers included caring for students, interest in the subject taught, patience, a sense of humor, enthusiasm, respectfulness, being responsible, facing adversities with courage, and not giving up easily, self-reflection, being fair, being mission-minded, attaching importance to moral education with a positive influence on students’ values and attitudes, and holding individual teaching beliefs. Although teacher qualities are



important, evaluation systems should be systems to improve accountability and improvement that can be measured by teacher performance and impact (Stronge, 2006).

Teacher evaluation can also be impacted by the perception or ability of the evaluator to accurately rate the teacher's performance. Evaluations can be very time-consuming for both the evaluator and the teacher being evaluated (Blanton et al., 2006). There is more research available regarding the teacher evaluation without specific regards to special education teacher evaluation components or consideration (Holdheide et al., 2010; Howard & McColskey, 2001; McCaffrey, Lockwood, Koretz, Hamilton, 2003).

#### Educational Governance

The No Child Behind Act (2001) is designed to create reform in America's schools. The No Child Left Behind Act Title II, Part A describes the need to increase the achievement for all students and encourages improved student performance through improved teacher and principal quality and ensures that all teachers are highly qualified. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) was developed to increase the accountability and growth of students with disabilities. Together the No Child Left Behind Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act have joined to ensure that all students are increasing in their academic achievements. Teachers must have a bachelor's degree, full state certification or licensure, and prove that they know each subject they teach (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Although the No Child Left Behind Act seeks to ensure that all students have high quality instruction from qualified teachers Cruickshank and Haefele, (2001) contended that effectiveness can be defined in many ways.

There have been earlier versions of these present day reforms that promise a better outcome for the children of today. Past reforms in education have not been successful and have rendered disappointing results (Clark & Astuto, 1994). At times, educational reform has been found to deliver complete failure (Pogrow, 1996) from the targeted action. One reason that has been offered for reform failure has been related to the lack of connection or impact that the reform has on teachers (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000).

One criterion in the federal legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) is for each student to have a highly qualified teacher (No Child Left Behind Act). Teacher quality is considered one of the most significant predictors of student success (Goldhaber & Anthony 2004). The success of education must be measured through teacher effectiveness because we must go beyond just program design and development and look to the quality of those who are primarily responsible for implementation (Stronge, 1993).

The No Child Left Behind Act was designed to increase accountability by ensuring that states have tools that adequately set expectations regarding student growth for all students including those in subgroups such as special education. (Holdheide et al., 2010; No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). Benedict et al. (2013) stated, “there is an urgent need for evaluation models that support all teachers in fostering professional growth and are valid and reliable” (p. 62).

Similar to other management models “educational governance and the prevailing climate of outcomes-driven economic rationalism in which such models operate policy activity related to issues of: accountability, assessment, standards monitoring and benchmarking, performance indicators, quality assurance, teacher quality, school and

teacher effectiveness, are widespread” (Ingvarson & Rowe, 2007, p. 1). Teacher evaluation is required by the No Child Left Behind Act (No Child Left Behind, 2001; Stronge, 2006). Teacher evaluations have been found to be a beneficial tool in increasing teacher effectiveness (Blanton et al., 2006; Howard & McColskey, 2001; Little, 2009; Stronge, 1995).

### Purpose of Teacher Evaluations

Most states have adopted state mandated teacher evaluation systems to increase the objective assessments of teacher performance to address individual, school, and district accountability (Holdheide et al., 2010). Evaluation systems can be used as meaningless bureaucratic necessities or as catalysts for improved teaching and learning (Davis, Ellett, & Annunziata, 2002). However, Stronge & Tucker (2003) contend that we cannot measure the quality of teachers without quality evaluation systems. Although evaluations can be deemed as subjective (Rockoff, 2004), evaluations have been found to be vital in improving teacher effectiveness (Howard & McColskey 2001; Stronge, 1995).

Teacher evaluations can be used for many purposes. In many states student achievement on high stakes testing is a component of teacher evaluation (McCaffrey et al., 2003). Evaluation ratings are used to demonstrate teacher performance (Blanton et al., 2006; Little, 2009) and can drastically impact personnel and compensation determination. Milanowski (2004) contended that teacher performance evaluations can also be used to determine pay incentives since there is a relationship between teacher performance and student achievement. Evaluations often are used for dismissal from teaching positions and remediation of teacher performance concerns (Ellett & Garland, 1987; Ellett et al., 2002). More than ever before, current legislation and public policy

almost forces a premium on high quality teacher evaluation systems (Stronge, 2006). Sanders and Horn (1998) contended that there are benefits of having an effective teacher over an ineffective teacher.

Teacher evaluations have been found to be an advantageous tool in increasing teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Teacher quality is considered one of the most significant predictors of student success (Goldhaber & Anthony 2004). According to Moya and Gay (1982), teacher evaluation should be viewed as “a positive valuing process and change agent” (p. 40). Teacher efficacy can be impacted by evaluation (Medley & Coker, 1987; Milanowski, 2004). When considering the benefits of teacher evaluations, it is imperative to review the tool and criteria used as well as the evaluation process and procedures. There are many factors such as relatedness of the criteria used as it pertains to the actual roles and responsibilities, the type of procedures such as the number of observations, and the level of comfort and knowledge of the assessor have been found to impact the value of an evaluation (Goldhaber & Anthony; Medley & Coker, 1987). Teacher evaluations can render practices related to what evaluation tools should be used, how often to conduct the evaluation, and what evaluation methods should be used in the process (Brandt et al., 2007).

Although evaluations are beneficial, one barrier may be the level of reflection and the perception of the person being evaluated. When asked to rate their skill, special education teachers were less confident and rated themselves lower on their skills than the general education teachers (Sweeney & Twedt, 1993). Perception of strengths and deficiencies can further be complicated by the teacher preparation program (Nougaret, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 2005). Kyriakides et al. (2006) further asserted that “teachers

tend to adopt an attitude mirroring the educational system in which they are expected to operate” (p. 17) positive and confident environments could render positive and confident teachers.

Reflective practice can be beneficial to teachers. Holding and Fraser (2013) found that there was a statistical difference that indicated that National Board Certified teachers were favored for their learning environment, attitude, and student achievement when compared to the attitudes and achievement of non-National Board Certified teachers. National Board Certified Teachers were found to demonstrate increased reflectiveness and response to the needs of their students in order to improve effectiveness. Expert teachers learn best from experience, observations, and reflection (Tucker, Stronge, & Gareis, 2002). Evaluations can be a beneficial way to increase reflective practice in teaching.

Taylor and Tyler (2012) conducted a quantitative study to examine the practice-based assessment approach to teacher evaluation. The analysis sample consisted of 105 teachers. Taylor and Tyler found that teachers' effectiveness improved the year that they were evaluated and the subsequent year. Teachers with the most room for improvement who received the most feedback demonstrated the most significant gains. When teacher evaluations are completed with fidelity, most teachers tend to change their behavior. Taylor and Tyler noted that most of the teachers in the sample were being evaluated for the first time although they had been employed with the same school for a number of years. Kimball, White, Milanowski, and Borman (2004) conducted a study that examined the relationship between teacher evaluation and student achievement as measured on state

and district assessments. Kimball et al. found a positive correlation between student performances on the norm referenced tests and the teacher evaluation score.

Holdheide et al. (2010) stated “comprehensive teacher evaluation frameworks that are fair, objective, reliable, transparent, focused on instruction, and linked to professional development hold promise in improving the effectiveness of special education teachers” (p. 4). There is research available regarding the quality and effectiveness of teachers without specific regard to special education teachers. While there is very limited research about quality and effectiveness with special education teachers, it is known that improved tools, processes, and procedures in teacher evaluation will increase teacher efficacy and thereby increase student achievement (Dolmans et al., 2003; Moya & Gay, 1982).

Evaluations are often used to make personnel and compensation decisions which may drastically impact special education teachers. According to Milanowski (2004), there are consequences such as termination for poor evaluations and advancement for positive evaluations.

#### Evaluation Processes and Procedures

Various evaluation approaches have been used to ascertain the best assessment of teacher performance. There are two types of teacher evaluations: those that assess teacher learning and those that assess teacher competence (Marzano, 2012). Stronge (2006) stated, “the most frequently cited purpose of personnel evaluation are accountability and professional growth” (p 2). Summative evaluations have the goal of measuring accountability, while formative evaluations are typically used for teacher improvement (Kyriakides et al., 2006). Although evaluations serve different purposes, the same evaluation system can cover multiple purposes (McGreal, 1988). Various tools are used

depending on the state laws and individual school leader preferences. Six commonly used evaluation methods are observation checklists, peer review, portfolios, teaching standards, Charlotte Danielson Framework, and value added measurement (Benedict et al., 2013; Danielson, 2013). There are pros and cons of the various evaluation methods such as limited research and reduced statistical data (Koretz, 2008).

Blanton (2006) conducted a qualitative study that examined the approaches to assessment of special education teacher quality. Blanton examined the use of observation measures, process-product observational measures, evaluation checklists, professional standards large scale surveys, and commercially available observation systems approach to evaluating teachers. Blanton found that one model of evaluation did not render better results over another model, but instead the purpose of the evaluation determined which model was more appropriate. Blanton contended that various forms and models of teacher quality evaluation should be used to get the best outcome from an evaluation. Blanton et al. (2006), asserted that it is "more important for assessment systems to reliably differentiate competent and incompetent teachers" (p.125) as it related to the performance of special education teachers. Future studies should focus on validation of measures of teacher quality.

There are different processes that are used for teacher evaluations. Pre-conference, observations, and post-conferences are the most common methods for teacher evaluations (Stronge, 2007). One-time evaluation observations typically are used for teacher evaluations (Medley & Coker, 1987). The Educational Researcher Service (1988) conducted a study and found that 99.8% of American public school administrators use direct classroom observation as the primary data collection technique. Other methods of

evaluation include teacher work samples (Schalock, 1998), interview protocols (Flowers & Hancock, 2003), and portfolio assessments (Gellman, 1992). Evaluations should include more than one data source in order to get a full view of the teacher's overall performance (Stronge, 2007).

Blanton et al. (2006) found that time and expertise of principals who evaluate teachers may be problematic. There has been criticism regarding the evaluations where the administrator is the only one collecting data regarding teacher performance. (Peterson, 2000; Stronge & Tucker, 2003). Some principals feel that they want to have good relationships with their teachers and therefore are reluctant to criticize the teachers about their performance (Brandt et al., 2007). There are many studies that indicate that principals are not accurate raters of teacher performance (Johnson, 1997).

Range, Young, and Hvidston (2013) conducted a quantitative study that measured teachers' perception of preferences between the pre-conference and post-conference components of their evaluation. Range et al. found that teachers perceived conversations about how students would be assessed as the most beneficial component of the pre-conference. All components of the post conference were determined to be important based on the teacher responses; however, the constructive feedback was rated as the most important. Range et al. found that non-tenured teachers were influenced by situations that built trust, sharing of the observation report, constructive feedback, identified standards, sequence for the conference, and areas for growth. Tenured teachers were influenced by the post conference outcomes as it related to linking to professional development opportunities and receiving positive comments. Range et al. suggested future research should focus on formative supervision procedures.



Doolittle (1994) suggested the use of artifacts and portfolios can be beneficial in evaluating the performance of teachers. Chou (2012) conducted a qualitative study to explore the relationship between teachers, technology, and evaluations. Chou found that teachers accepted electronic portfolios and the use of the electronic portfolios positively influenced teacher effectiveness (Chou) and were useful in helping teacher to self-reflect, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and to further enhance their professional growth (Tucker et al., 2002).

Ebmeier and Nicklaus (1999) conducted a qualitative study that estimated the impact of collaborative supervision on the affective variables of commitment to teaching, commitment to school, trust in administration, trust in teachers, and desire for collaboration. The impact of collaborative supervision on the personal decision variables of efficacy expectations and outcome expectations were also examined. The research conducted by Ebmeier and Nicklaus revealed that peer implementation of the collaborative model impacted the teachers' desire to collaborate and the teachers' commitment to teaching. However, when the peer implementation was compared to the principals' implementation of the collaborative treatment significant increases on the measures were noted. Ebmeier and Nicklaus reported that teachers who worked with the principals believed that the study was more than just an experimental program, while the peer implementation group did not appear to take their process as serious as the principal implementation group.

Teachers teach in different teaching situations. Dolmans et al. (2003) conducted a study to report the development, validity, and reliability of a feedback instrument to evaluate teaching behaviors and effectiveness during small group instruction. A pilot

study was originally used to construct the development of the instrument using 25 students and 25 teachers. Confirmatory factor analysis was used and determined that the instrument was fairly valid and reliable. The teachers were provided with the feedback from the developed instrument. The feedback provided was determined to be rich and descriptive data based on the individual needs of the teachers. Dolmans et al. suggested further research focusing on the impact of the feedback received by teachers and increased teacher behavior.

Although feedback may be important in changing teacher effectiveness and behaviors, there are also circumstances that can impact the benefit of feedback. Maslow and Kelley (2012) conducted a qualitative study that examined the feedback given through the teacher evaluation process to teachers in diverse high schools. Maslow and Kelley found that although each of the schools served a difficult population and had their respective areas of focus, significant variation existed across the schools in their use of teacher evaluation. Maslow and Kelley asserted that teacher evaluation and feedback can be a beneficial tool, but the right conditions including shared belief, high expectations, collaborative professional environment, and a safe and orderly school must also be established in order to focus on teacher evaluation and increased student achievement.

Kersten and Israel (2005) conducted a qualitative study that examined if school administrators perceive certain evaluation approaches to be more effective than others. Kersten and Israel surveyed 63 kindergarten through eighth grade school administrators in the Northern Cook County area of Chicago to inquire about what tool was used to evaluate teachers and the relationship that the tool has with student achievement. Kersten and Israel found that the administrators used post conferences, pre-conferences, and

narratives for the evaluation procedure of non-tenured teachers but often did not complete pre-conference meetings or observations for tenured teachers.

The administrators in the study conducted by Kersten and Israel (2005) did not perceive the evaluation methods to be highly effective. Kersten and Israel found that administrators spent 10 or more hours of time on evaluating non-tenured teachers; whereas they spent five or more hours on tenured teachers. Kersten and Israel found that administrators devoted a significant amount of time to teacher evaluation although they do not perceive the tools to be effective. Further research recommended examining the reduced confidence in the evaluation methods.

The evaluation model can impact perceptions about evaluations. Kyriakides et al. (2006) used descriptive analysis to explore teachers' attitudes of the criteria from the teacher effectiveness research. Kyriakides et al. found that the working process model was the most appropriate model for formative and summative evaluations. The analysis revealed statistical significant differences and that teachers' perception of formative evaluation was more important than the summative evaluation because the teachers felt less threatened by the feedback received from peers (Kyriakides et al, 2006).

Kyriakides et al. (2006) suggested future research should focus on a qualitative approach to the criteria used for formative and summative evaluations. Kyriakides et al. asserted that "teachers should be involved in the design of an evaluation system attempting to measure their effectiveness" (p. 17). Kyriakides et al. further asserted that "teachers tend to adopt an attitude mirroring the educational system in which they are expected to operate" (p. 17). Evaluations are vital (Davis et al., 2002).

## The Need for Evaluator Competency

The competency and perception of the evaluator of teacher performance can drastically impact the validity and benefit of the evaluation system used to assess teacher performance (Goldhaber & Anthony, 2004; Gun, 2012; Medley & Coker, 1987). Tollefson, Lee, and Webber (2001) found that teachers perceived a reduction in the qualifications for evaluators to make legitimate judgments about their effectiveness which seems to lead to questioning the validity and reliability of the evaluation tool being used. Although principals are often the person who is responsible for evaluating teacher performance, Johnson (1997) found that the principals demonstrate reduced accuracy when rating teacher performance. Rockoff (2004) stated that “principals’ opinions of teacher quality is correlated with student test scores” (p. 251). However, Blanton et al. (2006) found that a principal’s ability to evaluate the performance of teachers may be problematic. Kocak (2006) suggested that teacher evaluations conducted by superintendents are ineffective.

Rater perception can impact a teacher’s evaluation. Gun (2012) conducted a quantitative study that compared different observers’ views on the same lessons. Gun found that there is a clear difference between the interpretation and views of different observers evaluating the same lesson. The views of the students in the classroom seemed to be the furthest view from the other evaluators, followed by the view of the teachers themselves, the trainers, and then colleagues. Cash, Hamre, Pianta, and Myers, (2012) found that it is possible to train large numbers of raters to calibrate to an observation tool, although the rater's belief about teachers and children predicated the degree of calibration.

Yariv (2009b) conducted a qualitative study that examined the informal practices that lead to the identification of poor performing teachers. Yariv found that principals used their own professional and moral codes as criteria for evaluating teachers. Principals identified favorable traits as being sensitive to children and working enthusiastically. Negative traits that were identified included laziness. The principals reported that they relied on sporadic unplanned observations and discussions with students. Most principals reported that they held meetings to discuss performance with teachers. The principals reported that they preferred to discuss safe and less controversial issues when speaking with teachers. Evaluations may present some interference with principals being able to speak with teachers and to lead them instructionally (Brandt et al., 2007).

Painter (2000) conducted a qualitative study that examined the subjective beliefs of elementary and middle school principals regarding their ability, knowledge, and commitment to the evaluation of low performing teachers. Painter found that many principals did not believe that all teachers could succeed; although the administrators reported that the teachers improved in their performance. The administrators also reported that they used teacher performance evaluations for satisfactory change in performance, dismissal, transfer to a different position, or resignation. The administrators did not believe they had the skills needed to develop and implement a plan to help teachers nor the ability to inform teachers that there is a problem with their performance. The principals reported delayed responses related to the performance of the poor performing teachers as a result of the amount of time that must be devoted to the evaluation process, legal demands, social factors, and personal adequacy. Painter

suggested future implication for research should focus on how evaluator training may improve teacher evaluation processes.

Evaluators should be trained to assess teacher's performance (Seyfarth, 2002; Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin, & Bernstein, 1984). Sweeney (1992) conducted a study to determine the effects of training on the impact of teacher evaluations. All principals attended an evaluation training focusing on evaluation procedures. Teachers were asked to rate and compare their evaluation results after their administrator participated in the evaluation training to their evaluations from three years prior. Sweeney found that teachers rated their evaluations as higher quality after the evaluation training. Sweeney also found that the teachers reported a greater impact on their teaching practices and attitudes about teaching. There was more of a positive perception from teachers after the evaluation training than before they were trained. The attributes of the evaluator improved after the evaluation training. It was also noted that more time was spent on evaluation procedures than previously devoted. The feedback that teachers received after the principals attended the evaluation training was very beneficial.

Teacher perceptions of evaluation systems are not isolated to American schools. Rahman (2006) conducted a quantitative study that examined the attitudes of 232 Malay, Chinese, and Indian public school teachers in Malaysia. Rahman examined the effect that the cultural dimension of an ethnic origin had on teachers' attitudes about the new performance appraisal system used in Malaysia. Rahman found that all teachers regardless of the ethnicity reported less favorable attitudes towards the Malaysian performance appraisal system. The attitudes towards the appraisal system may have been impacted by power distance and a limited relationship between teachers and supervisors.

Most respondents did not prefer that feedback was provided in a public forum among other colleagues. Rahman found a correlation between the teachers' attitudes towards the appraisal system and their commitment to teaching.

Taut, Santelices, Araya, and Manzi (2011) conducted a study to examine the perception of teachers and school leaders as it related to the effects of the Chilean national evaluation system. Taut et al. found that the school leaders perceived the national evaluation system for teachers and schools had both positive and negative effects due to the level of accountability that was upheld using the system. Taut et al. also found that as teachers become more familiar with the procedures and the national evaluation system, the perception of the evaluation system shifts to a more positive viewpoint. The benefits in using the national evaluation system was that it improved teaching because teachers were required to be reflective regarding their practices, standard rating for teacher quality, and criteria for recognition of good teachers (Taut et al.). Although some schools used the evaluation results to identify mentor teachers, assign classes, and for marketing purposes, most school leaders reported that the procedures or process used did not impact them. The teachers felt like an active part of the evaluation process in the schools where the school leaders reported using the results, whereas the lower performing school leaders appeared to have more of a negative perception of the benefits of the national evaluation system as the evaluation procedures caused the leaders and teachers to focus on less important activities. Taut et al. suggested further research to focus on the formative aspect of the teacher evaluation system. Evaluator competency can contribute to the benefits of performance evaluations for teachers (Painter, 2000).

## Separation of the Teachers

It is increasingly important to focus on evaluation systems that consider the diverse teacher roles and responsibilities that are experienced by special education teachers (Holdheide et al., 2010). Most of the research that has been conducted regarding special education teachers focus on self-efficacy, the certification process, and the experiences that special education teachers have had (Blanton et al., 2006; Carlson et al., 2004; Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000; Greenwald et al., 1996). Although evaluation systems have been developed to address overall teaching skills and competencies, the evaluation systems do not differentiate in the criteria or consideration for special education teachers who work to serve the needs of students with varying disabilities and classifications (Chait, 2009a; Toch & Rothman, 2008). Many evaluations have been found to not have an established processes or procedures, which may result in inconsistencies in the benefits associated with teacher evaluations (Blanton et al., 2006; Stuhlman et al., n.d.).

Youngs et al. (2011) conducted a mixed methods study that determined the differences in the curricula, instructional, and role expectations between beginning general education and special education teachers. Although the general education teachers helped to define their roles and responsibilities, the data indicated that the special education teachers depended on their principals to assist with fostering positive relationships with general education teachers. Youngs et al. suggested that special education teachers be integrated in the school faculty and environment and define the special education teachers' role. Principals should ensure that beginning special education teachers have access to mentors and encourage inclusion of all. Youngs et al. suggested



further research to examine the curricular and role expectations of beginning special education teachers.

Evaluations are useful when they pertain to the tasks that teachers are involved in (Dolmanns et al., 2003). The intensity in the roles and responsibilities typically vary for teachers with different classification labels such as general education teacher and special education teacher (Holdheide et al. 2010). Evaluation tools designed for general education teachers are often used to evaluate special education teachers although their roles differ significantly (Moya & Gay, 1982).

Wasburn-Moses (2005) conducted a study and found that many special education teachers indicated that their top five responsibilities included managing student behavior, paperwork, working with general education teachers, making adaptations or providing accommodations, and consulting with students in their caseloads. Of the 191 teachers who were surveyed, teaching content skills such as reading, studying, and working with other professionals were lower in prevalence when discussing their major roles and responsibilities. The teachers reported that their major responsibilities had little to do with direct contact with students. Balance should be applied to the workloads of special education teachers as the quality of the program may be impacted (Conderman & Katsiyannis, 2002). The identity crisis and all-encompassing roles have left the question, is a special education teacher a teacher (Vannest & Hagan-Burke, 2010)?

Special education teachers can hold various positions with varying roles and responsibilities (Holdheide et al., 2010). In one given school or district there are general education teachers, special education teachers, reading teachers, and English language learner teachers who all contribute to student learning with variance between the levels of

teaching (Holdheide et al.). Although there may be similarities and differences between the positions of special education teachers, settings, and level of teaching; there are other factors such as location and size of special education populations that impact responsibilities (McLaughlin et al., 2005). “Special education teachers are often overburdened with multiple and sometimes even competing responsibilities” (Wasburn-Moses, 2005 p. 151). Some special education teachers may teach within the early childhood setting, while others may teach elementary, middle school, or high school; they may teach through various models such as co-teaching or inclusion environment, resource, or a self-contained classroom (Holdheide et al.). Rather than focusing on creating engaging lessons for classroom implementation, some beginning special education teachers spend the majority of their time on indirect activities such as managing relationships for collaboration, student behaviors, and organizational tasks (Israel, Carnahan, & Snyder, 2012). Other special education teachers who teach students with more severe disabilities often have to focus on teaching additional skills such as personal care, health, mobility, and communication skills (Eichinger & Downing, 2000).

Special education teachers and general education teachers may have some responsibilities that are identical, but they also have drastically different roles and responsibilities related to the populations they serve. The instruction provided by special education teachers is typically different from the structures of general education teachers and may include systematic instruction and interventions, highly repetitive instruction, and requires specialized skills (Benedict et al., 2006). Moya and Gay (1982) contend that due to the differences in the roles and responsibilities, the evaluation of general education and special education teachers should also be different. Appropriate feedback and

evaluation is needed for special education teachers (Moya & Gay, 1982). Although some of the responsibilities of special education teachers are similar to general education teachers, there are also very separate responsibilities that should be noted (Garcia & Potemski, 2009; McGraner, 2009) and those differences should be noted in the evaluation tools used to rate their performance (Moya & Gay).

### Special Education Teacher Evaluations

Students with disabilities often require additional support through accommodations and modifications to increase their ability to demonstrate their learning (Holdheide et al., 2010). When utilizing student achievement data as a component of the teacher evaluation process, there is little to no research on the impact that student achievement data of students with disabilities has on the evaluation process of special education teachers (Frudden & Manatt, 1986). According to Holdheide et al. (2010), students with disabilities' scores can drastically impact a teacher's evaluation if student achievement is a strong factor.

The validity of the evaluations that are used to rate the performance of special education teachers have been questioned (Wise et al., 1984). The expertise of the teacher evaluators has also been questioned (Milanowski, 2004; Wise et al.). Principals in most schools are responsible for evaluating special education teachers (Brandt et al., 2007; Moya & Gay, 1982), although principals do not always feel that they have the expertise required to appropriately evaluate these teachers. Principals demonstrate some limitations in their ability to adequately rate teachers' performance (Eady & Zepeda, 2007; Jacob & Lefgren, 2006).

Breton and Donaldson (1991) conducted a qualitative study to examine the patterns and perceptions of supervision in special education resource teachers in Maine. Breton and Donaldson (1991) found that the special education resource teachers received the most contact related to non-teaching consultation, occurring at least once per quarter. Breton and Donaldson reported "formal observation was reported to be the least frequent and least useful type of supervision" (p. 119). Special education directors' observations were perceived as more useful than those of principals. Teachers reported that their supervisors predominately used a non-directive style of supervision. Teachers also reported that their contact with their supervisors was unrelated to their teaching responsibilities. Breton and Donaldson further asserted that supervisors of special education resource teachers need additional training to be able to better assist their teachers and they must become more proficient in assessing the performance of these teachers.

Coladarci and Breton (1997) conducted a qualitative study using resource room teachers from Maine. The resource teachers reported that most of their supervision was done through formal observations on an annual basis. The teachers rated the frequency and use of supervision that was provided. The teachers reported varied senses of efficacy and reported that the supervision methods were not beneficial and did not significantly impact their performance.

Sweeney and Twedt (1993) conducted a qualitative study that determined whether the principal would receive good grades from their special education teachers the same as they have from their general education teacher. Sweeney and Twedt found that special education teachers were satisfied with the quality of their evaluations although their

feedback was not focused on the classroom observations. The feedback received by the special education teachers was more based on the information that the evaluator knew about the classroom and the standards addressed.

There has been extensive research that indicates that teachers have an impact on student achievement (Holdheide et al., 2010; Rockoff, 2004; Sanders & Horn, 1998). In order to achieve the outcome of special education, special education teachers must have knowledge, skills, and expertise that general education teachers do not have (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008). Sanders and Horn (1998) revealed that teacher quality has an increased impact on achievement over other factors such as student background or class size. McLeskey and Billingsley stated, "although the importance of having a highly qualified teacher in every classroom has been well documented for general education teachers, similar data are not available for special education teachers" (p. 294). "The risks of failing to improve the quality of instruction are unacceptable" (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010 p.373). Brownell et al. further asserted that the ability to access the curriculum and make progress depended on the skills teachers possess. When servicing students, it is important that special education teachers use practices that aim for high achievement levels especially since the students they work with were not able to demonstrate targeted academic progress in general education (McLeskey & Billingsley).

Moya and Gay (1982) explored the processes of evaluation of special education teachers employed in 122 school districts in California using a qualitative study. Moya and Gay analyzed the questionnaire responses, guidelines for special education teacher evaluations, and any forms that were used for the evaluation of the special education teachers. Moya and Gay found that 107 of the districts used the same evaluation criteria

for both special and general education teachers; while 15 school districts used specific criteria for the evaluation of special education teachers. Moya and Gay also found that observation and written feedback was used by the evaluator in 109 school districts within this sample. The principal was named primarily responsible for completing the special education teacher evaluations in 109 of the sampled school districts. Thirteen school districts in the sample used other administrators such as the director of special education as evaluators. Location and size appeared to have little impact on evaluation procedures, but the grade levels served by the district influenced procedures by the increased availability of staff members to serve as evaluators. Only 16 of the sampled districts employed a process that used specific criteria for special education teacher evaluations.

Moya and Gay (1982) suggested that evaluators develop a basic philosophy regarding evaluation of special education teachers using the special education teacher job description to inform criteria for the evaluation. The evaluation process used can be confusing and the process may be devalued by both the evaluator and the teacher to be evaluated if it is not clear.

Moya and Gay (1982) suggested that differences between general and special education teachers' job descriptions, competencies, and character attributes demonstrated the need for special considerations related to the learning environment that special education teachers teach in should be explored. Moya and Gay briefly examined the areas of job descriptions, competencies, and character attributes using previous research. The results revealed that principals are primarily responsible for evaluating special education teachers, but further research is needed to explore the evaluator's feelings of having evaluative responsibilities. Moya and Gay found that although many evaluators use

observations and written feedback, alternative methods outside of the observations and rating scales would be beneficial. Moya and Gay suggested training for evaluators should also be explored.

Brandt et al. (2007) conducted a study that described the systematic evaluation policies in school districts within the Midwest. Brandt et al. found that most districts within the Midwest did not identify training for the evaluators who had to assess teacher performance. Brandt et al. also found that the sampled districts had policies that distinguished between beginning and tenured teachers, but most did not communicate any policies related to distinguishing the differences between special education teachers or general education teachers. Only 7 out of the 140 districts had policies that differed by subject area taught or special education. Brandt et al. stated that “in some cases, evaluators of special education teachers were required to use a rubric that varied slightly from that used for regular education teachers” (p.14). Brandt et al. indicated that one of the participating districts stated “teachers who are given unusual responsibilities or difficult situations in which to teach will not be expected to meet the same performance standards as other teachers” (p. 4).

### Conclusion

There are some barriers that may impact the perceived effectiveness of an evaluation. These barriers include perception related to the validity of the tool, feedback, the approach and process used for the evaluation, and the evaluator’s knowledge and competence related to special education (Benedict et al., 2013; Dolmanns et al., 2003; Holdheide et al., 2010; Holdheide & Reschly 2010; Kyriakides et al., 2006; Moya & Gay, 1982). Special education teachers’ roles and responsibilities are different from general

education teachers; therefore, they do not benefit holistically from the use of the same tools, process and procedures, and evaluator knowledge as general education teachers (Holdheide et al.; Moya & Gay). Special education teachers need an evaluation that is valid and reliable (Moya & Gay).

### Summary

This chapter has been a review of literature introducing the reader to the historical nature of teacher evaluation as it pertains to special education. Research that indicates that teachers have a huge impact on the achievement of their students (Rockoff, 2004; Sanders & Horn, 1998). Special education teachers have been challenged with the task of providing specialized instruction for students who were not successful in the general education environment (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008; Holdheide et al., 2010). Because of the nature of the roles and responsibilities in educating students with disabilities, special education teachers would benefit from an evaluation that is related to their roles and responsibilities (Moya & Gay, 1982). Special education teachers would also benefit from the evaluation being conducted by an evaluator knowledgeable about special education (Billingsley, 1993; Brownell et al., 2005). A special education teacher can benefit from feedback geared to improve their practices related to achievement for students with disabilities.

Chapter three will describe the methodology of a qualitative study designed to explore the current evaluation tools, systems, and criteria used for the performance appraisals of special education teachers. The study will include surveys, interviews, and document analysis related to special education and general education teacher evaluations.



Suggested changes that could contribute to an improved performance appraisal tool, system, or criteria used to evaluate special education will also be included.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

Appropriate evaluations for teachers can contribute to improved professional growth and performance of the teachers (Benedict et al., 2006; Medley & Coker, 1987; Milanowski, 2004). Improved tools, processes, and procedures in teacher evaluation will increase teacher efficacy and thereby increase student achievement (Dolmans et al., 2003; Moya & Gay, 1982). The foundation of the research that is available identifies that there is a need to develop criteria that would be appropriate feedback and evaluation on the performance of special education teachers (Moya & Gay). Review of the literature revealed that there is limited research available regarding the performance appraisal of special education teachers.

The limited research available regarding special education teacher performance appraisals gave rise to the purpose of this study. The goals of this study were to qualitatively explore the current practices of evaluating special education teacher performance and to examine additional criteria that may be beneficial to include in a special education teacher performance appraisal tool.

The literature that was reviewed did not reveal a significant exploration of information about performance appraisal of special education teachers however; there were studies that revealed that performance appraisals are beneficial to teachers and some of the vital components that should be used to appraise teacher performance. Most of the

research revealed various ways of measuring teacher performance however, there was limited research found that indicated or suggested methods for assessing special education teacher performance. Research did reveal that there are notable differences between special education teachers and general education teachers, ' roles and responsibilities, therefore there should be a difference in how special education teachers receive evaluative feedback. Although the research revealed that most school principals are responsible for the performance appraisals of teachers, the principals may not have the confidence in their ability to assess the performance of teachers' particularly special education teachers.

This chapter sets forth the procedures that were used to examine and compare the current evaluation approach and tools used to evaluate special education teachers in order to explore performance criteria and procedures that would accurately reflect the performance of special education teachers in the Midwest. Specifically, the researcher sought to understand the need for alignment in the current evaluation practices used to rate special education teachers' performance. The researcher believed that a better understanding of this phenomenon would contribute to improved evaluation practices and professional growth for special education teachers through increased awareness regarding the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers, current practices used to evaluate the performance of special education teachers, and to suggest criteria that may be beneficial to include in the special education teacher's evaluation. In seeking to understand this phenomenon, three research questions were addressed:

1. What differences exist in the systematic approach to evaluating special education teachers in the Midwest?

2. What differences exist between evaluation tools utilized for special education and general education teachers in the Midwest?
3. What differences exist between the job descriptions and performance appraisal tools used for special education teachers in the Midwest?

This chapter reviews the chosen research design and rationale, population and research sample description, data collection methods, data analysis, and limitations of the study.

### Research Design

The current study used a qualitative methods format which explored the current evaluation approach and tools used to evaluate special education teachers and general education teachers. This research method was accomplished through the use of a survey with structured and semi-structured questions, document analysis, and interviews. Based on the limited research available regarding the internal construction of special education teacher evaluation, quantitative research methods to explore variables was not used because it would not provide the data required to answer the research questions. The goal of the study was to explore the need for separation and alignment of how special education and general education teachers are currently evaluated. When conducting exploratory research, qualitative methods, the findings of the qualitative research can be used to later establish, confirm or be validated by using quantitative methods (Leedy & Ormond, 2005).

This research was not designed to identify causal conclusions. Instead the design of the research was to explore and to describe the current phenomena surrounding the practices that are currently used to evaluate the performance of special education teachers in the Midwest. The research focused on being descriptive instead of predictive regarding

the implications of the current practices for special education teacher evaluations in the Midwest. The research generated a descriptive analysis of the current practices of special education teacher evaluations in the Midwest through identifying the content of the evaluation tools used, the process and procedures for special education teacher evaluations, and the opinions of a few evaluators in terms of their preparedness to conduct evaluations. In a phenomenological approach to research, the description developed through the data yielded the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2013).

### Population

Educational systems exist throughout the United States and the world. There are different types of schools including private or parochial, charter schools, and public schools. It is important to distinguish the target population for this research study. The population for this research study consisted of 863 school districts in the Midwest. Based on the extent of the educational system it is vital to distinguish the target population from the accessible population. The accessible population refers to the group that is accessible from the target population of the results of this study (Gay, Airasian, & Mills, 2006). A request was sent to all of the school districts in the population. Purposive sampling was used because there was a particular reason or purpose regarding the sample of participants considered in this study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Purposive sampling was used for the school districts who returned the requested documents.

There are 863 public school districts in the targeted area selected for this research that were expected to conduct evaluations of special education teachers. The Performance Evaluation Reform Act enacted in the region in 2012 required all school districts to conduct evaluations on teachers (Center for Educator Effectiveness, 2011). The

population for this study was selected based on the purpose of the research and the geographical location.

After identifying the population of 863 public school districts, the researcher requested each district to complete a questionnaire; submit job descriptions for special education and general education teachers; and to submit the templates that documented or communicated the process, procedures, and tools used for the performance appraisals of special education and general education teachers. Participants were selected into the sample if they submitted at least two of the following: (a) evaluation tool, (b) job description (c) response to the questionnaire or explanation of missing documents.

Purposive convenience sampling was used in order to identify a smaller sampling of individual districts with a particular purpose under consideration (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Purposive sampling was appropriate for this study as the school districts were not randomly assigned as a member of the population (Robson, 2002). The researcher sought to examine the current process, procedures, and tools used to evaluate special education teachers. In order to proactively guard against researcher bias, the researcher selected five school districts to conduct face-to-face interviews with based on convenience and proximity to the researcher.

Twenty-six school districts returned the requested items and served as the sample participants for this study. Of the original 863 school districts within the population, 48 school districts responded to either decline participation with explanation or submitted documentation. Twenty-six of the responding school districts responded with all requested materials. The 26 schools that completed all requested components of the request were included in the sample participants for this study.

## Data Collection

The methodology approach for this study is qualitative and descriptive in nature. This study is non-experimental therefore variables were not identifiable. According to Salkind (2012), qualitative research methods are used to examine human behavior in various contexts such as cultural and political through the use of tools such as interviews and historical methods. The data collected was gathered to identify themes and categories to build towards a better understanding of the current process, procedures, and tools used to evaluate the performance of special education teachers and the alignment to the general education teacher process, procedures and tools. This phenomenological multi-case study was designed to discover the current phenomena utilized in special education teacher performance appraisals. Data emerged as the researcher analyzed the documents submitted by the various school district participants, responses to a semi-structured demographic questionnaire, and semi-structured open-ended interview questions. The interview questions were created by the researcher. All participants who were interviewed received the same questions. The focus of the face-to-face interview questions asked was to obtain additional data focusing on research question two. The interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

The researcher retained the structure of the questions and revised others in order to ensure that questions elicited responses that addressed the research questions (Gibbs, 2012; Patton, 2002). In order to collect this data the researcher interviewed five participants using semi-structured open-ended questions tied to research question two and research question three. Interview questions that are related to the established research questions have been found to be advantageous in eliciting the perception of the

participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Short questions were asked to allow the interviewees the opportunity to share their perception without interruption. Kvale and Brinkmann suggested asking short questions can promote interviewees to provide long answers, particularly when interruptions happen to provide clarity and redirections. In relying on the participants to discuss their experiences in a phenomenological study, it is important that the researcher ask appropriate questions and have patience (Creswell, 2013). Appendix B provides a sample of interview questions associated with the research questions.

The interview participants were chosen based on proximity to the researcher in an effort to increase the access and likelihood of conducting face-to-face interviews. Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) asserted that there is higher quality information that is shared when interviews are conducted face-to-face. The face-to-face interviews were requested via email and confirmed via phone.

The participants were contacted by email and via phone in order to explain the purpose of the interview and to schedule the interview sessions at an agreeable time and location. The nature and benefit of the interview was also explained to the participant. Most interviews occurred at the location where the interviewee worked. Overall the participants appeared eager to share their insights regarding their experiences with performance evaluations. During a point of contact either on the phone or via email, many participants expressed that they were elated that someone was exploring this area of study and how it can be improved for both the evaluator and the individual being evaluated. Interviews were conducted between May 2015 and June 2015.



Each participant was emailed a written description of the interview's purpose and consent for participation prior to the scheduled interview. At the beginning of each interview session the description of the purpose of the interviews were discussed. The researcher also presented each interview participant with the consent document with an explanation of the voluntary aspect of research participation, their right to stop the interview or withdraw from participation, the ability to review the transcripts and recordings, and additional feedback opportunities. Confidentiality was also addressed. The researcher wanted to ensure that the participants understood the benefit of their participation as well as their rights and safety as a participant.

Each school district in the population was sent a link via email to complete the District Demographic questionnaire. The District Demographic questionnaire can be found in Appendix A. The District Demographic questionnaire consisted of 12 open and closed ended questions related to the overall demographics of the school including the setting, numbers of students with disabilities served and information regarding the total number of teachers including special education teachers. The District Demographic questionnaire also inquired about procedures related to the evaluation of special education teachers such as the frequency of evaluations. The demographic information was collected in an effort to identify the unique information about each district and to determine the generalizability of the results. The questions included in the District Demographic Questionnaire were related to all three research questions posed in the current study.

The researcher sent mass emails requesting participation using the service from Mail Chimp ®. The mass emails were sent biweekly in the first month and then monthly

for three months. A total of five mass requests were sent for participation in the study. In the fifth month, the researcher individually requested participation from school districts that were within 50 miles of her geographical location. On average five school districts consented to participate with each request campaign sent.

### Analytical Methods

The data collected was analyzed via the three research questions that were satisfied by the iterative analysis methods using memos, coding, and categorization. The iterative reading of the submitted documents combined with identification of codes, themes, and meanings resulted in an improved description of the current practices related to the three research questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Although the researcher's descriptions and interpretations of the themes and meanings may not be the only possible interpretations, the researcher did believe that the study's findings draw a clear and descriptive picture of the current practices used in the performance appraisal of special education teachers.

Each participant was requested to submit their evaluation process and procedures. The researcher used memos throughout the submitted documents. "Memos are seen as a way of theorizing and commenting as you go about thematic coding ideas and the general development of the analytic framework" (Flick, 2011 p. 30). The memos were used to allow the researcher the opportunity to communicate ideas, thoughts, and wonderings related to the information included in the process and procedures data.

Constant comparative analysis was made to continuously review the text to conduct open coding, axial coding, and finally interpretive coding (Gibbs, 2012). In order to facilitate the coding process, repetitive review of the literature was conducted

throughout this study. The repetitive reviews were conducted in order to provide insight into emerging themes and categories (Creswell, 2013). In order to identify themes and categories drawn from the text, the data were analyzed using open coding. Axial coding was used to label connections among the identified themes and categories. Interpretive coding was used to label the meanings of themes, categories, and connections between themes and categories that emerged from the text. NVivo 10 software helped to organize, store, and display the data during the analytical process (Gibbs, 2012).

The interviews were conducted in order to collect additional data that may emerge from the sample participants' verbal response regarding the professional development opportunities for the evaluators of general education and special education teachers. The interviews contained structured questions for the evaluators to answer regarding their preparedness to conduct performance appraisals on special education and general education teachers (see Appendix B). The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed.

Flick (2011) contended that when analyzing data from a phenomenological theory that the term 'themes' should be used instead of the term 'codes.' For the remainder of this paper the term themes will be used to signify the links between the analyzed texts. The codes used will be used as a method to categorize (Flick) as a theme is an outcome of coding and categorization (Saldana, 2013).

The evaluation tools, job descriptions, and evaluation process and procedures that were submitted by the participants were analyzed using memos, codes, and themes. The researcher used memos to record thoughts while reviewing the submitted documents. No pre-determined themes or categories existed as the analysis of the content was examined

(Gibbs, 2012). The *thick description* model was used to get a deeper analysis of interpretation from the data collected (Patton, 2002). The thick description allows for the phenomenon to be described in detail in order to examine the depth of the conclusions and the ability to transfer or generalize (Holloway, 1997). The thick description approach takes the data and use open, axial, and interpretive coding with consistency in revisiting the text.

Initial open coding was used to break down the data into discrete components, analyzing the codes, followed by a comparison and contrasting of the codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). By using the initial open coding framework, the researcher remained open to all possible directions and outcomes that were available in the data set (Saldana, 2013). Each line of the data was examined using open coding. Process codes and sub codes were developed during this phase of coding.

Axial coding was then used to further identify the phenomenon that exists. The purpose of axial coding is to relate the categories to the subcategories (Dawson, 2010). Once the categories were identified, axial coding provided a method to labeling the connections and relationship between themes and categories. Based on the themes that were identified the researcher used interpretive analysis throughout the analysis in order to draw conclusions and interpret the findings related to the current practices in special education teacher performance appraisals as it related to the research questions for this study.

### Limitations

Throughout the process of analyzing the data many limitations were discovered. The focus for this study was on the public school districts within the Midwest. It would

be beneficial to conduct a similar study on all types of schools as there is no research that indicates that other types of schools who employ and evaluate the performance of special education teachers would be generalized from the findings of this research. The lack of generalizability of the findings impacts other types of settings in many ways. Currently the legislation that determines the directive to complete teacher performance appraisals in the geographic landmarks of this study is focused primarily on the public schools and not as much on other schools. Options for performance appraisal tools can be greatly impacted by the fiscal funding availability in settings outside of public schools.

Another limitation of the study was with the timing of the research study. There were many responses received where a school district declined participation. Many of the responses provided were statements such as “My district has a lot going on” or “we are in the middle of a negotiation year.” The timing of the research study may have reduced the response rate of the targeted population for the study. There was a lower response rate than was originally expected which may have limited the ability to deeply analyze the differences that may exist between tools, process, or procedures used to evaluate the special education teacher.

In the beginning of the design of the study, the request for data submission was targeted towards the Director of Human Resources. It was the thought of the researcher that a person sitting in this position would have had access to the materials requested. It was discovered that each district did not have a Director of Human Resources who could be identified. In situations where a Director of Human Resources was not available or existent, the superintendent became the point of contact. There were responses that were received from participants such as “can you please provide Ms. Harris with the

information that she needs?” The data collected came from multiple sources and not just the initial point of communication made. This may have impeded on the follow-up requests for participation or additional materials needed.

### Summary

Chapter III described the framework that was utilized to answer the three research questions for this study. The researcher used qualitative methods to answer the research questions for this study. The methods and research questions were designed to illuminate the current practices that are used in the performance appraisals of special education teachers. Transcriptions of interviews as well as open, axial, and interpretive coding were all used to analyze the data collected. The researcher meticulously analyzed the data collected to ensure that the phenomena was explored and examined carefully. Limitations that were revealed throughout the research process were also discussed. The results of this study’s findings are presented in chapter IV.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter the methodology used for this study was described in detail. The description of the research design, population and sample, and data collection were provided, newly introduced in this chapter are the findings, conclusions, recommendations and implications. To provide a more visual representation of the data collected from the research, the resulting information is presented in this chapter through the use of tables.

This study examined the current evaluation tools, systems, and criteria used for the performance appraisals of special education teachers in order to explore what changes, if any, could contribute to an improved performance appraisal tool, system, and criteria used to evaluate special education teachers. The literature review in Chapter II established that the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers are different from general education teachers; therefore, they do not benefit holistically from the use of the same tools, process and procedures, and evaluator knowledge as general education teachers (Holdheide et al., 2010; Moya & Gay, 1982). Special education teachers need evaluations that are valid and reliable (Moya & Gay). This study was undertaken in order to understand the current practices used to evaluate the performance of special education teachers. The current evaluation practices used for special education and general education teacher evaluations were examined through the use of surveys,

interviews, and document analysis. Despite the importance of performance appraisals in the field of education, there is limited research available that focuses on the special education teacher evaluation. Studies have shown that there is a difference in the practiced roles and responsibilities between special education and general education teachers (Holdheide et al.; Moya & Gay). Despite the agreement that there is a difference between the special and general education teacher positions, there is limited research related to the need for separation and alignment to the expectations and evaluation for the position of special education teacher.

The desire to learn from the examination of the current practices in the performance appraisal of special educators served as the impetus for this study. In exploring the existing documents, the researcher first explored the current practices that embody the performance appraisal for special education and general education teachers. In the process of exploring the current practices of evaluating the performance of the special education and general education teachers, specific attention and analysis was devoted to identification of the systematic approach, the evaluation tools used and the respective job descriptions for the special education and general education teacher. The participants also completed a questionnaire yielding information about their school district's demographics as it relates to special education. The final component of the data collection process consisted of face-to-face interviews with evaluators of several participating school districts in order to ascertain the professional development that the evaluators received in order to prepare them for conducting performance appraisals of general education and special education teachers. An additional interview question related to the overall performance appraisal was also investigated.



The research process utilized in this study directed the discovery of themes that contributed to the framework utilized to structure data which allowed the researcher to add to the body of literature on the subject of special education teacher evaluations and address the research questions guiding this study.

The research questions that guided this study are the following:

1. What differences are there in the systematic approach to evaluating special education teachers in the Midwest?
2. What differences exist between evaluation tools utilized for special education teachers and general education teachers in the Midwest?
3. What differences exist between the job descriptions and performance appraisal tools used for special education teachers in the Midwest?

A secondary purpose of this study was to explore a potential challenge that was presented in the research related to evaluators not having training in conducting performance appraisals. To satisfy this curiosity, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews via WebEx ® in order to explore the potential challenge related to evaluator preparedness to conduct performance appraisals. The interviews were conducted with five participating school districts, recorded and later transcribed. The questions asked during the interview were centered on the availability of training opportunities to enhance the evaluator's ability to conduct performance appraisals for general education and special education teachers as well as their knowledge of the teacher performance appraisal process.

The data obtained from the participants is presented within this chapter. First the data obtained from the survey regarding the participant demographics is presented using a

non-ranking structure visual presentation. A summary of the demographics obtained from the online survey completed by the participants are displayed in Table 1. A detailed analysis of the prominent and significant themes that unfolded during the data analysis is discussed.

Of the 26 participants, the size of the district varied from a school district made up of just one school to a school district that had up to 20 schools included. Of the 26 districts that participated, 11 were located in a rural area, 10 were in a suburban area, and three were located in an urban area. Two participants did not indicate the type of area of their location. The number of special education teachers ranged from having two special education teachers to 225 within the participating districts. The number of general education teachers had a range between 22 and 1226. The range of the percentage of students receiving special education services ranged from 10% to as much as 70% according to the responses reported by the participants on the District Demographic Questionnaire.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

PARTICIPANT CLASSIFICATION	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	AVERAGE NUMBER OF TOTAL TEACHERS	AVERAGE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS
SMALL DISTRICT	1-4 schools	67.1	9.6
MEDIUM DISTRICT	5-10 Schools	242.8	25.5
LARGE DISTRICT	11+ schools	721.7	159.7

The results from the survey revealed that there was diversity in the participants as it relates to the district size. Most of the respondents regardless of the size of the district

indicated that at least a tenth of their teaching staff are special education teachers who are evaluated formally using a standard tool. Although a standard tool is used, three out of 26 respondents indicated that the same tool was used for all special education teachers regardless of their titled position. One respondent indicated that different tools were used for the special education teacher depending on the setting, workload, and caseload assigned, although various evaluation tools were not submitted. One respondent indicated that special education teachers are not evaluated, while another respondent did not provide a response to the posed question relating to the tool used to evaluate special education teachers.

Many of the submitted documents from the participants made reference to the Framework for Teaching or the Danielson Framework ©. Based on the inclusion of the Framework, the researcher did locate the resource for review. Based on curiosity, the researcher informally analyzed the Charlotte Danielson Framework ©. The structures from the Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument were included in many of the documents submitted from the participants. Many of the themes that were later discovered through the analysis process were also noted in the Framework for Teaching. The domains and components assessed in the Framework for Teaching can be found in Appendix C.

Analysis of the data began with the coding of each document that was submitted by the participants. The request for documentation for each participant consisted of special education and general education teacher evaluation tools, job descriptions, and the evaluation processes. Each document was analyzed and emergent themes were identified. No pre-determined themes or categories existed as the analysis of the content was

examined. Initially open coding was used to break down the data into smaller components. The codes were then analyzed followed by a comparison and contrasting of the codes. Axial coding was used to relate the code categories. Once the categories were identified, axial coding provided a method to labeling the connections and relationship between codes. The researcher then completed tasks of identification and clustering of the codes and emerging themes within each document. Results from the document analysis, questionnaire responses and the surveys allowed the researcher to answer each research question.

### Findings

The results obtained from the analysis of the submitted documents allowed the researcher to gain a deeper perspective into the current practices used to evaluate the performance of special education teachers. Specific attention was given to the systematic approach, the differences between the evaluation tools, and the differences between the job description and the performance evaluation tool used for special education teachers. For purposes of this study the systematic approach consisted of the frequency of performance appraisal, evaluator title, direct report, and variations in the evaluation tools.

The submitted documents did not reveal a separate or distinguished approach to evaluating the performance of special education teachers any different than the general education teachers. Instead themes related to the classifications of non-tenured teachers, tenured teachers, and teachers identified as needing improvement. Each of the submitted documents that addressed the systematic approach to evaluation approached the process as a system that applied to all instructional staff with the consistent variance being related to the years of experience or the need for improvement.

Variations in the evaluation frequency differed from participant to participant. Content analysis revealed that some participants conducted evaluations on non-tenured teachers once per year while other participant documents revealed that evaluations were conducted on non-tenured teachers twice a year. Although there was variance in the frequencies of evaluations of non-tenured teachers, the analysis indicated that most evaluations were conducted once per year for teachers who were classified as non-tenured. Frequencies for evaluation of tenured teachers indicated evaluation schedules that occurred once every two evaluation cycles or minimally once every two years with the formal evaluation at the end of the cycle.

The content analysis revealed that 26 out of the 26 participants who indicated that they conduct evaluations conducted at least a pre-conference, observation, and post conference format. While most participants conducted one annual observation for teachers, only three of the participants indicated that other models such as peer observations, walkthroughs, or multiple observations were included in the processes used for the evaluation of teachers. It was also noted that all of the participants assigned a summative rating to indicate the overall performance appraisal. The labels that were assigned as a summative label on the teacher evaluations were unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, and distinguished. These labels were assigned regardless of the title or position of the teacher.

When a teacher was identified as needing improvement some participants increased the frequency of the evaluation such as being evaluated at least once in the evaluation cycle following the receipt of such a rating, repeated walkthroughs focusing on the component area(s) that are deficient, quarterly evaluations and ratings conducted

by a qualified administrator. At times some participants communicated a clear distinction made between tenured and non-tenured teachers without respect or separation given to position. Some participants communicated that tenured staff can be recommended by the administrator to continue employment on alternative plans such as a Reflective Model, Professional Awareness, or Assistance Plan for tenured professionals. Review of the alternative plan processes and documentation indicated that if a teacher failed to receive a summative rating of proficient or excellent that the rating may result in dismissal.

The evaluation frequency was not as clear in the evaluation process documentation submitted by all of the participants. At times the frequency of the evaluation cycle was not found in the documentation submitted by each participant, but the District Demographic questionnaire asked each participant a question regarding the frequency of their special education teacher evaluations. Eight participants indicated that their special education teachers are evaluated annually. One participant indicated that their special education teachers are evaluated twice a year as they are on a semi-annual schedule for evaluations. Ten of the participants indicated that their special education teachers are evaluated on a bi-annual schedule. Seven of the participants indicated that their special education teachers are on varied schedules for evaluation.

It was only in three cases that the researcher was able to identify who the evaluator was for a tool that was submitted. Based on the survey results from the Demographic Questionnaire, Table 2 shows the variation between the participant responses as it related to the position title that special education teachers report directly to and then the title of the position of the person who evaluates their performance.

Analysis of the participants' responses revealed that most special education teachers report directly to and are evaluated by the building principal or assistant principal. Some participants indicated that their special education teachers report directly to the special education director or coordinator. Many of the participants indicated that when the special education director or coordinator was identified as the direct report, they also maintained the role of evaluator for the special education teachers. Only a few participants indicated that the special education teachers report directly to or are evaluated by multiple titles or the superintendent.

Table 2

*Special Education Teacher Direct Report versus Evaluator*

Title	Direct Report	Evaluator
Special Education Director or Coordinator	6	5
Principal and/or Assistant Principal	18	19
Multiple	1	1
Superintendent	0	1

Of the five participant representatives that participated in the face-to-face interviews for this study, all indicated that anyone who would be responsible for conducting evaluation had to attend a mandatory evaluation training before he or she was certified to conduct performance appraisals of teachers. Although there was a mandatory training that the evaluators had to attend, the interview participants did not indicate any specific trainings that were offered or mandatory that focused on an approach for evaluating the performance of special education teachers specifically. Each participant provided a brief explanation of the evaluation process, but did not provide elaboration.

The specific evaluation questions asked during the face-to-face interviews can be found in Appendix B.

The researcher used the submitted documents to identify the systematic approach used for evaluating special education teachers. In allowing for the emergent themes to develop from the analysis of the text, themes related to the approach to evaluating special education teachers were not discovered. Instead the themes from the analysis of the documents appeared to allow the researcher to gain a deeper perspective into the current practices that are utilized for the evaluations that are used for all teachers without respect to title.

Based on the submitted documents very little assumption can be made regarding the presence or absence of evaluation tools that are used to evaluate special education teachers. The evaluation tools that were submitted by the participants were mostly identified as teacher evaluation or growth system, with no stipulations identified in most cases to be related to the evaluation tool used for special education teachers explicitly. Three participants indicated that different tools were used for positions such as school nurse, counselors, or reading coaches. Only five participants submitted documents that were identified as evaluation tools used for special education teachers. In utilizing the questionnaire responses, the researcher found that 23 out of the 26 respondents indicated that the special education teacher is evaluated using the same performance appraisal tool as the general education teacher. Only two participants indicated that a different tool was used on the special education teacher and the general education teacher. One participant did not respond to the question.



Five out of the 26 participants submitted documents that were deemed as tools used for the performance evaluation of special education teachers. In order to make this determination, the researcher identified the label or phrase in the title of the document that referred to special education teachers or learning specialist. The other 21 documents submitted did not indicate a particular title on the evaluation tool or used a generic term such as teacher. The tool was therefore categorized as a general education teacher or non-specified position tool. The submitted documents did not indicate that it was used as a tool for either position, but instead indicated ‘teacher’ as the target for the system.

Based on the exploration of the current systematic approach to evaluation of special education teachers, the researcher discovered that there was not a specific process that was documented. The process documents that were submitted were for all teachers regardless of their job title. Most of the districts that participated in this research used the same tool for special education and general education teachers. Only five districts had a separate tool used for special education teachers. The systematic approach appeared to be based more on the amount of years that a teacher worked in a specific school district rather than by title. For most districts, the teachers fell into three categories for determining the evaluation process that would be used; tenured, non-tenured, and needs improvement. The determination of the frequency of an evaluation or feedback varied depending on which track the teachers fell into. For example, teachers who were non-tenured seemed to receive an evaluation every year until they were tenured. Once a teacher reached tenure, the evaluation frequency seemed to shift from annually to every other year. Teachers who were on the needs improvement track appeared to receive

several formal and informal evaluations throughout the year based on their present level of performance.

After conducting initial and axial coding, there were 26 themes identified in the special education teacher evaluation. However, 33 themes were identified in total for the general education teacher evaluation. The information in Appendix D indicates the total themes that were identified in the general education and special education teacher evaluation tools. The special education teacher evaluation tool had 22 themes in common with the general education teacher evaluation tool. There were four additional themes that emerged out of the analysis of the special education teacher evaluation. The themes included only on the special education teacher evaluation tools were related to collaborating with team members to design lessons related to goals, establishing goals for individual students, knowledge of state and federal regulations, and conducting individual evaluation.

There were 12 themes that appeared in the general education teacher evaluation tool that were not on the special education teacher evaluation tool. The themes that were only included on the general education teacher evaluation tool were related to attendance, having clear communication, collaborating and problem solving with others, contributing to the district, delivery of instruction, designing assessments, grading students, integrating technology, as well as planning and preparation. Two themes appeared on the general education tool that were related to students with disabilities. The themes on the general education teacher evaluation tool that related to students with disabilities were knowledge of students with special needs and plans for diverse learners.

Variation between the similarities of the themes increased when the top 20 themes were hierarchically identified. The information in Appendix E indicates the top 20 themes that emerged in the evaluation tools for special education and general education teachers. The themes presented from the evaluation tools for general education and special education tools are presented in a hierarchical manner based on the number of references in the categorized evaluation tool theme.

Fifteen themes were found in both the special education and general education teacher tools when the top 20 themes were analyzed. The 15 themes that were shared in the top 20 themes between the special education and general education teacher evaluation tools can be found italicized in Appendix E. The italicized items are the themes that appeared on both the special education and the general education teacher evaluation tools.

Within the top five themes for the special education and general education teacher evaluation criteria many themes appeared categorically similar. Themes related to communication with others, collaboration, and assessing students during instruction were recurring themes that were shared between the criteria for special education and general education teacher evaluation top five themes. The special education teacher evaluation criteria that differed in the top five themes were related to management of student behavior and professionalism. The general education teacher evaluation criteria that differed in the top five themes from the special education criteria was related to contributing to the school district and attendance.

The analysis of the job descriptions for the special education and general education teachers were set up in a similar manner as the evaluation tools. After

conducting initial and axial coding, themes were identified in the special education and general education teacher job description. The themes were used to identify the communicated expectations for the particular position of special education and general education teacher.

Based on the analysis of the job description for the special education and general education teacher, there were more themes that were the same than there were different. There were a total of 72 themes for the special education teacher job description that emerged, while the general education teacher had 50 themes identified. Thirty-three of the themes were the same between the job descriptions for the special education and general education teacher. The themes that emerged from the special education teacher job description are listed in Appendix F. The information in Appendix G lists the themes that emerged from the general education teacher job description. The themes that are italicized represent those that are found in the special education teacher and general education teacher job descriptions.

The unique themes that emerged from either the special education or the general education teacher job description are indicated in Table 3. The themes that are presented in Table 3 are presented regardless of hierarchy as it relates to the number of references coded and instead has been identified due to the uniqueness as it relates to not being included in the job description for both special education and general education teacher. Appendix I lists the top 20 job description themes found in special education and general education teachers job descriptions. Nine out of the top 20 job description themes were the same for both special education and general education teachers.

Further analysis of the themes extracted from the general education and special education teacher job descriptions revealed that the unique themes that are included in the special education teacher job description was more related to meeting the unique needs of a student who is at risk for academic and behavioral difficulties, tasks related to IEPs, and supporting others. The unique themes included in the general education teacher job description were more related to nonacademic supports such as providing initial medical care.

Table 3

*Unique Themes Included in the Job Descriptions*

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER	GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHER
Advise administrator	Establish a culture of learning
Align assessments	Provide initial medical care
Assist in the evaluation of others	Cooperates in the evaluation methods for self
Budget	
Confidentiality	
Coordinate IEP services	
Co-teaching	
Conduct behavior analysis and develop behavior plans	
Identify struggles in students	
Serve as liaison	
Plan instruction to individual needs	
Understand processes related to disabilities	
IEP documentation and implementation	
Manage behaviors	
Support students	
Tutor	
Train others	

The researcher analyzed the top 20 themes that emerged from the special education teacher evaluation tool and the special education teacher job description. Only

five out of 20 themes were found in both the special education teacher evaluation tool and the job description. The five themes that were found in both the special education teacher evaluation tool and the job description were use of effective questioning, student engagement, setting instructional goals, reflecting in teaching, and professionalism. The five themes that were found in both the special education teacher evaluation tool and the job description are italicized in Appendix I. Some of the unique themes that emerged in the analysis of the top 20 themes appeared to be related to the work that would be directly related to the direct service provided by a special education teacher.

### Conclusions

The literature review did not indicate a difference or existence of research related to the systematic approach for evaluating special education teachers. Through this research, the researcher was unable to find any differences in the systematic approach to evaluating special education teachers. The findings of this study revealed that the systematic approach to evaluating special education teachers are the same as the systematic approach used for evaluation of general education teachers. The principal or assistant principal was more likely to conduct the performance appraisals for both special education and general education teachers. While information was not collected regarding the competence for the principal or assistant principal to conduct performance evaluations on special education teachers, historical research has indicated that limitations do exist in the expertise that principals may have in evaluating the performance of special education teachers (Eady & Zepeda, 2007; Jacob & Lefgren, 2006). It was indicated that training to conduct evaluation occurred for evaluators,

however none of the participants indicated any special training related to supporting special education teachers.

The frequency of the evaluation, the title of the person responsible for evaluating, and the evaluation tools used to for special education teachers and general education teachers appear more likely to be the same than they are to be different. Moya and Gay (1982) indicated that there is a need for a difference in the evaluation tools for special education teachers and general education teachers. However, the data collected from this research study indicated that only a few participants had a separate evaluation tool that was used for the performance appraisal for special education teachers. In analyzing the themes in the evaluation tool for the general education teacher and the special education teacher, many of the themes were the same. There were differences found in the task to collaborate with team members in designing lessons related to goals. There were minimal differences found between the evaluation tool used to evaluate the performance of special education teachers and general education teachers.

Holdheide et al. (2010) found that a special education teacher's roles and responsibilities were different from that of a general education teacher and therefore special education teachers should have a different evaluation tool geared to assess their performance aligned to their daily duties for which they are responsible. The special education teacher job description contained more than 20 additional themes when compared to the themes that emerged in the evaluation tools used to evaluate the performance of special education teachers. There were themes that were included in the special education teacher job description that was not included in the special education teacher evaluation tool. The themes found in the special education teacher job

descriptions, but not in the evaluation tool appeared more related to tasks where the special education teacher was in a support role. The special education job themes included tasks such as assisting and teaching others, participation in IEP activities, building a safe classroom, tutoring, and advising administrators. No specific consideration was given to the various roles and positions that a special education teacher can hold such as resource teacher or co-teacher.

The current study revealed that there are differences between the job description and the evaluation tool used for the performance appraisals for a special education teacher. The evaluation criteria appeared very limited and focused on the art of teaching while the job description took into account more of the intricacies that special education teachers may be responsible for such as coordinating services, advising administrators, and developing Individualized Education Plans. Valid and reliable evaluations are needed for special education teachers (Moya & Gay, 1982). Although most of the participants did not appear to have a separate job description for special education teachers, when a separate job description was indicated it differed from the criteria measured in special education teacher evaluations.

#### Implications and Recommendations

The current study indicated that the approach to evaluating the performance of a special education teacher is very similar to the approach used to evaluate general education teachers. The results of this study revealed that the frequency of the evaluation is the same. The researcher was not able to identify any research that indicated that the frequency of the performance appraisals for special education teachers should be any more frequent or rarer than general education teachers.



Although the frequency of the evaluation for a special education teacher can be the same as a general education teacher, the evaluation tool that is used to evaluate the special education teacher should be different. The results of this study appear to be aligned with previous research indicating that special education teachers should have a different evaluation tool from general education teachers because their jobs are different (Holdheide et al., 2010; Moya & Gay, 1982). The findings of this research also indicated that there is a difference between the roles and responsibilities of the special education and general education teacher. The results of this study did not find variation in the job description or the evaluation tool used for different special education teachers with different titles.

The findings of this research were aligned with the findings of Moya and Gay (1982). The results indicate that the practices used to evaluate special education teachers in the Midwest include the use of the same evaluation tool. More than three decades ago, Moya and Gay suggested that consideration be given to the evaluation process for special education teachers to explore opportunities that focused on the job descriptions, competencies, and attributes in order to separate the differences between special education and general education teachers. The results of this study suggests that we have not overcome this obstacle. Moya and Gay suggested using the job descriptions to inform evaluation criteria. The evaluation tool used to evaluate special education teachers are not aligned with the job descriptions for special education teachers. In fact, it appeared that a job description specifically written for a special education teacher is rare. Based on the results of this study, there appear to be a separation between the criteria included on the

special education teacher evaluation and the job description for special education teachers.

Based on the limited historical and current research there is a need for an evaluation tool that is more aligned with the day to day operational responsibilities for a special education teacher. There appears to be a disconnection between the job description and the levers that are identified in the performance appraisals for special education teachers. Although it may not be necessary to have a different frequency schedule for evaluating special education teachers, the evaluator and evaluator training continues to be areas that should be explored.

Although participants indicated that special education teachers were included in their district, there was not always a separate job description to indicate the roles and responsibilities for the special education teacher. Often a generic title such as ‘teacher’ served as the title for any type of teacher which would include special education and general education teachers. The job descriptions that were indicated for a special education teacher had more themes included than the non-specified teacher job description. However, it was noted that most of the themes for the general education teacher were included in the special education teacher job description. There were some alarming themes included in the special education teacher job descriptors such as tutor, train others, possess fine art skills, and coordinate schedules for students. These themes were not included for the general education teacher, but fell within the top 20 job description themes for a special education teacher. Special education teachers may benefit from a job description that describes their roles and responsibilities in a fair and respectful manner, while also being tailored towards their unique responsibilities. There

is also a need for future studies to explore the need for variation in the job descriptions and evaluation criteria for the different roles that special education teachers hold such as resource teacher or co-teacher.

Future studies should focus on identifying the perception of the evaluation process from the perspective of the evaluator and the special education teacher being evaluated. This study indicated that most times the principal or assistant principal serves as the direct report and evaluator for special education teachers. It would be beneficial to explore the perceptions that exist in the ability of principals to conduct beneficial evaluations that contribute to the overall growth and development of special education teachers. It would also be beneficial for future research to focus on the perception of preparedness that evaluators feel when they have to conduct an evaluation on a special education teacher. Exploring practices related to the preparedness and preparation activities for evaluators would be beneficial.

There is limited research that is focused on the perceived benefit of evaluations for special education teachers. Additional research to substantiate the perceived benefits of evaluation from the perspective of the special education teacher would be beneficial. If evaluations are designed to promote professional growth, future studies should also focus on the perceptions as it relates to the professional growth for special education teachers.

Criteria that should be included in special education teacher evaluations in order to create a better alignment between the roles and responsibilities communicated via job descriptions and the tool that is used to evaluate their performance should be considered. There were many unique themes that were related to the special education teacher job descriptions that were not reflected in evaluation tools. The practice of having themes

included in the job description, but not monitored in the performance appraisals can be confusing. Responsibilities such as maintaining confidentiality, coordinating IEPs, conducting behavior analysis, completing IEP documentation and implementation may be valid criteria that would be beneficial to monitor, however it was not found in the evaluation tool for special education teachers. In determining the importance of items included in a job description and not in the evaluation tool could encourage a question to be asked related to what happens if it is not done. In a similar fashion the question can be begged in what happens if there is criterion included in the evaluation that was never communicated in the roles and responsibilities. When evaluations are used to determine continuation of employment, it may be beneficial to adequately communicate the appropriate expectations to the special education teacher. A job description with expectations well communicated for the position held by the special education teacher and aligned to the evaluation criteria should be further explored.

Special education teachers are different from general education teachers. The roles and responsibilities of special education and general education teachers are different. The job descriptions for special education teachers should be reflective of their respective roles and responsibilities. There should be alignment in the expectations in the job description and the criteria used to evaluate special education teachers. The evaluation tool should be appropriate for a special education teacher and avoid the one size fits all phenomena that is evident in the current practices of evaluating special education teachers. The evaluation tool may be more beneficial if it is aligned with the job descriptions in order to create a balance between expectations and evaluation. There is a need to separate and align the job description and the evaluation tools for special

education teachers. Special education teacher are teachers, but they are different than general education teachers. The evaluation process and tools should reflect this difference.

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## Appendix A

### Systematic Approach to Special Education Teacher Evaluation Questionnaire

Systematic approach to special education teacher evaluation questionnaire

1. How would your district's location be described?

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural

2. How many schools are in your district?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5-10
- 11-15
- 16-20

3. How many teachers are in your district? \_\_\_\_\_

Of the total amount of teachers, how many are special education teachers? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What special education teacher positions are in your district?

- Resource pull-out Teacher
- Self-contained classroom Teacher
- Co-taught/inclusion Teacher
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_



5. What is the title of the person that special education teachers report directly to?
- Principal
  - Assistant Principal
  - Director of Special Education
  - Special Education Coordinator
  - Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
6. Who completes the performance appraisal evaluations for special education teachers?
- Principal
  - Assistant Principal
  - Director of Special Education
  - Special education Coordinator
  - Peer evaluation
  - Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
7. How often are special education teachers formally evaluated in your district?
- Semi-annually (every 6 months)
  - Annually
  - Bi-Annually (every 2 years)
  - Every 3-5 years
  - Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_
8. Are the same evaluation tools used for performance appraisals of special education and general education teachers?
- Yes
  - No

9. Is a standard evaluation tool utilized in the performance appraisal process of special education teachers?

- Yes
- No

10. Is a standard evaluation tool utilized in the performance appraisal process of general education teachers?

- Yes
- No

11. Which of the following best describes the evaluation tools used for *all* special education teacher positions in your district?

- The same evaluation tool is used to evaluate ALL special education teachers.  
*Please describe*
- Different evaluation tools are used to evaluate special education teachers. *Please describe*
- Special education teachers are not evaluated. *Please describe*

12. What percentage of students served receive special education services? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Follow-up Interview Questions

### Follow-up Interview Questions

1. Please describe any professional development opportunities for the evaluators focusing on performance appraisals.
2. Is there any professional development opportunities focused on performance appraisals of special educators?
  - a. Please describe
3. Please describe your overall evaluation process including all formal and informal components.

## Appendix C

### Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching Domains

*Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching Domains*

<b>Domain 1-PLANNING AND PREPARATION</b>	<b>Domain 2- CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT</b>	<b>DOMAIN 3- INSTRUCTION</b>	<b>DOMAIN 4-PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY</b>
Knowledge of content and pedagogy	Create an environment of respect and rapport	Communicating with students	Reflecting on teaching
Knowledge of students	Establishing a culture of Learning	Using questioning and discussion techniques	Maintaining accurate records
Setting instructional outcomes	Managing classroom procedures	Engaging students in learning	Communicating with families
Knowledge of resources	Managing student Behavior	Using assessment in instruction	Participating in the professional community
Design coherent instruction	Organizing physical space	Demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness	Growing and developing professionally
Designing student assessments			Showing professionalism

*Note.* Extracted from Danielson (2013) *The Framework for Teaching: Evaluation Instrument*

Appendix D  
Evaluation Tool Themes

## Evaluation Tool Themes

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER EVALUATION THEMES	GENERAL TEACHER EVALUATION THEMES
Demonstrate professionalism	Assessment in instruction
Communicating with students	<i>Attendance</i>
Assessment in instruction	<i>Clear communication</i>
<i>Collaborate with team members in designing lessons related to goals</i>	<i>Collaborates and problem solve with other professionals</i>
Manage student behavior	Communication with families
Communicates productively with parents and larger community	Communication with students
Professional development	<i>Contributes to school district</i>
Content and pedagogy	<i>Delivery of instruction</i>
Create an environment	<i>Designs lessons</i>
Culture for learning	Differentiation of instruction
Design student assessment	<i>Grading and feedback to students</i>
Differentiation in instruction	<i>Integration of technology</i>
<i>Establish goals for educational setting and individual student</i>	Knowledge of content and pedagogy
Flexibility and responsiveness	<i>Knowledge of students with special needs</i>
Knowledge of resources	Maintain accurate records
<i>Knowledge of state and federal regulations</i>	Participation in plc
Knowledge of student	<i>Planning and preparation</i>
<i>For individual evaluations</i>	<i>Plans for diverse learners</i>
Maintain records	Professional development activities
Manage classroom procedures	Professionalism
Organization	Reflection on teaching
Participates in a PLC	Responsive and flexible
Questioning and discussion techniques	Classroom procedures
Reflection on teaching	Create environment
Setting instructional outcomes	Culture for learning
Student engagement	Teacher evaluation-designing student assessment
	Knowledge of resources
	Knowledge of students
	Manage behavior
	Organization
	Questioning and discussion techniques
	Student engagement



SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER  
EVALUATION THEMES

GENERAL TEACHER EVALUATION  
THEMES

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Setting instructional outcomes

*Note.* The italicized themes represent the themes that are unique and only emerged in either the special education or general education teacher evaluation tool.

## Appendix E

### Top 20 Evaluation Tool Themes

*Special education and general education evaluation Top 20 themes*

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER EVALUATION THEMES	GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHER EVALUATION THEMES
<i>Student engagement</i>	<i>Setting instructional goals and objectives</i>
<i>Setting instructional outcomes</i>	<i>Student engagement</i>
<i>Reflection on teaching</i>	<i>Uses questioning and discussion techniques</i>
<i>Uses questioning and discussion techniques</i>	<i>Organization</i>
<i>Professional development</i>	<i>Manage behavior</i>
<i>Participates in a PLC</i>	<i>Knowledge of students</i>
<i>Organization</i>	<i>Knowledge of students with special needs</i>
<i>Manage student behavior</i>	<i>Knowledge of resources</i>
<i>Manage classroom procedures</i>	<i>Designing student assessment</i>
<i>Maintain records</i>	<i>Culture for learning</i>
<i>Maintain records for evaluations</i>	<i>Create environment of respect</i>
<i>Knowledge of student</i>	<i>Communication with students</i>
<i>Knowledge of state and federal regulations</i>	<i>Classroom procedures</i>
<i>Knowledge of resources</i>	<i>Flexibility and responsiveness</i>
<i>Flexibility and responsiveness</i>	<i>Reflection on teaching</i>
<i>Establish goals for educational setting and individual student</i>	<i>Professionalism</i>
<i>Differentiate in instruction</i>	<i>Contributes to school district</i>
<i>Design student assessment</i>	<i>Professional development</i>
<i>Professionalism</i>	<i>Planning and preparation</i>
<i>Culture for learning</i>	<i>Participation in PLC</i>

*Note.* Themes are presented in hierarchical order based on the number of references coded.

The italicized themes are those that appeared in the special education and general education teachers' top 20 evaluation themes.

Appendix F

Special Education Teacher Job Description Themes

*Special Education Teacher Job Description Themes*

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER JOB DESCRIPTION THEMES

Advise Administrator	<i>Collects Data</i>	Help Students With Work	Plans For Substitute
Aligned Assessments	<i>Communicate With Families And Community</i>	Identify Struggles	<i>Participate In Professional Learning Community</i>
<i>Assess Student Accomplishments</i>	<i>Communication With Students</i>	Ideology	<i>Attends Professional Development</i>
Assesses Student Learning	Confidentiality	Individual Education Plans Development And Implementation	<i>Professionalism</i>
Assessment Guide Instruction	Coordinate IEP services	Implementation Of Individualized Education Plan	<i>Supervises Others</i>
<i>Assist In The Evaluation Of Others</i>	Co-Teaching	<i>Knowledge And Pedagogy</i>	<i>Reflect On Teaching</i>
Attendance	<i>Effective Instruction</i>	<i>Knowledge Of Resources</i>	Relationships
Budget	Develop Transition Plans	<i>Knowledge Of Students</i>	Report Progress
Build Relationships	Diagnose And Collaborate On Disabilities	<i>Lesson Planning</i>	Safe Classroom
<i>Building Regulations and Procedures</i>	<i>Diagnose Learning Disabilities</i>	Liaison	Scheduling For Students
Change Review Or Update Procedures Or Documents	<i>Differentiated Instruction</i>	<i>Maintains Records</i>	Screenings
Child Development	Effective Communication	Manage Behaviors	<i>Sets Goals And Objectives</i>
<i>Teach Citizenship</i>	<i>Create Environment Of Respect</i>	Monitor Progress	<i>Support Social Emotional Learning</i>
Classroom Activities	Functional Behavior Assessments	<i>Other Duties As Assigned</i>	<i>Student Engagement</i>

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER JOB DESCRIPTION THEMES

<i>Culture Of Learning</i>	Fine Arts Other Skills	<i>Participate In Evaluation Process</i>	Supervise Students
<i>Classroom Procedures</i>	<i>Flexibility And Responsiveness</i>	Participate In Individualized Education Plan Meetings	Support Students
<i>Collaborate With Others</i>	<i>Grading And Feedback</i>	Plan Instruction To Individual Needs	<i>Teach Curriculum</i>
Understand Processes Related To Students With Disabilities	Use Resources Appropriately	<i>Uses Effective Questioning</i>	<i>Use Technology</i>

*Note.* The italicized items represent the themes that emerged in the general education teacher job descriptions.

## Appendix G

### General Education Teacher Job Description Themes

*General Education Teacher Job Description Themes*

GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHER JOB DESCRIPTION THEMES

<i>Administer Screenings</i>	Communicate Effectively	<i>Grading And Feedback</i>	<i>Attend Professional Development</i>
<i>Aligned Work For Scholars</i>	<i>Communicate With Parents</i>	Individualized Education Plans	<i>Professionalism</i>
<i>Assess Student Accomplishments</i>	<i>Communicate With Students</i>	Knowledge Of Child Development	Provide Initial Medical Care
<i>Assign Homework</i>	Content Curriculum	<i>Knowledge Of Resources</i>	<i>Reflects On Teaching</i>
<i>Assist In The Evaluation Of Others</i>	<i>Content Knowledge And Pedagogy</i>	<i>Knowledge Of Students</i>	<i>Social-Emotional Learning</i>
<i>Assists Others</i>	<i>Cooperates In Evaluation Methods Of Self</i>	Knowledge Skills And Abilities	<i>Sets Instructional Goals</i>
<i>Behavior Management</i>	<i>Create An Environment Of Respect</i>	<i>Lesson Planning</i>	<i>Student Engagement</i>
<i>Building Regulations And Procedures</i>	<i>Culture of Learning</i>	<i>Maintains Records</i>	<i>Supervises Others-Aides Or Paraprofessionals</i>
<i>Teach Citizenship</i>	Design Student Assessment	Organization	<i>Teach Curriculum</i>
<i>Classroom Procedures</i>	<i>Diagnose Learning Disabilities</i>	<i>Other Duties As Assigned</i>	<i>Use Technology</i>
<i>Collaborate And Coordinate With Others</i>	Differentiated Assessment	<i>Participate In Professional Learning Community</i>	<i>Uses Data</i>
<i>Collaborative-Teamwork</i>	<i>Differentiated Instruction</i>	<i>Flexibility And Responsiveness</i>	<i>Uses Effective Questioning</i>
	<i>Effective Instruction</i>	Encourages Parental Involvement	

*Note.* The italicized themes represent the themes that were also found in the special education teacher job descriptions



## Appendix H

### Top 20 Job Description Themes

*Top 20 Job Description Themes*

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER JOB DESCRIPTION	GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHER JOB DESCRIPTION
<i>Uses effective questioning</i>	<i>Uses effective questioning</i>
Use resources appropriately	Uses data
Tutor	<i>Use technology</i>
Train others	<i>Teach curriculum</i>
<i>Use technology</i>	Social-emotional learning
Teaching content and pedagogy	Differentiated instruction
<i>Teach curriculum</i>	Content curriculum
Support social emotional behaviors	Collaborate with others
Possess fine arts other skills	<i>Teach citizenship</i>
<i>Teach citizenship</i>	Assign homework
Supervise students	<i>Supervises others- paraprofessionals</i>
<i>Student engagement</i>	<i>Student engagement</i>
<i>Sets instructional goals and objectives</i>	<i>Sets instructional goals and objectives</i>
Conduct screenings	<i>Reflect on teaching</i>
Coordinate scheduling for students	Provide initial medical care
Provide a safe classroom	<i>Professionalism</i>
Develop positive relationships	Enhance professional competence
<i>Reflect on teaching</i>	Participate in professional learning communities
<i>Supervises others- paraprofessionals</i>	Demonstrate good organizational skills
<i>Professionalism</i>	Maintain records

*Note.* The italicized themes represent the themes that emerged in the top 20 themes for the job descriptions for both the special education and general education teachers.

Appendix I

Special Education Teacher Job Description and Evaluation Themes

## Special Education Teacher Job Description and Evaluation Themes

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER EVALUATION THEMES	SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER JOB DESCRIPTION
Demonstrate professionalism	Uses effective questioning
Communicating with students	Use resources appropriately
Assessment in instruction	Tutor
Collaborate with team members in designing lessons related to goals	Train others
Manage student behavior	Use technology
Communicates productively with parents and larger community	Teaching content and pedagogy
Professional development	Teach curriculum
Content and pedagogy	Support social emotional behaviors
Create an environment	Possess fine arts other skills
Culture for learning	Teach citizenship
Design student assessment	Supervise students
Differentiation in instruction	Student engagement
Establish goals for educational setting and individual student	Sets instructional goals and objectives
Flexibility and responsiveness	Conduct screenings
Knowledge of resources	Coordinate scheduling for students
Knowledge of state and federal regulations	Provide a safe classroom
Knowledge of student	Develop positive relationships
For individual evaluations	Reflect on teaching
Maintain records	Supervises others- paraprofessionals
Manage classroom procedures	Professionalism
Organization	
Participates in a Professional Learning Community	
Questioning and discussion techniques	
Reflection on teaching	
Setting instructional outcomes	
Student engagement	