

Are Building Principals Prepared and Equipped to Supervise Special Education Teachers?

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### Abstract

The purpose of this quantitative study was to understand if principals from this rural southwest Wyoming district are prepared and equipped to supervise special education teachers. The complexities and variability of the tasks that are being asked from our special education teachers raise questions about how special education teachers are supervised. This research was necessary to provide building level principals with definitive supports which can be implemented in their efforts to effectively and appropriately supervise special education teachers. Findings show that building principals did not believe that their preparation program provided them enough coursework and/or experiences to supervise special education teachers, and that the evaluation tool the district currently uses does not afford them the opportunity to appropriately supervise special education teachers. Findings also revealed that, while the district had provided opportunities for professional development in regards to special education, additional professional development in the areas of compliance and special education programming is necessary; yet, with each of those concerns highlighted, all building principals believed that they were able to determine if a special education teacher is an effective teacher.

*Keywords:* special education, building principal, supervision

### Are Principals Prepared to Supervise Special Education Teachers?

Teacher supervision is an important focus for principals (Aseltine, Faryniarz, & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2006). With the implementation of the new national education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2017) students with disabilities are to be held to the same educational standards as their non-disabled peers, resulting in, building level principals shifting their responsibilities of guiding traditional instructional practices to various methods of specialized instruction and special education services (Alvarez, 2016). This transition has created a situation where building level principals are responsible for supervising special education teachers in an assortment of instructional settings, and while many of the special education teachers' responsibilities overlap those duties found with general education teachers, there are also substantive differences (Ysseldyke, O'Sullivan, Thurlow, & Christenson, 1989). The responsibilities for special education teachers may include: ensuring compliance with special education documentation, post-secondary transition activities, behavioral challenges, and other responsibilities necessary to appropriately deliver and implement student services (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). As a result of these variances, building level principals may not be fully aware or knowledgeable of the many roles that special education teachers fulfill and their respective needs, such as: manageable case load responsibilities, professional development opportunities to hone teaming, instructional, and progress monitoring skills (Bateman & Bateman, 2001; Pankake & Fullwood, 1999; Sage & Burrello, 1994; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000).

Nevertheless, principals play an important role in the lives and education of special needs students (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran & Walther-Thomas, 2004; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013), as principals must be able to garner public understanding and support for educational programs that

serve the needs of all students (Monteith, 2000). DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, and Walther-Thomas' (2004) state good principals are the best hope that students with disabilities and others at risk for school failure have for academic success. However, the complexities and variability of the tasks that our principals are being asked to monitor in regards to special education, raises questions about how special education teachers are and should be supervised. With the vast differences of responsibilities found between general education and special education teachers, do building principals alter their supervisory behaviors? As accountability efforts and expectations continue to be focused on and requiring that all students be held to the same educational standards, it is important to investigate if building principals are prepared to supervise special education teachers.

### **Review of Literature**

Effective schools' research from Lezotte and Edmonds in the late 1970s, has long revealed the importance of leadership at the local school level (Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand & Usdan, 1990; Downer, 1991), and it is no surprise that principals are vital in the success or failure of special education efforts at the building level (Parker & Day, 1997). Typically, building principals are responsible for communicating with families and teachers about special education services, promoting disability awareness, monitoring and evaluating special education decisions and services, and ensuring legal compliance (Council for Exceptional Children, 1998; Pankake & Fullwood, 1999). Gersten and colleagues (2001) found that building-level support from principals had strong effects on nearly all critical aspects of special education teachers' working conditions. Additionally, the values and supportive actions of principals and general education teachers, as mediated by overall school culture, influence special educators'

sense of collegial support (Billingsley, 1993; Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Brownell & Smith, 1993; Embich, 2001).

Still, while we ask our special education teachers to be specialized in specific instructional content, pedagogy, and various teaching practices, most principals lack background from coursework or field experience which may be required to exert strong leadership in special education (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). Many principals do not have the background knowledge about disabilities and their impact on learning; nor do many ever take courses in special education as part of their principal preparation program, yet a large part have shared, or sole, responsibility for supervising special education personnel and programs in their schools (Sirotnik & Kimball, 1994). Elliot and Riddle (1992) found that while building principals indicate that they have assumed a greater responsibility for special education programming within their buildings, they often refer problems and questions to central office special education directors.

Although the responsibility of the principal has increased, almost no state requires any training in special education for an individual to become licensed as a principal (Bateman & Bateman, 2001); and while the University of Wyoming, Department of Professional Studies (2017), does require those pursuing a master's degree in educational leadership to take one course in special education law, Doyle (2001) adds that building principals often do not have the required knowledge to evaluate and supervise special education personnel or to contribute to their individual growth. Unfortunately, as a result, it is estimated that as many as half of all new special educators leave the field within the first three years due to poor administrative support, poor preparation, complex job responsibilities, and overwhelming paperwork requirements (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Boe, Barkanic & Leow, 1999; Embich, 2001; Miller et al., 1999).

Through the review of literature, four factors were attributed to impacting a building principal's ability to supervise special education teachers. First, most principals lack the course work and field experience needed to lead local efforts to create learning environments that emphasize academic success for students with disabilities (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Katsiyannis, Conderman & Franks, 1996; Parker & Day, 1997); and without a solid understanding of IDEA, principals cannot administer special education programs effectively (Bateman & Bateman, 2001; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001; Valente, 1998). Second, the professional development provided to new and seasoned principals, specifically related to implementing and supporting special education compliance and programming is lacking. Anderson (1999) stated that resistance toward inclusive reforms by principals is often due to lack of training rather than negative perceptions or attitudes toward special education. Third, the teacher evaluation tool and how this supports a building principal's ability to effectively supervise a special education teacher is also a concern. Most evaluation systems lack the capacity to differentiate among teachers based on specialized roles and to consider the challenges of working with at-risk students and specific contexts (Chait, 2009; Toch & Rothman, 2008). Lastly, Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, and Keeling (2009) concluded that building principals consistently rate teacher performance at the same level, hence, judging teachers as equally effective in the classroom. This is concerning knowing that Bright (2011) suggested that the most important factor contributing to student success is the effectiveness of instruction; thus, the building principal's capacity to measure teacher effectiveness can also be noted as impacting their ability to supervise special education teachers.

### **Principal Preparation Programs**

Rhys (1996) shares that since the first mandate for the provision of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for individuals with disabilities, a dual system of education has existed. Students are separated into groups labeled ‘special education’ and ‘general education,’ each group having its own teachers and administrators. Institutions of higher education traditionally have prepared both teachers and administrators to work within one of the separate programs. In this dual system, the decision-making responsibility for providing special education and related services has been primarily with special education administrators and their staff members (Rhys, 1996).

Before amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) were made in 1997 (U.S. Department of Education Federal Register, 1999), Katsiyannis (1994) had already highlighted that school principals are responsible for ensuring the appropriate education of all students, which includes those with disabilities. He added that principals must also provide the leadership to develop the knowledge base and must have the competence to ensure compliance. DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, and Walter-Thomas (2003) suggested that most principals lack any background from coursework and field experience, which may be required to exert strong leadership in special education. Lasky and Karge (2006) found a need for principals to receive more training in the area of special education in order to effectively evaluate the quality of special education teachers; unfortunately, such training appears to be absent for prospective principals, as colleges and universities often fail to require future principals to take a single course in special education (Garrison-Wade, Sobel, & Fulmer, 2007).

The American Association of School Administrators (2009) highlighted a recent study surrounding principal preparation programs and specifically how prepared building principals

felt in regards to special education programming. Their findings suggested that recent graduates of principal preparation programs felt no more comfortable with special education than graduates of fifteen or more years. While the results point out that just one course in a preparation program can significantly increase a novice principal's confidence in dealing with special education, building principals, even with many years of experience, are still relying on special education administrators for support and guidance. However, rather than simply adding on coursework, at the risk of further creating separate and exclusionary programs, Angelle and Bilton (2009) suggested that embedding skill and knowledge areas into existing curriculum and integrating general education issues with special education issues will better serve aspiring principals of the future.

Bridges and Hallinger (1995) identified the need for graduate administrative programs to offer authentic opportunities that support the development of special education understanding while developing overall administrative skills. These opportunities should include: field based problem solving, observations of effective special education programs, authentic involvement in the oversight of identification and program planning for students with disabilities with the supervision of a mentor, authentic projects that focus on student performance and data-based decisions about services, and lastly an internship with a variety of authentic learning opportunities. Despite the fact that special education is now a big part of the principal's job, people coming out of principal preparation programs often seem to lack knowledge regarding special education program operations (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003).



### **Professional Development**

DiPaola and Tschannen-Morran (2003) reported that the greatest need expressed by principals was help and information about implementing successful special education programs, and Balt (2000) shared that what principals need are a firm foundation in special education policy and legal issues. However, in Balt's study, many principals indicated they had not participated in any specific workshops or conferences regarding special education sponsored by a professional organization or a public school agency. Several other studies (Davidson & Gooden, 2001; Lowe & Bringham, 2000) also point to gaps in special education training, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels and in professional development. Hubbard, Mehan, and Stein (2006) explain that while districts will often hold meetings with building and district level administrators, which are frequently used as opportunities to roll out new district initiatives, directives, and expectations, these generally provide building principals with the *what*, rather than the *how*, of leading change and creating the conditions which promote healthy teacher responsiveness to feedback generated by the evaluation process. Nonetheless, these meetings rarely focus on issues and topics which are related to special education.

With principals needing to make decisions relevant to a) compliance at the federal, state, and local level; b) effective procedures for identifying students; c) maximizing program options to meet student's individual needs; d) parent involvement in planning and maintaining effective individualized services; and e) necessary changes to programming based on data and program evaluations (Council for Exceptional Children, 2007; Woodcock & Vialle, 2010; Zirkel, 2004), it is critical that they receive appropriate professional development in each of these areas. This lack of professional development and ongoing support for principals is especially concerning when data reveals that, according to a 2012 MetLife survey, 86 percent of principals agree that they

should be held accountable for student outcomes. Yet, 84 percent of them report high stress two or more days a week related to the challenges of the position, combined with long hours, limited authority to make high level decisions, and intense pressure to raise student achievement. As a result, one in nearly three principals surveyed was actively considering leaving the profession. The National Center for Education Statistics goes on to highlight that principals who reported receiving no professional development during the previous year left their school 1.4 times more often than principals who had some form of professional development (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2013).

### **Evaluation System**

Another issue regarding the supervision of special education teachers revolves around the current teacher evaluation system. Most evaluation systems lack the capacity to differentiate among teachers based on specialized roles and/or to consider the challenges of working with at-risk students and specific contexts (Chait, 2009; Toch & Rothman, 2008). Teacher evaluation systems have moved into the forefront of educational reform with the discussion centered on the question of how to develop fair and reliable measures of effective teaching, Hull (2013) suggested that previous evaluation systems were inadequate as he identified that nearly all teachers were rated as simply satisfactory or not; this without offering any useful feedback or directions for teachers on how they can improve their instruction. Holdheide, Goe, Croft, and Reschly (2010) highlighted the strong relationship between teacher effectiveness and student achievement, evidenced by states taking measures for improving their teacher evaluation systems.

A recent report provided by the Center for Public Education indicated that since 2009, over two-thirds of states have made significant changes to how teachers are evaluated. For most

states, the motivation for these changes came at the hand of incentives available through federal programs; such as, Race to the Top (U.S. Department of Education, 2016) and the No Child Left Behind waivers (Klein, 2015). State applications for these funds earned additional credit for upgrading teacher evaluation systems to have them take place annually and be based in part on student achievement (Hull, 2013). Research completed by the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (2010) shows that most state and district respondents indicated that their current evaluation system does not allow for a different or slightly modified evaluation process for special education teachers. Further, the majority of district respondents (81.4 percent) supported that contractual agreements do not allow for modification in the evaluation process for special education teachers. Conversely, 0.9 % of the respondents “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with the statement that special education teachers should be evaluated using the same process as that of general education teachers. In addition, 84.1 percent indicated that special education teachers are required to have knowledge, skills, and expertise that general educators are not. Many district level interviewees expressed that using the same system to evaluate both general and special education teachers was not a “good fit” for special educators.

It should be noted that, in systems that allow for a different or modified process, most (86.6 percent) include all special education teachers, with 6.3 percent including educators for low-incidence disabilities and 5.0 percent including educators serving as consultants/co-teachers (National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2010). Therefore, it can be stated that most teacher evaluation systems, even those that have been newly developed, have not taken into consideration the unique differences between special and general education teachers.

Furthermore, and as previously mentioned, special education teachers may be observed by

principals or assistant principals, many whom lack sufficient background knowledge in special education (Lasky, Karge, 2006).

### **Teacher Effectiveness**

Bright (2011) confirms, that the most important factor contributing to student success is the effectiveness of instruction. Hattie (2003) adds that we should focus on the greatest source of variance that can make the difference, this being the teacher. Within supervision, one of the primary purposes of the teacher evaluation tool is to determine and measure if a teacher is indeed effective; nonetheless, lack of consistency among evaluators poses concerns that a teacher might be rated at the highest level by one principal and much lower by another (Danielson, 2010). Although building principals know and understand their responsibilities in identifying growth areas and ensuring that teachers are accountable for their students' outcomes, their feedback is habitually positive and varies little based on the teacher's contributions to students' successes (Holdheide, Goe, Croft, & Reschly, 2010).

States, districts, and schools all across the United States are busy developing or implementing teacher evaluation systems. Reports and initiatives highlight two failings of past efforts: (1) Teacher evaluation systems have not accurately measured teacher quality because they've failed to do a good job of discriminating between effective and ineffective teachers, and (2) teacher evaluation systems have not aided in developing a highly skilled teacher workforce (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2011; Toch & Rothman, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2009; Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009). In an effort to recognizing the concerns surrounding how teacher effectiveness is measured, reference can be made to the Widget Effect (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009). The widget effect derives its name from the authors' conclusion that building principals consistently rate teacher performance

at the same level, hence, judging teachers as equally effective in the classroom. This conclusion came from surveying over 15,000 teachers in over twelve districts of various sizes. Conceptually, the authors viewed teachers as ‘widgets’, and as a result, interpreted them as easily interchangeable (such as the mechanical parts of a particular system).

Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, and Keeling (2009) went on to identify that despite specified goals to improve teacher practice and a supported desire to maintain high expectations for teacher performance, compliance-driven requirements for teacher evaluation have contributed to a process overseen by indifference. Charlotte Danielson (2010) considers the following deficiencies with traditional systems for evaluating teachers: outmoded evaluative criteria, simplistic evaluative comments without any consistency as to what those comments mean, same procedures regardless of experience without differentiation that reflects veteran teachers’ experience and expertise, lack of consistency among evaluators, and top down communication. In effect, the majority of teachers receive positive evaluations with little regard for their varying contributions to student success (Sledge & Pazey, 2013).

### **Summary**

Principals who focus on instructional issues, demonstrate administrative support for special education, and provide high-quality professional development for teachers, demonstrate and produce enhanced outcomes for students with disabilities and for others at risk of school failure (Benz, Lindstrom & Yovanoff, 2000; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff & Harniss, 2001; Kearns, Kleinert & Clayton, 1998; Klingner et al., 2001). While the essence of teacher supervision is complex, when specifically targeting special education teachers, the challenge grows exponentially, primarily because of the specificity of the position and limited knowledge and experience from those responsible in their supervision. The review of literature identified

four elements which impact a principal's ability to effectively supervise those in special education positions. First, literature continues to highlight the need for improved principal preparation programs that include specific instruction in the implementation and supervision of special education programming. Second, Goldring, Taie, and Riddles (2013) have shared that professional development for building level principals is rare and costly, and that due to the lack of support and training, principals are often leaving the profession prematurely because of the demands and stress associated with the position.

Third, the evaluation tool has also been critiqued for not considering the many facets involved in being a special education teacher (Chait, 2009; Toch, & Rothman, 2008). The Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) and the Danielson Group's Framework for teaching Evaluation Instrument are two of the most often used commercial teacher evaluation tools; yet, these are not applicable to various special education programs, and therefore, their use is purely compliance driven and not effective for improving special education teachers' performance. Lastly, the challenge of determining whether a teacher is effective is difficult in nature and not limited to special education teachers, and as Holdheide, Goe, Croft, and Reschly (2010) suggested, the feedback provided by principals is routinely positive and varies little based on the teacher's contributions to students' successes.

## **Background**

To examine the supervision of special education teachers by building level principals, this study was conducted within a rural southwest Wyoming district. The school district requires building level principals to supervise and evaluate all teachers within their building. They are to use the same evaluation instrument, irrespective of the teacher's role within general or special education (Wyoming State Legislature, 2015). The special education director is available to

advise with the supervision and provide feedback regarding individual evaluations for special education staff; nonetheless, the responsibility ultimately resides with each of the building principals.

Over the past six years, head and assistant principals from this district have received extensive training focused in the area of special education compliance and special education law, which has resulted in an increased awareness of legal obligations and appropriate practices for ensuring compliance. Conversely, instructional methods, behavioral strategies, functional skills, and other special education related instructional material has primarily been provided for teachers rather than building level principals.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to understand if principals from this rural southwest Wyoming district are prepared to supervise special education teachers. The information derived from the research and the review of associated literature is to be provided to district level administrators (special education directors, curriculum directors, and superintendents) from both this district and throughout the region, along with, the Wyoming Department of Education. The results found in this research aim to assist in the development and implementation of professional development opportunities to support building level principals in their ongoing challenges with supervising and evaluating special education teachers.

### **Research Questions**

To determine if similar challenges and barriers were found throughout this district as identified in the review of accompanying literature, the following research questions were examined:

1. Do building principals believe that their administrative preparation programs adequately prepared them to supervise special education teachers?
2. Do building principals believe they are able to determine a special education teachers' effectiveness?
3. Do building principals believe they receive appropriate professional development to assist them with the supervision of special education teachers?
4. Do building principals believe their evaluation tool is appropriate for supervising and evaluating special education teachers?
5. What are principals' greatest challenges in supervising special education teachers?
6. What supports do principals perceive would be the most helpful in assisting them with the supervision of special education teachers?

### **Method**

#### **Setting**

The context of this study is a rural school district located in the Southwest portion of Wyoming. The district consists of an area roughly around 5,250 square miles with a population of approximately 12,500 people (United States Census Bureau, 2016). Only eight percent of individuals are of alternative ethnic background. The district provides a comprehensive educational program for approximately 2,700 students in grades kindergarten through twelfth and is North Central Association (NCA) accredited. In addition to the district maintaining four elementary schools within the city limits and three rural schools, the district also operates one intermediate school which hosts fifth and sixth grade students and one middle school for its students in the seventh and eighth grade. Secondary education comprises of one high school serving students in grades 9 through 12 and one alternative high school which educates students



in grades 10 through 12. The community's major employers consist of mineral mines that extract trona, oil and natural gas production, the Union Pacific Railroad, and the School District. The community is considered a bedroom community due to its close proximity to a nearby city with approximately three times its population.

### **Description of Participants**

Selected participants for this study were elementary and secondary building level principals and assistant principals throughout the previously described school district. All principals who supervise special education teachers, whether or not they are the head principal or assistant principal, were contacted and asked to complete the survey. Out of the twelve potential participants, four participants who completed the survey were categorized as secondary (7-12 grades) and seven as elementary (K-6). Five of the participants had three or less years of experience as building level principals. One of the participants is currently responsible for supervising the district's rural schools which currently do not have any special education staff; still, this individual's data is equally as important as the research aimed to gather all building level principals who supervise special education staff, whether that is currently or in the foreseeable future. None of the participants have taught special education or have been involved in a field directly correlated to special education.

### **Survey Design**

The survey included qualitative open responses, and quantitative Likert-Scale responses. The following four areas were included in the survey and selected based on the review of literature and research regarding elements which impact building principals' preparation as they seek to supervise special education teachers.

**Principal Preparation Program.** The review of literature highlighted that principals are not adequately prepared for the complex challenges of supervising special education teachers and often will defer to district level special education administrators for guidance. Five questions were crafted to determine patterns among building principals in regards to their preparation programs and coursework related to special education.

1. Do you believe your principal preparation program provided you with coursework and experiences which supported your ability to supervise special education staff?
2. Did your principal preparation program provide you with enough instruction to be competent and confident in supervising special education compliance?
3. Did your principal preparation program provide you with enough instruction to be competent and confident in supervising special education programming?
4. Do you believe that additional coursework on special education during the principal preparation program would better support and equip a building principal with the skills necessary to supervise special education staff?
5. Do you believe that an opportunity for field experience during the principal preparation program would better support and equip a building principal with the skills necessary to supervise special education staff?

**Professional Development.** District professional development for building principals varies from district to district; therefore, gaining an understanding of districts' efforts to train building principals in the field of special education is crucial to identifying the professional development gaps of building principals. Five questions, specific to special education, pursued the amount of professional development provided, the trends in topic areas, and whether or not

building principals, as the general research suggests, believed additional professional development is warranted.

1. Do you believe that your district provides you with enough professional development in the area of special education compliance?
2. Do you believe that your district provides you with enough professional development in the area of special education programming?
3. Do you believe that professional development in the area of special education strengthens your ability to supervise special education teachers?
4. Do you seek out professional development targeted towards the supervision of special education teachers?
5. Do you believe that your district has provided you with enough professional development for you to appropriately supervise special education teachers?

**Evaluation Tool.** One main component of how special education teachers are supervised is the evaluation tool supervisors' use. As the literature review points out, concerns are found with using one tool to evaluate various positions within the teaching trade. Within the survey, five questions attempted to discover if similar concerns are found throughout the researched district and if trends were evident with any of the particular tools utilized.

1. Do you believe the district's evaluation tool is appropriate for evaluating and supervising special education teachers?
2. Do you believe the evaluation tool should be different for special education teachers than teachers in the general education classroom?

3. Does the evaluation tool afford you the opportunity to differentiate your documentation based on your observations and findings for a variety of special education positions (i.e. behavior, life skills, resource, itinerant, etc.)?
4. Does the district's evaluation tool allow you to address compliance needs as they are related to special education services?
5. Does the district's evaluation tool allow you to address programming concerns as they relate to special education teachers?

**Teacher Effectiveness.** Well written and implemented IEPs reflect high quality individualization as evidenced by appropriately written key components including present levels of performance, annual goals, special education and related services, and transition plans. In addition, all teachers need to be prepared to teach students with disabilities effectively. Specifically, special education teachers should be able to: create a plan for adapting materials, identify and evaluate the demands that students are not meeting, develop goals for teaching strategies and making appropriate adaptations, determine whether content or format adaptations are needed, identify the features of the materials that need to be adapted, determine the type of adaption that will enable to the student to meet the demands, implement then evaluate and adjust the adaptations, and lastly fade the adaptations when possible (Olinghouse, 2008). This survey asked five questions attempting to discover if building principals believed that they are able to effectively determine a special education teachers' effectiveness in regards to the above-mentioned skills.

1. Do you find yourself able to determine if a special education teacher is an effective teacher?

2. Do you find yourself able to decipher between special education teachers in need of improvement versus those who are proficient?
3. Do you find yourself able to decipher between special education teachers that are determined to be proficient versus distinguished?
4. Do you believe you have the skills and experience to improve a special education teacher's effectiveness?
5. Does compliance impact your perception of a special education teacher's effectiveness?

The survey began with a series of questions addressing the four elements. These questions used a four-point Likert scale, ranking principal's responses from a '0' meaning 'Strongly Disagree' to a '4' for 'Strongly Agree. Lastly, the following two open ended questions asked:

- What are principals' greatest challenges in supervising special education teachers?
- What supports do principals perceive would be the most helpful in assisting them with the supervision of special education teachers?

Following the four elements mentioned above, the survey ended with a demographic section including: participants' current administrative role, years of experience in education and as a supervisor, gender, teaching experience, and teaching area.

All principals in the district were asked to complete the online survey and received an email cover letter with the link. During an administrative meeting, all potential participants were introduced to the survey and provided an opportunity to ask for clarification regarding the purpose, risks, and potential benefits of their participation. Potential participants were asked to complete the survey honestly as their responses were critical to the results of the study. The

survey was open for 3 weeks with a weekly reminder sent each week via email. Responses were confidentially stored on the researcher's desktop and deleted once the research was completed.

### **Procedures**

The design of this study was to investigate, through a quantitative Likert Scale survey with two open ended items, both elementary and secondary building level principals throughout the previously described district. The focus of the research examined whether or not building level principals felt prepared and equipped to supervise special education teachers.

Prior to sending the survey out to participants, the survey was reviewed by a four-member committee from the University of Wyoming faculty with expertise in the field of education, supervision, research, and special education. The survey for this study was developed by the researcher for the purpose of investigating the preparation of building principals, and how equipped they felt, as it relates to supervising special education teachers. Surveys typically allow researchers to measure the perceptions, attitudes, behaviors and characteristics of a group (Cook & Cook, 2008). The survey questions were created based on both the literature review and the practices of the district identified throughout this study. In addition to the review from University of Wyoming faculty and permission from district administration, approval from the Institutional Review Board was also requested and received.

### **Validity/Reliability**

Three items were emphasized for validity: content, criterion, and construct (Social Research Methods, 2016). It was believed that the survey items contained content material that matches the instructional objectives. Criterion was measured by analyzing the responses to determine if they are in agreement with the researcher's hypothesis; along with what was found throughout the literature, in regards to the four elements which impact supervisory behaviors.

Construct was determined as the surveys were returned and whether or not patterns similar to those identified in the review of literature were found from the participants' responses. In an effort to increase validity, three to four experts within the education field reviewed and provided feedback on the survey before it was sent out. It is important to note, that the small sample size of the study, may have impacted the reliability of the findings.

### **Data Analysis**

The research was arranged as quantitative approach with parallel data gathering. Survey results were analyzed with descriptive statistics to determine the trends, attitudes, and opinions of the participants. The descriptive statistics were used to analyze each of the 21 Likert scale items in the survey. The researcher used the open ended responses to determine challenges and perceptions from building principals, that in turn, were utilized to develop appropriate measures to better prepare principals in supervising special education teachers throughout the district. Qualitative data was used to enrich information on variables that were not obtained through the empirical data that was gathered through the Likert survey.

The University of Wyoming's Survey tool was used for both Likert Scale questions and to acquire responses from the two open-ended questions regarding building principals' beliefs of their greatest challenges in supervising special education teachers and what supports they perceived would be the most helpful in assisting them. Each response was printed out and looked at individually to determine conceptual categories and themes (Creswell, 2005). These themes were determined based on similarities and comparisons to the literature reviewed. Quotes and themes were categorized and used in supporting or challenging the research and its findings. If responses were irrelevant or did not fall within an identified theme, the answers were not

included. As previously mentioned, with the research resembling a case study, the researcher believed that themes would emerge through the findings and correlate to the literature.

### **Summary**

The study incorporated an online survey to acquire both empirical and qualitative data to determine whether or not building principals in the selected district believe that they are prepared and equipped to supervise special education teachers. The survey included four sets of questions related to principal preparation programs, professional development, the evaluation tool, and determining teacher effectiveness. It concluded with two open ended questions. As referred to throughout the chapter, the research resembled a case study where data was gathered regarding the anticipated concern and/or need and suggestions and recommendations are provided to address the concerns.

## **Results**

### **Principal Preparation Programs**

Research question one asks: “Do building principals believe that their administrative preparation programs adequately prepared them to supervise special education teachers?” Table 1 lists the means of the five Likert Scale questions asked in the survey that indicate principals’ perceptions of the preparation that was provided by their principal preparation program.

It is important to note that the first three questions of this particular data set are evaluating if the principals’ preparation program did indeed provide enough coursework and/or instruction; as compared to the last two questions, which asked if more coursework and/or instruction would improve a principals’ ability to supervise special education staff. Overall, two themes emerged from the results. The first, that principals did not believe that their preparation program provided enough coursework to support their ability to supervise special education



teachers, and that they did not believe that the instruction provided made them confident in supervising special education compliance ( $M = 2.17, SD = 0.73$ ) and/or programming ( $M = 2.25, SD = 0.59$ ). Second, that given more coursework ( $M = 3.58, SD = 0.64$ ) and/or more field experience ( $M = 3.58, SD = 0.49$ ) throughout their principal’s preparation program would better prepare principals with the task of supervising special education teachers.

Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviation of Principals’ Perceptions – Principal Preparation Program*

Statement: My principal preparation program...	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>
Provided coursework which supported my ability to supervise SPED staff.	2.41	0.75
Provided enough instruction to be confident in supervising SPED compliance.	2.17	0.73
Provided enough instruction to be confident in supervising SPED programming.	2.25	0.59
Given more coursework would better prepare principals in supervising SPED staff.	3.58	0.64
Given more field experience would better prepare principals in supervising SPED staff.	3.58	0.49
Average Subscale Score – Principal Preparation Program	2.79	0.64

*Note:* Response scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

**Professional Development**

In answering questions pertaining to the second research question which asked: “Do building principals believe they have received appropriate professional development to assist them with the supervision of special education teachers?” Table 2 shows that overall, principals believed that the district had indeed provided enough professional development to appropriately supervise special education staff ( $M = 2.92, SD = 0.64$ ), and that they strongly believed that

professional development in the area of special education strengthens their ability to supervise special education staff ( $M = 3.50, SD = 0.50$ ).

When specifically analyzing professional development as it relates to special education compliance, the results indicate that overall building principals did believe the district had provided them with enough professional development ( $M = 3.08, SD = 0.49$ ), as with professional development in the area of special education programing ( $M = 3.08, SD = 0.64$ ).

Table 2

*Means and Standard Deviation of Principals’ Perceptions – Professional Development*

Statement.	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>
My district provides enough professional development in SPED compliance.	3.08	0.49
My district provides enough professional development in SPED programing.	3.08	0.64
Professional development in SPED strengthens my ability to supervise SPED staff.	3.50	0.50
I seek out professional development in the area of supervising SPED staff.	2.42	0.75
My district has provided enough professional development to appropriately supervise SPED staff.	2.92	0.64
Average Subscale Score – Professional Development	3.00	0.60

*Note:* Response scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

In examining whether or not principals would seek out professional development targeted towards the supervision of special education teachers, the findings showed that principals did not seek out professional development in this area ( $M = 2.42, SD = 0.75$ ). In referring to one of the open ended questions which asked to provide what supports, as a building principal, they would perceive to be the most helpful in assisting them with the supervision of special education teachers, one principal commented, “additional background in the expectations for special

educations (compliance, research-based effective practices for special education)” and another added, “specific training around SPED law and compliance” were items that they believed would be helpful, lastly, one principal shared “continued training on special education law.”

### **Evaluation Tool**

The third set of questions referred to the research question: “Do building principals believe their evaluation tool is appropriate for supervising and evaluating special education teachers?” In examining the data, as found in table 3, it can be stated that principals from this district believed that a different tool should be used between special and general education teachers ( $M = 2.92, SD = 0.64$ ); in addition, principals believed that the current tool does not afford them the opportunity to differentiate based on the various special education positions ( $M = 1.92, SD = 0.28$ ). When it comes to the evaluation tool, the results in general did not indicate any differences between a principal’s ability to address compliance ( $M = 2.00, SD = 0.41$ ) or programming needs ( $M = 2.00, SD = 0.00$ ), as both questions came out with the same mean, indicating that, with the exception of one elementary principal, all principals felt that the tool did not provide them the ability to address either compliance or programming with special education teachers. In analyzing the results of the open ended questions, asking what are the principals’ greatest’s challenges in supervising special education teachers and what supports would be most helpful in doing so, respondents provided the most suggestions and feedback related to the evaluation tool which include the following comments: “an evaluation tool which provides specifics to their practice and differing philosophies in regards to dealing with a variety of needs”, “an evaluation tool specific to their daily work”, “the district evaluation tool does not recognize the paperwork or compliance needs that might need to be addressed with a special education teacher”, “we need to have a more effective monitoring tool to adequately evaluate

teacher performance in regards to the roles and responsibilities they have as a special education teacher/case manager”, “lack of alignment of evaluation tool to special education teaching”, and “having an accurate evaluation tool that matches what is being asked of special education staff.”

Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviation of Principals’ Perceptions – District Evaluation Tool*

Statement. My district’s evaluation tool...	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>
Is appropriate to evaluate special education staff.	2.00	.58
Should be different for special education staff & general education staff.	2.92	.64
Affords me the opportunity to differentiate based on special education position.	1.92	.28
Allows me to address compliance needs related to special education.	2.00	.41
Allows me to address programming needs related to special education.	2.00	.00
Afford me the opportunity to improve special education teacher’s performance.	2.42	.49
Average Subscale Score – District Evaluation Tool	2.21	.40

*Note:* Response scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

When specifically analyzing a principal’s perception of being able to differentiate their documentation based on their observations of a variety of special education positions (behavior, life skills, resource, itinerant, etc.), all principals unanimously selected that they disagreed, with one principal strongly disagreeing, that the current evaluation tool that the district uses affords them the opportunity to do so ( $M = 1.92, SD = 0.28$ ). In removing the question regarding if the evaluation tool should be different for general versus special education teachers, the overall mean for the average of the other questions ( $M = 2.07, SD = 0.35$ ) indicates a strong opinion that principals believe that the evaluation tool is currently not affording them the opportunity to appropriately supervise special education teachers. Lastly, the data shows that as a whole,

principals believe that the current evaluation tool is not appropriate to evaluate special education staff ( $M = 2.00$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ).

### **Teacher Effectiveness**

The survey's last set of Likert Scale questions revolved around the research question: "Do building principals believe they are able to determine a special education teachers' effectiveness?" As part of the supervision process, the researcher wanted to know if building principals actually felt that they could appropriately determine the effectiveness of a special education teacher. Surprisingly, even though the data indicated that principals did not believe their preparation program provided them enough coursework and/or experiences to supervise special education teachers, and that the evaluation tool the district currently uses does not afford them the opportunity to appropriately evaluate special education teachers; the findings, as shown in Table 4, point out that all building principals strongly believed that they are able to determine if a special education teacher is an effective teacher ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = 0.47$ ).

In addition, principals believed that they are able to decipher between special education teachers in need of improvements versus those who are proficient ( $M = 3.25$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ); as well as, being able to decipher those that are proficient versus distinguished ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 0.41$ ). With a  $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 0.41$ , this is reinforced by principals' response to the question asking if they, as building principals, believed they had the experience to improving a special education teacher's effectiveness. When asking if compliance impacted their perceptions of a special education teacher's effectiveness, the results showed that principals agreed that indeed, compliance does play a part ( $M = 2.83$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ).

Table 4

*Means and Standard Deviation of Principals’ Perceptions – Special Ed. Teacher Effectiveness*

Statement.	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>
I’m able to determine if special education teacher is effective.	3.33	.47
I’m able to decipher between special education teachers in need of improvement versus those who are proficient.	3.25	.60
I’m able to decipher between proficient special education teachers versus those who are distinguished.	3.00	.41
I believe I have the experience to improve a special education teacher’s effectiveness.	3.00	.41
Compliance impacts my perception of a special education teacher’s effectiveness.	2.83	.55
Average Subscale Score – Special Education Teacher Effectiveness	3.08	.49

*Note:* Response scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

**Building Principals’ Greatest Challenge**

In response to the first open ended question, which asked what building principals felt were their greatest challenges in supervising special education teachers, principals offered the following responses which support the results obtained through the Likert Scale questions about the evaluation tool: “lack of alignment from the evaluation tool to special education teaching”, “the evaluation tool which provides specifics to their practice in differing philosophies in regards to dealing with a variety of needs”, and “the district evaluation tool does not recognize the paperwork or compliance needs that might need to be addressed with a special education teacher.” Some principals provided comments which pertained to the compliance requirements found within special education: “communication, especially with knowing whether all documents were sent/given to parents as required”, “making certain special education teachers have a proficient level of understanding as it pertains to special education obligations”, and

“scheduling time to meet with kids and special education law.” And lastly, various comments were provided as general challenges with supervising special education teachers: “helping some of them understand that what they do has more in common with what good classroom teachers do, and that the differences between the two roles are often relatively minor, depending on the program within which they work”, “number of concerns which are difficult to address or correct due to tenure, teacher lack of motivation, and buy-in to leadership initiatives”, and “it can be challenging when a special education teacher co-teaches”,

### **Supports Necessary for Building Principals**

The second open ended question provided insight as to what supports building principals believed would be the most helpful in assisting them with the supervision of special education teachers. As the first open ended question highlighted, building principals shared that they would like supports revolving around special education compliance, their comments included:

“continued training on special education law”, “knowing exactly what special education teachers need to complete and turn in to the special education office”, “brief checklist of when and what required paperwork should take place”, “additional background in the expectations for special education staff (compliance, research-based effective practices for special education, etc.)”, “clear feedback regarding the quality and timeliness of paperwork completion”, and “specific training around special education law and compliance.”

The second theme found throughout the responses was directly related to the evaluation tool. Again, as strongly suggested from the answers provided throughout the Likert Scale questions, principals felt that: “we need to have a more effective monitoring tool to adequately evaluate teacher performance in regards to the roles and responsibilities they have as special education teacher/case manager”, “an evaluation tool specific to their daily work”, and “having

an accurate evaluation tool that matches what is being asked of special education staff.” Lastly, one principal provided a comment asking for support through collaboration from special education experts and professionals in the process of observing special education teachers and providing dialogue about teaching practices and best practices.

### **Discussion**

The complexities and variability of the tasks that are being asked from our special education teachers raise questions about how special education teachers are supervised. Special education teachers are asked to be specialized in specific instructional content, pedagogy, and various teaching practices; while all along, staying current with special education laws and trends regarding recent litigation and judicial decisions involving students with disabilities; however, are building principals prepared and confident with their own training, experiences, and knowledge to effectively supervise special education teachers? This study, limited to quantitative methods, was conducted to investigate if building principals, in this rural southwest Wyoming district, believe that they are prepared and equipped to supervise special education teachers.

DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, and Walter-Thomas (2003) suggested that most principals lacked any background from coursework and field experience which may be required to exert strong leadership in special education. Findings from this research supported this statement as building principals reported that overall, their principal preparation program did not provide them with the necessary coursework and field experiences necessary to supervise special education teachers. Even though, Katsiyannis (1994), highlighted that school principals must provide the leadership to develop one’s knowledge base and must have the competence to ensure compliance, the results found within this district’s data showed that building principals did not



see themselves as having received the needed instruction to be confident in supervising special education compliance. In relation to supervising special education programs, the participants agreed with DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2003), that while special education is now a big part of the principal's job, people coming out of principal preparation programs often seem to lack knowledge regarding special education program operations.

DiPaola and Tschannen-Morrin (2003) reported that the greatest need expressed by principals was help and information about implementing successful special education programs; and while additional professional development is always necessary, the results from this research does indicate that building principals from this district do believe that they have received enough professional development in the areas of compliance and programming; yet, that they could still benefit from additional support in the area of properly supervising special education staff. Responses from the open ended questions did reveal that building principals still yearn for supplementary training, especially in the area of special education law, paperwork requirements, and developing an understanding of good teaching practices.

The teacher evaluation system used for supervising special education teachers generated the most frustration from building principals surveyed and supported Lasky and Karge (2006) in that most teacher evaluation systems, even those that have been newly developed, have not taken into the consideration the unique differences between special and general education teachers. Whether it be for compliance or addressing programming needs, building principals generally responded that the district's current evaluation tool did not allow them to address these needs appropriately when supervising special education teachers. In addition, they strongly felt that the evaluation tool did not afford them the opportunity to differentiate their evaluations based on the teacher's various positions within special education, similar to what the research completed by

the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality found in 2010. Overall, the most comments provided from the open ended question asking, what supports they believed would be most helpful in assisting them with the supervision of special education teachers, were in relation to the evaluation tool and building principals' desire for having a different evaluation system specific to special education teachers.

Lastly, as building principals reflected on their ability to determine a special education teacher's effectiveness, it is difficult to measure if their responses are truly indicative of professionals who can determine if a special education teacher is indeed proficient, versus distinguished, or one in need of improvement; this because, principals generally answered that they were able to determine a teachers' effectiveness, even though they lacked the preparation, or evaluation tool to do so. Hence, this data could reflect the findings of Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, and Keeling (2009) who completed the research regarding the Widget Effect, which concluded that building principals consistently rated teachers' performances at the same level, thus, judging them as equally effective in the classroom.

### **Recommendations**

Given the increase in accountability for students with disabilities and how special education teachers are evaluated, it is imperative to determine constructs which impact building level principals and their ability to appropriately supervise special education teachers. The results of this study provide implications for district leaders, universities, and state education agencies. As Elliot and Riddle (1992) shared, while building principals indicate that they have assumed a greater responsibility for special education within their buildings, they often refer problems and questions to central office special education directors. Directors can benefit from this research in developing specific professional development aimed at supporting their building principals with

becoming better leaders when it comes to special education. Establishing a professional development plan specifically for building principals, that aims at ensuring that they are fully aware of their responsibilities when it comes to compliance, is crucial. Building principals need to understand that they are often the representative for their local educational agency, which means, that they are in charge of supervising the individual education plan (IEP) process, as intended by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Confirming that building principals have the knowledge and understanding of the law and what it entails, will allow principals to better support their staff and ultimately ensure that students are receiving appropriate services.

As mentioned by DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2003), and as found throughout this research, many building principals do not have experience with special education programming. This means that special education directors should establish a support system, where they can provide coaching or side-by-side training where they can lead principals, in better supporting their special education staff. Building principals need to know what to look for when making classroom walk-throughs and having the support from the district's special education director could increase their confidence and competence in providing instructional feedback. Developing this knowledge not only ensures that the right services are being delivered, but may also protect districts from potential disputes resulting from having the wrong personnel working with various special education students.

The Wyoming Department of Education can benefit from this research in potentially providing additional professional development opportunities across the state, specifically tailored to building principals and increasing their knowledge of special education. Currently, most efforts around professional development, as it relates to special education, are aimed at special

education directors and staff; shifting the focus to building principals could empower more building leaders and result in better programming for students with disabilities. Partnering with the Wyoming Center for Educational Leadership through the University of Wyoming, could provide building principals with ongoing professional development that is prioritized around the data that is collected by the Wyoming Department of Education. This effort could bring support to building principals from other school and district leaders that have experienced the challenges which they may be facing, and are able to suggest practical and effective strategies for resolving them. The results of this study also supports the University of Wyoming's Educational Leadership program as it trains prospective building principals. The data received indicates a need for building principals to have more coursework and experiences related to special education. While special education law is already offered, additional courses in developing and supervising special education programming and how to manage various special education issues should be explored; as well as, incorporating special education programs and instruction within the overall curriculum in an effort to promoting a school culture where general and special education are not separated but instead, united. The possibility for specific internship hours observing and collaborating with administrators responsible for special education may also lead to enhanced skills and experiences that could support future building principals as they pursue administrative opportunities.

Chait (2009) Toch and Rothman (2008) have all critiqued the current evaluation system for not considering the many facets involved in being a special education teacher. The data collected throughout this research strongly supports this statement and urges district leaders to investigate how it can better support building principals in their efforts to evaluate and supervise special education teachers. As highlighted in the comments provided by building principals in

this study, they need a tool that allows them to evaluate both compliance and programming, which are the two main responsibilities of most special education teachers. Having a teacher that is ineffective at ensuring compliance through paperwork and following IDEA, is just as costly as having one ineffective in instructing students with disabilities. Both could result in the district facing serious violations and looming disputes. Investigating a model which provides flexibility for building principals to evaluate specific areas that are pertinent to that teacher's responsibilities would increase the likelihood that the feedback provided is meaningful and productive. The Wyoming Department of Education should also explore an evaluation tool that districts could utilize when evaluating and supervising special education staff; whether this tool is separate from that which is used with general education teachers or one that offers the flexibility to evaluate both general and special education teachers, the initiative could lead to more districts meeting the high accountability measures that have been put into law by the state's legislature.

As previously stated, the research revealed that while building principals do not feel that their preparation program provided them with the necessary coursework and experiences to supervise special education teachers, nor do they believe that the current evaluation tool is appropriate to evaluate them; they do all believe that they can determine if a teacher is effective. This is critical, as Bright (2011) confirms that the most important factor contributing to student success is the effectiveness of instruction. Yet, while building principals may feel this way, the literature does caution that most principals rate teacher's performances at the same level (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, and Keeling, 2009). These findings are important to district leaders in investigating if their district's evaluation rankings are indeed, consistent, regardless of the teacher. This data could lead to further efforts in establishing what the district believes is

essential in determining an effective teacher. As Danielson (2010) suggests, within supervision, one of the primary purposes of the teacher evaluation tool is to determine and measure if a teacher is effective; on the other hand, if building principals are not using the tool to provide constructive feedback and grow teachers in need of assistance, the ones to be impacted are the students. In analyzing the comments provided by building principals throughout the survey, it is important to note that although building principals believed that they can successfully determine a teacher's effectiveness, they still have many questions regarding their role and performance in regards to special education; which again, poses the question as to whether or not principals are completing evaluations out of compliance, or as a meaningful vehicle for growth?

### **Limitations**

This study helps determine if principals are prepared and equipped to supervise special education teachers. The findings of this study are limited to building principals who are in charge of supervision. Due to the small number of participants, the reliability of the scale used is unable to be determined. In addition, because an online survey was used, the self-reporting nature of the data collected prevented the researcher's ability to validate the honesty of the respondents; as well as, their willingness and time to respond to the survey. An important limitation resulted from the fact that principals, in this district, have received training in the area of special education. In addition to principals and their respective special education staff receiving monthly professional development opportunities from the special education administrator in the areas of compliance, special education programing, and any other questions they may have about special education in their buildings; for the past six years, principals have received annual trainings from legal representatives in the content area of special education compliance and law. These opportunities may have impacted the results of this study as building principals may

believe that, due to these trainings, they do receive appropriate professional development in the area of special education, as though these may not be commonly found in other districts. Lastly, as it relates to determining teacher effectiveness, building principals may have responded differently as their answers portray a self-reflection of their own abilities, and not those of others, as suggested through the evaluation tool, professional development, and their principal preparation program.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

The findings and implications provided in this study could result in additional research being analyzed regarding the supervision of special education teachers. Suggestions for further research could include:

- Researchers may want to explore a comprehensive study of the teacher evaluation system and provide suggestions for improving how special education teachers should be evaluated.
- Researchers could study how universities can improve their principal preparation programs to include additional coursework and experiences in regards to special education.
- Researchers may want to define teacher effectiveness and develop a plan for how districts can ensure that students are receiving effective instruction.
- Researchers could study which professional development opportunities provided to building principals are yielding the highest results in regards to developing knowledge and competence in supervising both compliance and special education programming.

**Summary**

This research aimed at determining whether or not building principals believed that they are prepared and equipped to appropriately supervise special education teachers. Findings showed that building principals did not believe that their preparation program provided them enough coursework and/or experiences to supervise special education teachers, and that the evaluation tool the district currently uses does not afford them the opportunity to appropriately supervise special education teachers. Findings also revealed that additional professional development in the areas of compliance and special education programming is necessary; nonetheless, with each of those concerns highlighted, all building principals believed that they themselves, were able to determine if a special education teacher is indeed an effective teacher.



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**Attachment 1: Email to Principals**

Date

Initial Email Letter

Dear (name of administrator),

I am requesting your help in completing a research study through the University of Wyoming. The enclosed survey is to determine if building principals believe that they are prepared enough to effectively supervise special education teachers. All building level administrator throughout the district are being asked to participate in this study.

I am asking for you to please complete a short (10 minute) survey rating your experience, knowledge, and proficiency in regards to supervising special education teachers in your building. One possible benefit from participating in this survey is that you will have the opportunity to reflect on your own supervisory behaviors as it relates to supervising special education staff. The potential risk for you is minimal and could include: you stating identifiable information in the open ended questions, having your own feelings and opinions regarding supervising special education staff with the district specials services director. Please be assured that no individual responses and no identifying information will be shared. If you do disclose identifiable information, it will be deleted and not used in the report of the study. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may choose whether or not to participate or to discontinue participating at any time by closing your web browser.

If you have questions regarding the survey, you can contact me at [demarea@swcsd2.org](mailto:demarea@swcsd2.org).

Thank you for your assistance and participation.

Sincerely,

Alan Demaret  
Director of Special Services  
(*Special Education, Section 504, Homeless Liaison*)  
Sweetwater County School District #2  
320 Monroe Avenue  
Green River, WY 82935  
307-872-5503

**Attachment 2: Permission to Conduct Research Study**

November 3, 2016

Mrs. Donna Little Kaumo, Ed.S.  
 Superintendent of Schools  
 Sweetwater County School District #2  
 320 Monroe Avenue  
 Green River, WY 82935

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Mrs. Little Kaumo:

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study on building administrators in Sweetwater County School District #2. I am currently enrolled in the Ed.D. Program for Educational Administration through the University of Wyoming and am in the process of completing my program requirements. The study is entitled: Supervising Special Education Teachers in a Rural School District: Are Building Principals Equipped and Prepared to Do So? Your approval would allow me to contact building level administrators from each of our schools to anonymously complete a two-page questionnaire. Please note that participation in this study is voluntary and has minimal risks to those who choose to participate. The survey results will be summarized and individual results of this study will remain absolutely confidential and anonymous. Should this study be published, only averages of the results will be documented. No costs will be incurred by the district or the individual participants as a result of this study.

Your approval to conduct this study would be greatly appreciated. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at: [demarea@swcsd2.org](mailto:demarea@swcsd2.org)

Sincerely,  
 Alan Demaret, Ed.S.  
 Approved by:

Signature	Title	Date
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cc: David Hvidston, Ed.D. (Committee Co-Chair) & Courtney McKim, Ph.D. (Committee Co-Chair)

**Attachment 3: Survey**

**Please indicate your opinion of the importance of these items by choosing your response on the scale**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
I believe my principal preparation program provided me with coursework which supported my ability to supervise special education staff.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My principal preparation program provided me with enough instruction to be confident in supervising special education compliance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My principal preparation program provided me with enough instruction to be confident in supervising special education programming.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that additional coursework on special education during the principal preparation program would better prepare a building administrator with the skills necessary to supervise special education staff.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that an opportunity for field experience during the principal preparation program would better prepare a building administrator with the skills necessary to supervise special education staff.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that my district provides me with enough professional development in the area of special education compliance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that my district provides me with enough professional development in the area of special education programming.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that professional development in the area of special education strengthens my ability to supervise special education teachers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I seek out professional development targeted towards the supervision of special education teachers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that my district has provided me with enough professional development for me to appropriately supervise special education teachers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe the district's evaluation tool is appropriate for supervising special education teachers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe the evaluation tool should be different for special education teachers than teachers in the general education classroom.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The evaluation tool affords me the opportunity to differentiate my documentation based on my observations for a variety of special education positions (i.e. behavior, life skills, resource, itinerant, etc.).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The district's evaluation tool allows me to address compliance needs as they relate to special education services.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The district's evaluation tool allows me to address programming concerns as they relate to special education services.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The district's evaluation tool affords me the opportunity to improve special education teacher's performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find myself able to determine if a special education teacher is an effective teacher.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find myself able to decipher between special education teachers in need of improvement versus those who are proficient.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find myself able to decipher between special education teachers that are determined to be proficient versus distinguished.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe I have the experience to improve a special education teacher's effectiveness.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Compliance impacts my perception of a special education teacher's effectiveness.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

22. What are your greatest challenges, as a building administrator, in supervising special education teachers?

23. What supports do you, as a building administrator, perceive would be the most helpful in assisting you with the supervision of special education teachers?

Demographic Questions

Your Gender: Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

Are you elementary (K-6) or secondary (7-12)?

\_\_\_\_Elementary \_\_\_\_Secondary

How many years of administrative experience do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

How many years of teaching experience do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you now, or have previously been, actively involved in the supervision of special education teachers?

\_\_\_\_No \_\_\_\_Previously \_\_\_\_Currently

Are you endorsed or licensed in special education?

\_\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_\_No

Have you previously taught special education?

\_\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_\_No

**Attachment 4: IRB Approval**

# UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

Vice President for Research & Economic Development  
1000 E. University Avenue, Department 3355 • Room 305/308, Old Main • Laramie, WY 82071  
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December 19, 2016

Alan Demaret  
Graduate Student  
Professional Studies: Educational Leadership  
University of Wyoming

David Hydson  
~~Assistant Professor~~  
Assistant Professor  
Professional Studies  
University of Wyoming

Courtney McKim  
Assistant Professor  
Professional Studies  
University of Wyoming

**Protocol #20161219AD01407**

Re: IRB Proposal *"Supervising Special Education Teachers in a Rural School District: Are Building Principals Equipped and Prepared to Do So?"*

Dear Alan, David and Courtney:

The proposal referenced above qualifies for exempt review and is approved as one that would not involve more than minimal risk to participants. Our exempt review and approval will be reported to the IRB at their next convened meeting January 19, 2017.

Any significant change(s) in the research/project protocol(s) from what was approved should be submitted to the IRB (Protocol Update Form) for review and approval prior to initiating any change. Per recent policy and compliance requirements, any investigator with an active research protocol may be contacted by the recently convened Data Safety Monitoring Board (DSMB) for periodic review. The DSMB's charge (sections 7.3 and 7.4 of the IRB Policy and Procedures Manual) is to review active human subject(s) projects to assure that the procedures, data management, and protection of human participants follow approved protocols. Further information and the forms referenced above may be accessed at the "Human Subjects" link on the Office of Research and Economic Development website: <http://www.uwyo.edu/research/human-subjects/index.html>.

You may proceed with the project/research and we wish you luck in the endeavor. Please feel free to call me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

*Esther Seville*

Esther Seville  
IRB Office Associate  
On behalf of the Chairman,  
Institutional Review Board