

TEACHERS KNOWLEDGE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW AND  
PREPAREDNESS TO CARRY OUT NON-INSTRUCTIONAL TASKS  
ASSOCIATED WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **TEACHERS KNOWLEDGE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW AND PREPAREDNESS TO CARRY OUT NON-INSTRUCTIONAL TASKS ASSOCIATED WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW**

Marissa Scholl

Teachers play a crucial role in the education of students with disabilities and their participation in the special education process is critical and mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). Despite the important role teachers play in the education of students with disabilities and the legal ramifications for failing to follow IDEIA, very few studies have examined teachers' actual knowledge or perception of their knowledge of special education procedure and law. The purpose of the present study is to determine the current knowledge of special education procedures and law and to determine areas in which educators need more support. This current case study focuses on the non-instructional tasks associated with educating students with disabilities. A sample of 17 general and special education teachers from various disciplines throughout grades K-12 in a Nassau County school district were interviewed independently or participated in a focus group via Google Meets.

Four themes emerged from the data analysis: first, conflicting perceptions of teachers' ability to adhere to special education laws and regulations, second, that teacher's roles and responsibilities depend on the environment, third, that there is insufficient support from administration and fourth, that teachers have a mix of emotional responses as they fulfill the non-instructional task related to special education. The findings suggest that teachers make sense of the non-instructional tasks associated with

special education students' support through peer relationships and administrative leadership. The study's findings indicate that there is a lack of professional development in the areas of special education law and that there are opportunities to meaningfully engage teachers in how to have positive and effective co-teaching relationships to enhance the education of students with disabilities across all grade levels.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my incredible children; Lucas and Brianna, I love you to the moon and back. I hope that my dedication and perseverance has been a model and motivation for you to accomplish your dreams. Most importantly, I want you to know that the most significant title I will ever have is Mom.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Due to the increase in students with disabilities, overall and in general education classrooms, all educators must have the knowledge required to successfully adhere to state and federal laws and regulations revolving around the non-instructional tasks associated with special education students. Nationally, the number of students with disabilities classified under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has grown significantly over the past several years. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2020), between 2011 and 2018 school years, the number of students who received special education services under IDEA increased from 6.4 million to 7.1 million. According to the New York State Education Department (NYSED), as reported in the NCES (2020), New York State's population of students with disabilities increased from 15% in the 2012-2013 school year to 18% 2018-2019. On Long Island, there has been a 1% increase in Nassau County and a 2% increase in Suffolk County of students classified under IDEA within the past six years. These requirements are emerging as a necessity for general education teachers; NCES reports that students ages 6-21 who are served under IDEA spend at least 80% of their time inside a general education classroom. This change in instruction has steadily increased from 47% in the fall of 2000 and 64% in the fall of 2018.

The inclusion of children with disabilities in the general curriculum requires active participation from all members of the student's educational team. All members play a critical and active role in developing and implementing of the Individual Education Plan (IEP). Under the reauthorization of IDEA (2004) also referred to as

IDEIA or IDEA '04, the development of a child's IEP is no longer the special educator's exclusive responsibility (Lee-Tarver, 2006). The additions to IDEIA are explained in more detail in chapter two, but this was the first time in special education history that legislation dictated that general educators must participate in developing of a student's IEP for its implementation within the general education classroom. Conversely, many general educators feel in the dark, about the IEP process (Christle & Yell, 2010; O'Dell & Schaefer, 2005; Rotter, 2014).

Having a basic knowledge of special education principles has become fundamental to fulfill one's role as an educator. Many general education teachers do not hold a certification in students with disabilities; however, it is highly likely that they have students with disabilities in their class and are responsible for their learning and following NYS laws and regulations. With the number of students with disabilities increasing, coupled with students in inclusion classrooms, all educators must be prepared to teach students with disabilities. Instructors in the classrooms may be ill-prepared to serve these students, one of the reasons teachers are unprepared is because they have little knowledge of the requirements expected federally and statewide (Christle & Yell, 2010; O'Dell & Schaefer, 2005; Rotter, 2014, Payne, 2005). Failure to understand these processes can lead to lower performance for students, frustration and corrective action for teachers, confusion for peers, unsatisfied parents and students, concerned administrators, and risk liability for institutions.

In a study conducted by O'Connor et al., (2016) researchers found that teachers are lacking essential information about IDEIA. The results also showed that a vast majority of the teachers reported not having any coursework related to special education

law (O'Connor et al., 2016 & Schimmel & Militello, 2007). Additionally, there are multiple pathways in NYS for teachers to obtain a certification to teach students with disabilities, and based on previous studies, certain pathways may not provide the experience or education they need to be successful (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002). Very few examples of inclusive teacher preparation programs exist and have a strong focus on Individualized Education Program (IEP) development and training (Blanton, Griffin, Winn, & Pugach, 1997).

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to explore what knowledge teachers have regarding special education law in relation to the non-instructional tasks necessary in their field to successfully support students with disabilities. To do so, an instrumental case study was conducted to determine the areas of support needed for teachers to carry out the non-instructional responsibilities required to increase student achievement for those with disabilities as well as to avoid any potential legal recourse resulting from failure to follow the laws that guide education for students with disabilities.

New York State requires educators to complete specific course work and pass certain exams prior to granting certification that ensure teachers are prepared for their obligations. However, general education teachers do not have to take an exam pertaining to students with disabilities and therefore are not assessed on the competencies necessary to complete the non-instructional tasks associated with teaching students with disabilities. "Special education teachers also need a deep understanding of information related specifically to special education (e.g., federal laws, the referral process, IEP development and implantation)" (Morewood & Condo, 2012, p. 16). Special education teachers are

required to take and successfully pass the Content Specialty Test (CST): Students with Disabilities or Safety Net Students with Disabilities Exam. The Content Specialty Test is a component of the New York State Teacher Certification Examinations (NYSTCE). The purpose of the exam is to assess knowledge and skills in the subject of the certificate sought. Two sections of this exam that pertain to the knowledge necessary to carry out the non-instructional tasks associated with teaching students with disabilities: competency 0001 and competency 0003. In competency 0001, The Foundations of Special Education, the expectations are that New York State educators "apply knowledge of federal and state laws, regulations, policies, and ethical guidelines related to special education" (New York State Education Department, 2018). For competency 0003, Assessment and Individual Program Planning, the expectations are that:

The New York State educator of students with disabilities understands how assessments are used for a variety of purposes, including determining eligibility for special education services, developing annual goals, monitoring progress, and informing instruction. Teachers understand procedures for selecting and administering assessments and for interpreting the results of such assessments. Teachers also understand how to collaborate with others in the development, implementation, and monitoring of individualized education programs. (New York State Education Department, 2018)

Yet, previous studies suggest that teachers do not have sufficient knowledge (Morewood & Condo, 2012; Sanders, 2011; Whitaker, 2003; Schimmel & Militello, 2007; O'Connor, Yasik, Horner, 2016).

This study will serve to help school administrators identify the training needs of teachers and could lead to the implementation of effective professional developments (PD) within districts. The intention of IEP is to serve as the foundation of a child's academic program. Both special education teachers should utilize a student's IEP goals, present level of educational performance, related services, and accommodations/modifications and if applicable, the general education teacher, in order for the students with disabilities to be successful (Blanton, Griffin, Winn, & Pugach, 1997). While IEPs are intended to serve as a tool to guide instruction for students with disabilities, often they are treated as artifacts rather than vital guiding documents that direct instruction (Lee-Tarver, 2006; Yell & Stecker, 2003). IEPs are often regarded as artifacts created by special education teachers to comply with federal and state regulations (Rosas & Winterman, 2010). During a study addressing teachers' opinions on defining long-and short-term goals in the IEP development process, the researchers questioned teachers about student's goals. Their answers indicated that teachers consider information related to the student's IEP as a formality, as the goals that they defined for students were different from those stated in official documents (Ilik, & Sari, 2017).

Students with disabilities are no longer the responsibility of "someone else," solely the special education teacher, and they are no longer those students who receive their education "someplace else," such as a special school. Students with disabilities are the shared responsibility of everyone.

### **Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

Weick's (1995) framework defines what sensemaking is, explains how it works and suggests how sensemaking efforts can fail under certain circumstances. Sensemaking



is not purely about interpretation but the composition of interpretation. Sensemaking, as stated by Weick (1995), "Sensemaking is what it says it is, namely, making something sensible" (p. 16). Karl Weick's Sense Making Theory is defined as the process of "structuring the unknown" to comprehend, explain or predict what we do not know by placing it into our established framework (Ancona, 2012, p. 4). Teachers are not receiving all necessary knowledge during their academic courses; therefore, they are forced to make sense of a process without confidence in training and teacher education.

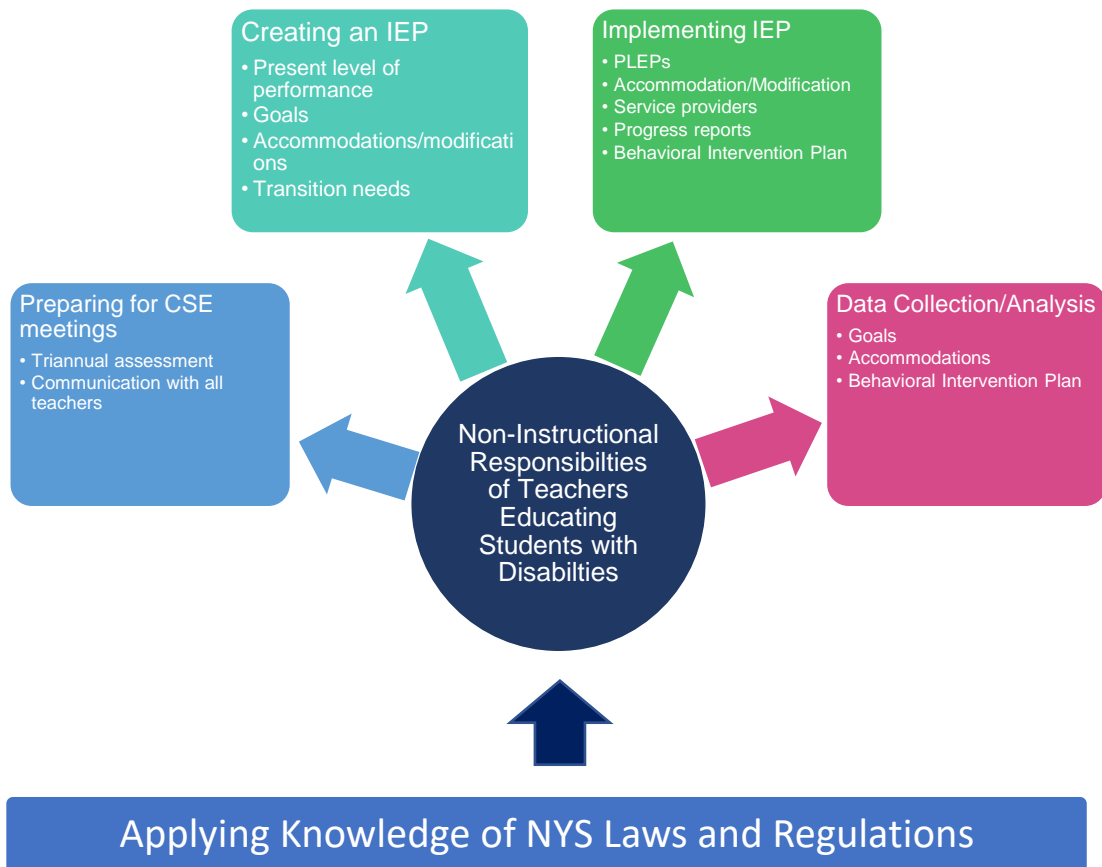
The non-instructional responsibilities of teachers who serve special education students vary based on student age, program, services, and the building/district in which they work. The complexity of the role could be why teacher preparation programs focus on teaching content and methodology. Regardless, there is an abundance of non-instructional tasks that need to be completed. In order to complete these non-instructional tasks, all teachers need to understand laws, how to create and implement IEP's and how to determine the proper modifications or accommodations for each student. Without the proper knowledge of the laws, teachers are forced to make sense of applying these laws on their own. Without knowing where to access the laws or how to interpret the laws, teachers will do what they think "makes sense" and that could lead to inaccuracies directly affecting the education of students with disabilities.

Teachers have many tasks, instructional and non-instructional professional responsibilities to fulfill in order to educate students and create life-long learners. This study focuses on the non-instructional tasks associated with increasing achievement for students with disabilities. While there are many non-instructional tasks not listed in the conceptual framework below such as building rapport with students and creating a

positive classroom environment, this study focuses on the non-instructional tasks solely related to special education. Both special education teachers and general education teachers are responsible for preparing for Committee of Special Education (CSE) Meetings, creating IEPs, implementing IEPs, and collecting/analyzing data. While the special education teacher physically writes the IEP, all teachers who educate the students are responsible to provide data and feedback to assist the special education teacher in writing the IEP. All teachers are responsible for implementing the student's IEP, whether it be providing appropriate accommodations or modifications, or adhering to the behavioral intervention plan (BIP). At a CSE meeting in addition to other professionals there must be a special education teacher and a general education teacher present. At the CSE they each provide the committee of special education with information about student progress and/or concerns. The following conceptual framework illustrates the responsibilities of teachers educating students with disabilities. While the degree of each responsibility may vary from special education teacher to general education teacher and by building, all teachers who educate students with disabilities are responsible for preparing for CSE meetings, creating an IEP, implementing an IEP and collecting and analyzing data.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework: Applying Knowledge of Special Education Laws/Regulations to Non-instructional Responsibilities of All Teachers Responsible for Educating Students with Disabilities*



**Significance/Importance of the Study**

Usually, teachers are the first to identify children in need of services (Speech, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, academic services, etc.) and refer those children for evaluation. Due to the fact that more of these children are being included in the regular classroom environment, it is imperative for all teachers to understand aspects of special education laws to be effective advocates for children (O'Connor, Yasik & Horner, 2016).

Additionally, according to O'Connor et al, more and more children are being classified as needing special education services. However, teachers are lacking some essential information regarding IDEIA, and have limited knowledge of provisions covered by Section 504. (O'Connor et al., 2016). Dangerously, teachers may not know the laws due to the complexity of IDEIA, and the continuous changes and updates made to the laws by federal and state agencies. According to Sanders (2011),

Due to the variety of inclusive practices, the complexity of IDEIA, and the continuous changes and updates made to the laws by federal and state agencies, many administrators and teachers lack complete knowledge of the policies, procedures, and issues related to special education. (Brookshire & Klotz, 2002; Mitello, Schimmel & Eberwein, 2009; Salisbury, 2006; Valesky & Hirth, 1992)

Regardless, laws require special education teachers to implement the policies and procedures. Administrators often expect educators to provide documentation when confronted with situations involving students with disabilities in order to show they are legally compliant and to avoid a potential lawsuit. Shuran and Roblyer (2012) describe four reason for potential lawsuits; arguments about interpretation of federal requirements, insufficient educator preparation, lack of parent involvement, and an increase in number of students being classified. "Special education training for both administrators and teachers has been limited, occurring mostly from on-the-job experiences and consultations with veteran teachers with experience in working with children who have disabilities" (Shuran & Roblyer, 2012, p. 51). Having adequate knowledge of special education law is vital for all teachers because they are held accountable for proper implementation of that law (Sanders, 2011). According to Schimmel & Militello (2007),

"the vast majority (over 85%) of teachers indicated that they had taken no school law course during their teacher certification program." Having a lack of knowledge of school law could lead to unnecessary lawsuits. This study will determine the current knowledge and preparedness of teachers who are responsible for teaching students with disabilities. Ascertaining the perceptions of teachers in this area is essential to determine the areas of weakness to create more informed policies and procedures as well as to dictate professional developments for current educational leaders.

### **Connection with Social Justice and/or Vincentian Mission in Education**

There are various supreme court cases that set the stage for social justice for students with disabilities; *Brown v. Board of Education*, *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, and *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia*. Each of these were the basis for IDEIA, stating that students with disabilities are entitled to the same education as those who do not have a disability. However, this current research demonstrates an issue with social justice for students who do not receive the proper support from their teachers because their teachers do not receive training, tools, and knowledge to create and carry out students' IEPs properly. Students with disabilities are often a vulnerable population, this research is framed by the notion that teachers should be equipped to teach all students that they serve and have all of the required knowledge to educate and advocate for students needing special education supports. The lack of education as well as the requirements to become a teacher in this area could be considered an equity issue. The purpose of the study is to determine if teachers, both general education teachers and special education teachers, are

prepared to teach students with disabilities adhering to federal and state laws and regulations. To do so this study is followed by the following research questions.

### **Research Questions**

R1: What are teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to implement special education laws and regulations?

- a. How do special education teachers and general education teachers perceive their knowledge of special education laws and regulations?
- b. How do elementary teachers and secondary teachers perceive their knowledge of special education laws and regulations?

R2: How do teachers make sense of their roles and responsibilities in order to complete the non-instructional tasks required?

R3: In what ways do special education teachers believe they are supported by administrators and colleagues to complete the non-instructional tasks associated with special education law and regulations?

### **Definition of Terms**

*408 Form:* A document used to ensure that school personnel and other service providers that are charged with the implementation of a student's IEP have the information necessary to fulfill their IEP responsibilities for each student.

*Accommodations:* Adjustments to how the student learns; changes in the environment/materials that allow a student with a disability to access the content or complete assigned tasks, such as a preferential seating, highlighted text, directions repeated, extended time for assignments or tests, FM hearing assistance technology program, etc. Accommodations do not alter the material that is being taught.

*Annual Goals:* Goals written on the IEP that describe what the child is expected to achieve in the disability-related area(s) over a one-year period.

*Committee of Special Education (CSE):* A multidisciplinary team established and appointed by the (individual district) board of education. Usually a CSE is comprised of a special education teacher, chairperson, general education teacher, school psychologist, parents and other school personnel, pertaining to the student's needs such as an Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, Speech and Language Pathologist, Nurse, etc. The CSE's purpose is to identify students in need of services by determining eligibility and developing the IEP in order to provide the proper environment and services to meet the child's educational needs.

*Extended School Year (ESY):* Special education and related services that are provided by the school district during the summer to prevent regression. Teachers must have evidence (data) that the student demonstrated substantial regression and recoupment issues during extended breaks such as spring vacation.

*Inclusion/Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT):* Students with disabilities are educated with age appropriate peers in the general education classroom by both a general education teacher and a special education teacher. ICT provides access to the general education curriculum and specially designed instruction to meet students' individual needs in the LRE.

*Individual evaluation or reevaluation:* a variety of assessment tools and strategies, including information provided by the parent, to gather relevant functional, developmental and academic information about the student that may assist in determining whether the student is a student with a disability (Special Education: Part 200, 2016).

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA)*: formally known as IDEA, this law governs the education of students with disabilities. IDEIA is comprised of four main sections; Part A covers the definitions and general provisions of the law, Part B covers the educational guidelines for children ages 3–21, while Part C covers infants and toddlers (ages 0–2). Part D covers national activities to improve the education of children with disabilities such as funding for research and dissemination of public information.

*Individualized Educational Program (IEP)*: a written statement, developed, reviewed, and revised annual by the committee of special education and executed by all personnel involved in the student with disabilities' education.

*Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)*: The placement of an individual student with a disability in which the district provide instruction to the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of the student with other students who do not have disabilities and be as close as possible to the student's home (Special Education: Part 200, 2016).

*Learning Disability*: One of the 13 classifications under IDEIA. Students exhibiting one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which manifests itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing or motor disabilities, of an intellectual disability, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (Special Education: Part 200, 2016).



*Modification:* Changes to the curriculum, fundamentally alter the expectations/learning standards.

*Other Health Impairment (OHI):* One of the 13 classifications under IDEIA, students with this classification have limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that is due to chronic or acute health problems, including but not limited to a heart condition, tuberculosis, rheumatic fever, nephritis, asthma, sickle cell anemia, hemophilia, epilepsy, lead poisoning, leukemia, diabetes, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or Tourette syndrome, which adversely affects a student's educational performance (Special Education: Part 200, 2016).

*Procedural Safeguards:* A notice of rights provided to families at least once a year in the native language of the parent or guardian

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

*Reevaluation:* An updated evaluation(s) for a student with a disability. A request for this can be made by the student's teacher, parent, or school district. Additionally, students with disabilities must be reevaluated once every three years, except when the district and parent agree in writing that a reevaluation is not necessary. A reevaluation may not be conducted more than once a year unless the school and the parent agree otherwise.

*Related services:* Developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as are required to assist a student with a disability and includes speech-language pathology, audiology services, interpreting services, psychological services, physical therapy,

occupational therapy, counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling services, orientation and mobility services, medical services as defined in this section, parent counseling and training, school health services, school nurse services, school social work, assistive technology services, appropriate access to recreation, including therapeutic recreation, other appropriate developmental or corrective support services, and other appropriate support services and includes the early identification and assessment of disabling conditions in students (Special Education: Part 200, 2016).

*Resource room:* The resource room is a home base for students with mild and moderate disabilities requiring extensive (over 50%) instruction in a special setting (Vannest et al., 2011).

*Section 4402 of the Education Law:* The board of education of each school district must establish committees and/or subcommittees on special education as necessary to ensure timely evaluation and placement of pupils. It is the school's responsibility to ensure that copies of IEPs are provided, and individuals informed of IEP implementation responsibilities prior to the implementation of a student's IEP.

*Special Class:* Also known as a self-contained class, a special class consists of students with disabilities who have been grouped together because of similar individual needs for the purpose of being provided specially designed instruction (Special Education: Part 200, 2016).

*Special Education:* IDEIA (2004) defined special education as, "specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability."

*Special Education Teacher:* An educator who holds a NYS certification in students with disabilities.

*Special Education Assessment:* assessing for placement, progress reporting, or dismissal from services (e.g., using behavior rating scales, administering intelligence tests, testing for progress reporting on IEP goals) (Vannest et al., 2011).

*Special Education Law:* Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 1990, Rehabilitation Act 1973 (see figure 2 for details).

*New York State Special Education Regulations:* Regulations of the commissioner of education; Part 200, Students with Disabilities and Part 201, Procedural Safeguards for Students with Disabilities Subject to Discipline.

*Students with Disabilities (SWD):* A student who has not attained the age of 21 prior to September 1st and who is entitled to attend public schools pursuant to section 3202 of the Education Law and who, because of mental, physical or emotional reasons, has been identified as having a disability and who requires special services and programs approved by the department (Special Education: Part 200, 2016).

*Testing accommodations:* The IEP shall provide a statement of any individual testing accommodations to be used consistently by the student in the recommended educational program and in the administration of districtwide assessments of student achievement and, in accordance with department policy, State assessments of student achievement that are necessary to measure the academic achievement and functional performance of the student.

## **Conclusion**

As the number of students with disabilities increase within general education classrooms and as a whole, it is essential that all educators who work with students with disabilities adhere to federal and state laws to successfully carry out the non-instructional tasks associated with students receiving special education services. To do this the researcher conducting a case study, framed by the sensemaking theory. This study sought to determine teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to implement special education laws and regulations as well as to determine if special education teachers feel supported by administrators and colleagues to complete the non-instructional tasks associated with special education laws and regulations.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Introduction**

Chapter one provides the reader with background information on the topic of teacher knowledge on special education laws. The previous chapter illustrates the purpose for the study, the research question, highlights the importance of the study, shows the connections with social justice in education and concludes with a definition of terms. Chapter two exemplifies the current literature and the theoretical framework for this current study. This chapter illustrates the laws pertaining to students with disabilities that educators are required to know, as well as recent literature on teacher knowledge and their perception of their knowledge of special education laws. Carl Weick's sensemaking provides the theoretical framework for this study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Sensemaking provides a useful framework for analyzing how teachers fulfill their role in educating students with disabilities. Weick's (1995) framework of sensemaking, defines what it is and explains how it works. The act of sensemaking is characterized by Weick (1995) with seven properties: "a process that is grounded in identity construction, retrospective, enactment of sensible environments, social, ongoing, focused on and by extracted cues, and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy" (p. 17). The concept of sensemaking offers a productive way to analyze how teachers wrestle with issues they encounter in their profession. Weick puts sensemaking at the core of his theory; he defines sensemaking as the process of finding ways to cope with disruptions appearing in the daily flow of activity. Weick himself puts his theory of sensemaking very succinctly in one sentence: "Order, interruption, recovery." Most recently Brown et al. (2008)

proposed sensemaking as, "the processes of organizing using the technology of language—processes of labelling and categorizing for instance—to identify, regularize and routinize memories into plausible explanations" (p. 1055). Sensemaking is not an isolated action (Weick, 1995); therefore, the prevalence of role identity, routines, and one's general understanding of roles, expertise, and stature must also be examined. The following key factors are used by individuals throughout the sensemaking process, as identified and defined by Weick (1995):

1. Grounded in Identity: According to this property, our experiences shape our lives and influence how we see things (Mills, Thurlow & Mills, 2010). Individuals learn about their identities by projecting them into the environment and observing the outcomes (Weick, 1995). Due to various factors: relationships, education, and environment, our identity is continually changing.

2. Retrospect: Individuals only truly understand their actions after the particular event; therefore, attention is directed to "meaningful lived experience" (Weick, 1995, p. 24). In order to understand the present, we compare it to a similar event from our past and use our schema to make sense of it.

3. Plausibility: Sensemaking is about "... pragmatics, coherence, reasonableness, creation, invention and instrumentality" (Weick, 1995, p. 56). Individuals interact with and use accounts they believe are applicable to inform their attempts to make sense of a particular policy (Weick, 1995):

Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy means that we do not rely on the accuracy of our perceptions when we make sense of an event and instead look for cues to make our sensemaking seem plausible. In doing so, we may distort or

eliminate what is accurate and potentially rely on faulty decision making in determining what is right or wrong. (Mills, Thurlow & Mills, 2010, p. 185)

4. Enactment of sensible environment: by taking action, organizations create their own environment (Weick, 1995, p. 36). Our sensemaking can be constrained or created by our environment (Mills, Thurlow & Mills, 2010). Each school district's procedures, protocols and professionalism differ in terms of the non-instructional tasks associated with students with disabilities.

5. Social: Sensemaking rarely takes place in isolation. Sensemaking is contingent on our interactions with others, whether physically present or not (Mills, Thurlow & Mills, 2010). Each individual draws from the social activities of "talk, symbols, promises, lies, interest, attention, threats, agreements, expectations, memories, rumors, indicators, supporters, detractors, faith, suspicion, trust, appearances, loyalties and commitments" (Weick, 1995, p. 41) that occur within the organization. New York State requires first-year teachers to receive a mentor to help, "The purpose of the mentoring requirement is to provide beginning educators in teaching or school building leadership service with support in order to gain skillfulness and more easily make the transition to one's first professional experience..." ("Office of Teaching Initiatives," 2015).

6. Ongoing: Sensemaking is a continuous process because people and organizations are always changing (Weick, 1995).

7. Cues: In life, we search for contexts within which small details fit together and make sense (Weick, 1995).

Often in education, especially when working with students with disabilities who have an IEP, each with their own unique needs, teachers are faced with "making sense" of

something such as analyzing data to determine student accommodations or least restrictive environment. Within organizations, most decisions are made in the presence of others where one receives validation or with the understanding that they could potentially need to defend their decision. If teachers are not in the presence of others when trying to make sense of data or a situation, they are forced to use their prior knowledge. Assuming teacher's do not know educational law, they are using schema from prior experience and doing their best with the knowledge they have, which may or may not be legally correct or may or may not be in the best interest of the student. However, if teachers had the knowledge and training necessary to fulfill their role in working with students with disabilities there would be less guesswork or speculation.

## **Review of Literature**

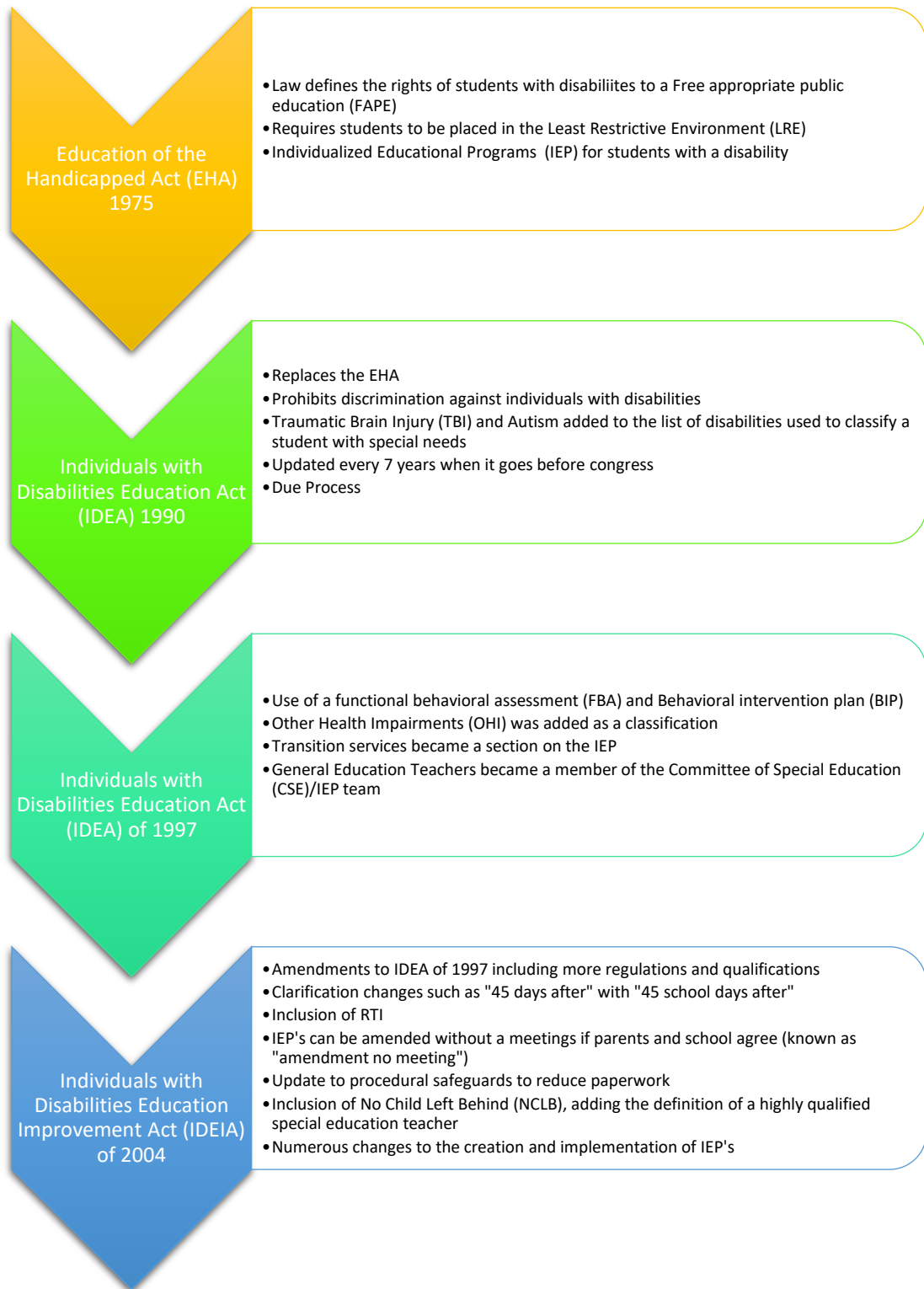
### ***History of Special Education Law***

There are many events that have driven the gradual and progressive evolution of special education that serve as influential milestones in American history (Esteves & Rao, 2008). Students with disabilities have not always had the right to an education. It was not until equal educational opportunities arose for students of color that inspired parents of students with disabilities to fight for their rights. As John F. Kennedy stated, "All of us do not have equal talent, but all of us should have an equal opportunity to develop our talent" (Quote, n.d.). Figure 2 describes a graphic representation of the history of special education law dating back to 1975.



**Figure 2**

*History of Federal Laws Pertaining to Individuals with Disabilities*



In 1975, the United States Congress passed the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EHA). The purpose of this law was to "to assure that all children with disabilities have available to them...a free appropriate public education which emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs," and "to assure that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents...are protected" (*Education for All Handicapped Children's Act of 1975*). However, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 did not require that special instruction and support services be provided under the law to students with disabilities. The EHA was not designed to help them achieve their full potential as learners. It was not until 1982, where the first special education case landed in the U.S. Supreme court: The Board of Education of Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley. The court ruled that students who qualify for these services must be offered programs that meet their unique educational needs, and that they are supported by services that enable them to benefit from instruction (Esteves & Rao, 2008). Congress stated:

Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities. (About IDEA, n.d.)

The ruling in favor of Amy Rowley marked the first time that the court had interpreted the EHA. Under the EHA, state governments, through local school boards, were required to provide students with disabilities with a "free appropriate public

education" (FAPE) in the "least restrictive environment" as explicitly stated in an individualized education program (IEP). An IEP is developed for each child by school officials in consultation with parents or guardians.

The EHA became known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990. The IDEA has been amended over the years becoming more encompassing largely in part due to landmark judicial decisions. The IDEA was reauthorized in 1997, and again in 2004 for the most recent time, changing its name to Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) or IDEA '04. Although there have been numerous changes in federal special education law since 1975, the basic foundations remain the same and compliance remains problematic (O'Dell & Schaefer, 2005).

Since the inception of IEP's in 1975, there have been various challenges identified. Teachers have faced adversity with the development of IEP's, a lack of adequate training, feelings of being overwhelmed with unnecessary paperwork, failure to link assessment data to instructional goals and challenges in developing measurable goals (Vannest et al., 2011, O'Dell, Schaefer 2005; Yell & Drasgow, 2000; Payne, 2005; O'Connor et al., 2016; Casey et al., 2011; Whitaker, 2003; Wasburn-Moses, 2005; Cheatham, Hart, Malian, & McDonald, 2012).

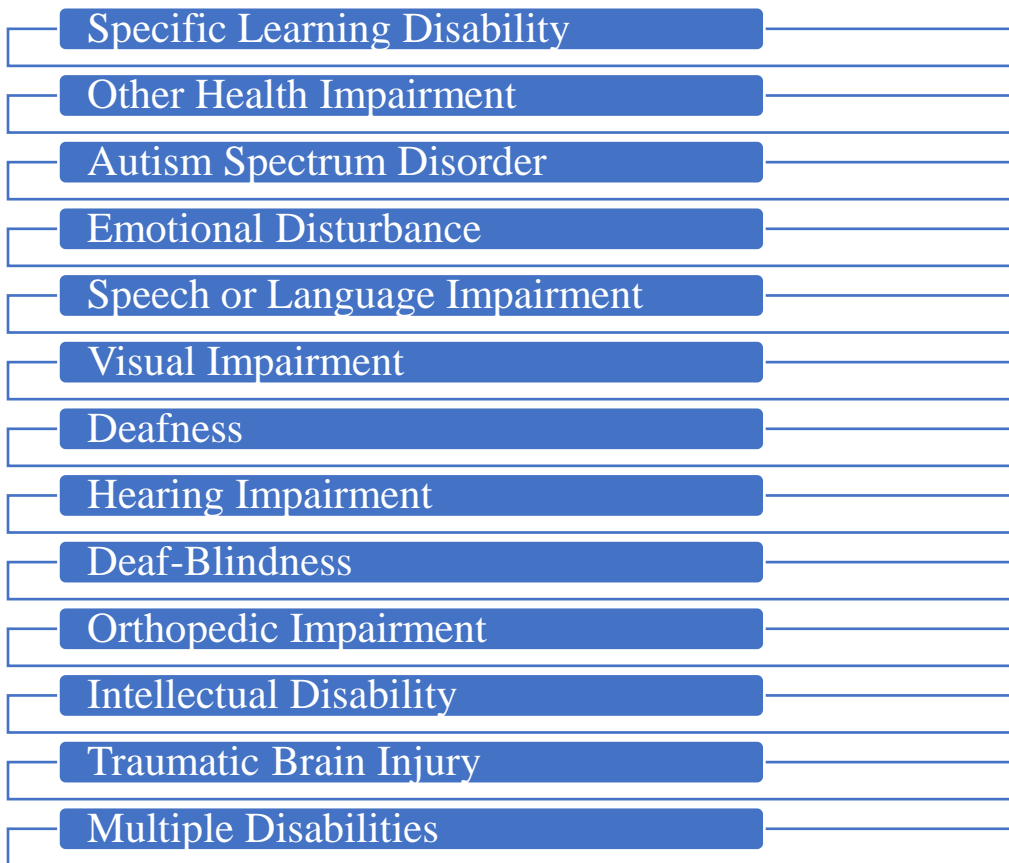
### ***Federal Law IDEIA***

Though still called IDEA, but now referred to as IDEA '04, this law is formally titled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA). The special education law, IDEIA requires the special education teachers to be very well experienced (Bollinger, 2014). In order to be eligible for special education and related

services under IDEIA, a child's school performance must be "adversely affected" by a disability in one of 13 categories. The categories include Specific Learning Disability (SLD), Other Health Impairment, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Emotional Disturbance, Speech or Language Impairment, Visual Impairment, Deafness, Hearing Impairment, Deaf-blindness, Orthopedic Impairment, Intellectual Disability, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and Multiple Disabilities (MD). Each of the 13 categories in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act covers a range of difficulties ("Section 1414," 2019).

**Figure 3**

*Thirteen Classifications of Disabilities under IDEIA*



IDEIA (2004) identifies six important principles within part B that characterize special education, providing students with disabilities. These principles include: Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), Appropriate Evaluation, Individualized Education Plan (IEP), Least Restrictive Environment, Parent Participation, and Procedural Safeguards (IDEIA, 2004). In addition, there are various other components that tie into IDEIA: confidentiality, transition services and discipline.

**Figure 4**

*Main Elements of IDEIA*



***Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).*** The foundation of Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) has remained unchanged since the beginning of IDEIA (Yell & Bateman, 2017). However, due to previous case history students with disabilities, regardless of the complexity of their educational needs, the accommodations, or additional services they require, or the cost to a

school district are entitled to a free appropriate public education. "Schools are now going to be held to a higher standard in providing FAPE and they must be prepared to meet this challenge" (Yell & Drasgow, 2000, p. 205). FAPE must be individually determined because what is appropriate for one student with a disability might not be appropriate for another. A student's FAPE is (a) established and memorialized through the IEP, (b) geared toward meeting his or her unique educational needs, and (c) designed to elicit educational benefit. The responsibility to make FAPE available rests with the public-school district in which the student resides and, ultimately, with the state (Yell & Bateman, 2017).

***Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).*** A common phrase and key feature of special education is the least restrictive environment (LRE). The LRE allows students with disabilities to receive their education in an environment that offers as much access as possible to the general education curriculum. IDEIA, explains LRE:

. . . to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities . . . are educated with children who are nondisabled; and special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

(Section 1412 (a) (5), 2019)

This knowledge is critical for educators to deliberate when determining student placement at a CSE meeting, all stakeholders are involved. IDEIA mandates

schools to integrate students with disabilities into the general education classroom if they are able to find success. Some students would not benefit from full inclusion or an integrated co-teaching (ICT) class because of the nature of their disability. However, some teachers who are misinformed of the intention of LRE would suggest that some students with disabilities would excel academically in a more restrictive setting. While that may be true academically, educators have to acknowledge social and emotional needs too. According to Rozalski, Stewart & Miller (2010), "Because there are a myriad of factors that must be considered when attempting to make the challenging LRE decision for a student with disabilities, there is no simple set of rules that the IEP team can follow" (Champagne, 1993; Kluth, Villa, & Thousand, 2002; Sharp & Pitasku, 2002; Yell, 1995). There can be no single or uniform interpretation of LRE. A balance must be achieved between instruction and a curriculum that are appropriate and the location of instruction (Palley, 2006). With necessary modifications and/or accommodations some students require a smaller class size (smaller student to teacher ratio). In a previous study by Hill (2006), examining 127 federal and state IEP-related court decisions, 30 involved a violation of the least restrictive environment mandate. If read and understood, previous case law has given the committee of special education chairperson helpful guidance to make the appropriate decision as to what the student's primary placement should be. As indicated previously, general education teachers are becoming more involved in the process involving students with disabilities due to students with disabilities being placed in an inclusion setting. Often, inexperienced or untrained teachers

may question or disagree with a student's placement because of their lack of understanding of the least restrictive environment and the benefits that arise from students with disabilities participating in class with their non-disabled peers. If not taught in teacher preparation programs, this knowledge should be shared among educators to help in the decision-making process. According to Rozalski, Stewart & Miller (2010) there are a number of questions that can be asked to help determine the LRE:

1. What are the educational benefits of the special vs. general education setting?
2. What are the social benefits of being education with his or her peers?
3. What is the negative impact of the student with disabilities in the general education classroom? (p. 158).

***Procedural Safeguards.*** Procedural safeguards refer to procedures that, by law, are used to ensure a child's rights to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and parents' rights to be involved in and understand the process. Parents must give consent for the recommended special education services before they begin.

Procedural safeguards must be provided to parents yearly and include general information, confidentiality information, complaint procedures, appeals, procedures when disciplining children with disabilities and timelines for various processes. The information must be provided in the parents or guardians native language. Parents of students with disabilities are often required to interpret an onslaught of complicated technical information and legal jargon attached to special education materials (Burke, 2013). Readability, the degree to which an individual can read and understand information, has been offered up as a mitigating factor to parent engagement in the special education system (Mandic,



Rudd, Hehir, & Acevedo-Garcia, 2012). According to a study conducted by Gray, Zraick, & Atcherson (2019), all procedural safeguard documents scored above an 11th-grade reading level. Seventy-four percent of these documents were found to be written at a graduate reading level, essentially for a reader who is currently enrolled in a master's program or higher education program. The language of these documents is not accessible to all parents. According to NCES (2014), Four in five U.S. adults (79 percent) have English literacy skills sufficient to complete tasks that require comparing and contrasting information, paraphrasing, or making low-level inferences—literacy skills at level two or above in Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). Specifically, there are 43.0 million U.S. adults who possess low literacy skills (NCES, 2014) and would therefore not be able to comprehend the documents provided to them. The authors concluded that to decrease barriers to parent involvement in the IEP process developers of IDEIA part B procedural safeguards should consider the literacy skills of the general public as revisions are made. This study guides policy makers, but also informs educators that they need to be able to explain this information to parents. It is the role of the educator to help parents decipher this difficult information and ensure the proper services and implantation of those services for students with disabilities.

***Parent Participation.*** There are high expectations for families with students with disabilities to be involved to a greater extent than students without disabilities. Previous studies indicate that parental involvement leads to higher achievement than those with parents not involved in a student's education (Patel, 2006; Lee &

Bowen, 2006). According to Strassfeld (2019), special education teacher preparation programs should consider how a curriculum that instructs and provides resources regarding home–school collaboration, advocacy, conflict resolution, and federal legislation and programmatic support can enhance parent involvement. Parents are entitled and expected to participate in developing their children's IEP and to become partners with teachers and schools to help their children find success. Most parents do not understand the process of special education law. Educators should explain the different services available to the families to ensure the child gets the best education setting to achieve their goals.

***Appropriate Evaluation.*** Assessment continues to play a crucial role in screening children who may have a disability. The purpose of these psychological and educational assessments is to identify children experiencing academic challenges, diagnosing children who are eligible for special education services, planning for instruction, and monitoring progress. All students recommended for special education are given an array of assessments in addition to classroom observation to determine if a student is classified as having one of the 13 disabilities as stated in IDEIA. According to Frey (2019):

No federal eligibility criteria within each disability category or mandates about which tests or what practices to use to determine eligibility; these decisions are made at the state levels, leading to great variability in what constitutes a 'comprehensive and individual evaluation process. (p. 152)

IDEIA requires that all assessments be unbiased and that procedures be fair. However, as with many assessments there are inconsistencies between the

examiners and the different assessments. During teacher preparation programs, educators may not be taught how to give the specific assessments the district offers or how to grade and analyze these evaluations and need support to fulfill a new position.

IDEIA does not specify which specific assessments must be used. In New York State, focusing on the academic assessments, districts may use the Kaufman Test of Education Achievement (KTEA), Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement (WJ) and Weschsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT) in addition to many others. In a study by Harrison, Goegan, & Macoun (2019), the researchers examined the scoring errors across these three widely used achievement tests; KTEA, KJ, and WIAT by novice examiners. Among the three measures, the WIAT-III was found to have the most scoring elements and was, therefore, the measure most susceptible to errors in scoring. Irrespective of the measure, more errors occurred on composites requiring greater examiner inference and interpretation. This inconsistency could potentially result in the student receiving different recommendations based on the individual/educator who grades the assessment and depending on the exam itself. The results from these assessments in one of the biggest factors in determining student program and services.

***Individualized Education Plan.*** An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a legal document that guarantees an appropriate education to each student with a disability. The IEP serves as an educational blueprint because of student history, evaluations, and a in depth decision-making process involving the students'

parents and educational professionals, including a general education teacher and special education teacher. While IEPs are intended to serve as an instructional tool for students with disabilities they are often treated as artifacts rather than vital guiding documents that direct instruction (Lee-Tarver, 2006; Yell & Stecker, 2003). It is the responsibility of the special education teacher, general education teacher and providers to create an individually designed educational plan for students with disabilities. The IEP helps inform instruction for teachers and therefore educators need to be fully aware of the information provided throughout the legal document, as well as how to implement the necessary supports on the IEP. The IEP is the communication tool, so every teacher working with a special education student should have access to the student's IEP and should become very familiar with its contents because this document includes important information about the accommodations needed, the special services provided, and unique educational needs of the individual.

The current version of IDEA, like its predecessors, clearly identifies certain required components of the IEP (e.g., present levels, annual goals, supplemental services/aids, accommodations). However, the governments regulations that accompany the actual federal statute do not now, nor have they ever, specifically defined how to write a meaningful and quality IEP. This reality has been and continues to remain a challenge for educators and parents, as the quality of well-written IEPs remains elusive (Tran, Patton, & Brohammer, 2018). Many districts are now utilizing frontline (formerly IEP Direct) as a platform to house IEPs and to create IEPs, track data and more. IDEA allocates funds to

states and local educational agencies to assist in educating students with disabilities ages 3-21. To remain eligible for federal funds under the law, states are required to have policies and procedures in effect that comply with federal requirements. New York State updated these requirements most recently in 2016 and are known as the regulations of the Commissioner of Education, more commonly referred to as Part 200 and Part 201 ("Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)," (n.d.)).

### ***Contents of an IEP***

**Classification.** Found at the top of every IEP is the classification of the student with disabilities. The CSE will determine if a student is eligible for special education services based on the criteria for one or more of the 13 possibilities of a disability classification as defined by IDEIA. McLaughlin et al., (2006) explains the differences in classification criteria among each state. Additionally, "the sheer growth in the number of students who receive special education has also been a concern to policy makers" (McLaughlin et al., 2006, p. 50). There are many students being classified as having a learning disability (McLaughlin et al., 2006), but how do special education teachers know how to determine between a learning disability and a student who doesn't want to put in the effort necessary to excel?

**Present Level of Educational Performance (PLEP).** The IEP must indicate the student's current abilities/performance in reading, writing, mathematics, study skills, etc. According to Van Boxtel (2017), the "greatest area of need" in relation to IEPs the recommendations centered around aligning IEP goals to present levels

of performance (p. 68). The information from this section helps teachers with planning their lessons to meet the individuals needs of their learners.

**Measurable Annual Goals.** Measurable annual goals are goals that a student with disabilities can reasonably accomplish over the course of a school year. Goals may be academic, address social or behavioral needs, relate to physical needs, or address other educational needs. The goals must be "measurable," meaning it must be possible to measure whether the student has achieved the goals. An educational program needs to be calculated to allow a student to make reasonable progress regardless of their disabilities. School districts must continuously collect meaningful data to document student progress towards IEP goals to document the student progress (Yell & Drasgow, 2010). However, many IEP goals fall short in terms of individualization, provision of sufficient detail, alignment with students' present levels of performance, or high expectations (Jung, 2007, Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2000). To avoid these shortcomings, educators can use the SMART acronym. An IEP-related interpretation of the acronym is as follows: specific, measurable, actionable, realistic, and time limited. In addition to these features, well-written IEP goals reflect students' unique strengths and needs. Using the SMART acronym as a guide, educators can produce specific, measurable, realistic goals with action verbs (Hedin & DeSpain, 2018). With the help of Frontline, data for goals can be documented electronically which can help visually and allow for rapid and accurate instructional decisions. According to Luckner & Bowen (2010), a primary concern was with the amount of time progress monitoring takes away from teaching.

**Accommodations/Modifications.** Accommodations and modifications are tools or procedures that provide equal access to instruction and assessment for students with disabilities. Designed to "level the playing field" for students with disabilities, accommodations are generally grouped into the following categories: presentation (e.g., repeating directions, reading aloud, using larger bubbles on answer sheets, etc.); response (e.g., marking answers in book, using reference aids, pointing, using a computer, etc.); timing/scheduling (e.g., extended time, frequent breaks, etc.); and setting (e.g., study carrel, special lighting, separate room, etc.). All teachers are required to adhere to the mandated accommodations and modifications per the student's IEP. There is a significant difference between the two and teachers need to be aware of the differences. A teacher who works with students with disabilities and does not understand the purpose of accommodations and modifications may not utilize them as they were intended, which is to assist students with disabilities. Accommodations do not change or lower the standards for a class, assignments, or tests. Rather, accommodations enable a student to access the general curriculum and demonstrate his or her knowledge of the class content by making adjustments to the way the student demonstrates his or her understanding of the content (Klor, 2007). Modifications alter the standards for a class, assignments, or tests and may involve changes in the content of what is being taught as well as a change in skill expectations of the student.

Polloway, Epstein, and Bursuck (2003) reported that general education teachers are more willing to consider accommodations but express more

reluctance to implement modifications. When accommodations are not enough to allow the student to be successful in the general education curriculum, the IEP team may decide to require modifications. Modifications are different from accommodations in that they change or lower the standards of the content being delivered. With modifications a student is not expected to gain the same knowledge the course usually requires. Examples of modifications include the use of alternative materials to offer the student a simplified curriculum and/or modified grading standards. (Johns, Crowley & Eleanor, 2002).

According to the NYS Education Department Testing Accommodations for Students with Disabilities appendix F (updated 2019), the accommodation of "tests read" allows students with disabilities that limit their ability to decode print the opportunity to demonstrate content knowledge in all subject areas by mitigating the effects of a reading or print disability. "Tests read" should be a low-incidence accommodation, as it is not effective or appropriate for many students with disabilities. Providing read-aloud accommodations for students who do not need them may have a negative effect on such students' test performance (NYSED, 2018).

**Programs, Related Services and Assistive technology.** An important difference between special education and general education is the array of services offered to students and their families. Special education provides additional services to help students with disabilities benefit from instruction. It includes direct services from special education teachers, as well as instruction and therapy from related services professionals. Commonly used related services are speech therapy, physical



therapy (PT), occupational therapy (OT), and counseling. Assistive technology is another component of a student's IEP; educators must be able to help students utilize this equipment as proper utilization can be critical for students with disabilities.

Teachers, however, are often not adequately prepared in their pre-service course work and ongoing professional development to address the technology needs of their special education students and have not had the opportunities to access technology due to limited availability and cost. (Koch, 2017, p. 1)

**FBA and BIPs.** Behavioral intervention plans are used to address problem behaviors. Before being able to address these behaviors a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) is given. The data collected during the FBA will provide strategies, supports, program modifications and supplementary aids and services that may be required to address the problem behavior. According to Rispoli et al., (2016) "Most public schools do not have personnel with expertise in challenging behavior assessment and intervention" (p. 250). As a result, many FBAs, are completed by personnel outside the district, yet teachers are the ones required to implement this plan. The lack of teacher involvement and understanding of the FBA process leads to a lack of teacher buy-in, lack of identification of relevant environmental factors associated with the challenging behavior, and lack of adherence to behavior intervention recommendations (Rispoli et al., 2016).

**Transition Services.** Transition services are defined by law as a coordinated set of activities which are designed to prepare the student for outcomes that are envisioned for the student in adult life. Outcomes may include postsecondary

education, including two and four-year college, employment, vocational training, adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation. Each student's set of activities needs to be based on the student's individual needs, preferences, and interests. The activities must include instruction, community experiences, and development of employment or other post-school adult living objectives.

The activities are student-specific, considering the student's strengths, preferences, and interests. They are based on and support the student's post-secondary goals and transition needs. The school based or district CSE should identify the transition needs, which focus on the student's courses of study as they relate to transition from high school to post-secondary school activities. Examples of courses of study might include school curriculum coursework, advanced placement courses and/or sequence of courses in a career and technical education field related to the student's post-secondary goals.

### ***Non-Instructional Responsibilities Specified in IDEIA***

Previous studies express teacher concerns related to special education: paperwork, student placement, evaluation/eligibility, IEP and parent participation (O'Dell, Schaefer 2005; Yell & Drasgow, 2000). "Many teachers that leave the field of education have become disgusted with the amount of paperwork that is required to do the job" (Payne, 2005, p. 89). Educators are responsible for ensuring student's IEPs are followed and that CSE meetings are aligned with federal and state regulations. Educators struggle when they do not have the appropriate knowledge, time, and resources.

Inexperienced teachers need support to complete their non-instructional responsibilities. Casey et al. (2011) designed an experiment to "investigate the experiences and support needs of novice," (p. 182) special education teachers who were alternatively certified in special education. The authors purpose was to determine where they need the most support within their first three years. The sample population included 52 novice special education teachers that earned their special education certification through an alternative pathway. Participants for this study were identified by contacting professional colleagues and were recruited using emails and paper flyers. The invitational flyer contained a link to the online survey consisting of "both closed-ended, quantitative type questions and open-ended, qualitative type questions about the participants' perceptions of their need for support and preservice experiences" (Casey et al., 2011, p. 185). The authors used a mixed-method approach to this study. The electronic invitation also asked participants to forward the invitation to others inviting them to participate, creating a snowball sample. The quantifiable data denotes the percentage of participants reporting perceived levels of difficulty in the eight areas as well as the frequency of novice special education teachers asking or receiving support.

The participating special education teachers most frequently asked for or received help/support with special education procedures/processes (60.3%); paperwork (52.8%); and materials (47.9%):

As the literature points out, new teachers initially operate in survival mode where a major concern is acceptance from their colleagues. This driving force often fuels the notion in novice teachers that *seeking help, advice, or support from another is a sign of weakness or incompetence* (Rowley, 2006, p. 45). In this study, 77.4% of

respondents indicated they infrequently asked for or received support on either legal issues or campus expectations. A similar percentage stated infrequent support on topics dealing with time management (75.5%), district policies and procedures (75.5%), and campus policies and procedures (71.7%). (Casey et al., 2011, p. 188)

To know what is specifically needed to improve teacher preparations, more information is needed. Teachers noted that procedures and paperwork were two common responsibilities among special education teachers in which they required support but were likely afraid to ask for assistance. Do they need help with writing IEP's? If so, what areas of the IEP are challenging for them? Do they need assistance with collecting appropriate data? The current study will help to determine the specific areas of needs to create future professional developments for current teachers and to increase the information within this area of need being taught in teacher preparation programs.

Vannest et al., (2011) conducted a study because "researchers know little of how special education program structures have changed and how the roles of special education teachers have been affected—how they actually spend their time" (p. 219). The authors examined teacher time use in four types of special education programs (adaptive behavior units (referred to in the current study as self-contained or special class), content mastery (where students have accommodations but are not necessarily in an ICT setting), coteaching (referred to in this current study as ICT or inclusion), and resource room). Data within 10 categories was collected from 31 teachers in 24 schools within nine districts in the Southwestern United States. Differences between program types were reliably established. Three activities consumed nearly half (49%) of class time: academic

instruction (20%), instructional support (17%), and special education paperwork (12%) (Vannest et al., 2011). This study indicates that special education teachers' responsibility could vary across their assignments.

In a study conducted by Wasburn-Moses (2005), the goal was to determine the roles and responsibilities of teachers of secondary students with learning disabilities (LD) by documenting teachers' work lives to understand their current roles and responsibilities. The sample consisted of 191 special education teachers all over Michigan state and "The survey instrument consisted of four components: (a) demographic information, (b) roles and responsibilities, (c) program evaluation, and (d) teacher preparation" (Wasburn-Moses, 2005, p. 153). In roles and responsibilities, the teachers rated the frequency with which they engaged in a list of 18 practices that included teaching reading, teaching vocational skills, working with other professionals, and completing paperwork; they also rated the quality of their teacher preparation for each item as excellent, good, fair or poor (Wasburn-Moses, 2005).

Participants' common roles and responsibilities included (a) teaching reading and writing, content, and skills; (b) working with students, including making adaptations or accommodations, managing behavior, and consulting with students on their caseload; (c) working with others, such as general education teachers, parents, paraprofessionals and administrators; and (d) paperwork. They reported teaching in several different content areas daily, primarily in self-contained settings (Wasburn-Moses, 2005). The author neglected to clearly state the data collected for teacher perception of the 18 practices in their teacher preparation program. Special education teachers are required to do a substantial amount of work daily and within each of these roles, they need to be

cognizant of special education laws. The author states that this knowledge will eventually lead to reform efforts, program development, and teacher preparation (Wasburn-Moses, 2005). This study helps create an understanding of how these non-instructional tasks are a large part of the responsibilities for all teachers. This study shows how paperwork is a common responsibility of educators who work with students with disabilities, regardless of what class they teach. A large amount of time as a special educator is spent completing non-instructional tasks such as writing IEP's, academic testing, filling out progress reports and communicating with service providers.

In a study conducted by O'Connor et al., (2016) the authors sought to examine whether teachers have sufficient knowledge of education law to implement the necessary special education services. The sample included 58 kindergarten through eighth-grade general education teachers from the New York City with less than six years of experience. The participants were enrolled in a master's program to obtain their degree in literacy. The participants were asked to complete a survey consisting of 10 True/False questions about IDEIA, Section 504 and FERPA then respond to six open-ended questions assessing their knowledge of special education laws and how these laws impact their work with children. The authors used a mixed methods approach when analyzing data. The correct answers for the true/false questions were calculated and completed coursework were analyzed using a quantitative approach (O'Conner et al., 2016).

This study indicates that teachers are lacking essential information about IDEA/IDEIA. The results also showed that a majority (79%) of the teachers reported not having any coursework related to special education law. Teachers are typically

misinformed and lack knowledge about education law, which in turn may inadvertently violate students' legal rights (O'Conner et al., 2016).

The purpose of this study was to, "assess teacher candidates' knowledge of special education policies and procedures as mandated by the federal government" (Sanders, 2011, p. 96) the authors surveyed 111 teacher candidates. The participants were from a Missouri private university and were asked to complete a survey. This cross-sectional method consisted of two parts, the first part of the survey assessed their perceptions regarding attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in a general education classroom and their knowledge of special education policies and procedures. The study consisted of five questions in which participants answered using a five-point Likert scale. The second part of the survey assessed knowledge of special education policies and procedures by having participants respond to statements addressing principals of IDEA with accurate and inaccurate statements using a four-point Likert scale (Sanders, 2011).

This study shows that teacher candidates lacked accurate knowledge and misperceived their lack of knowledge. According to Sanders (2011) "The most significant predictors of accurate knowledge were completing more special education courses and having positive attitudes toward inclusion" (Sanders, 2011, p. 96). Finally, when comparing general education teachers and special education teacher candidates, this study revealed no differences in their knowledge. The current study sought to discover why special education teachers do not have more knowledge regarding special education law, what could be done differently in higher education teacher preparation programs, what schools can offer new teachers during new teacher orientation that will be helpful.

***Implementing an IEP.*** Prior to the implementation of the IEP, the district must provide copies (electronic or paper) of each student's IEP to a student's regular education teacher(s), special education teacher(s), the parent, related service provider(s) and other service provider who is responsible for the implementation of a student's IEP. In previous studies, participants "expressed frustration over the amount of time needed to complete paperwork and the time they perceived paperwork took away from serving students and fulfilling other studies, thus creating additional compliance issues" (O'Dell & Schaefer, 2005, p. 9).

The district assigns a professional employee to be responsible for ensuring the proper implementation of the IEP. This "case manager," must obtain a signature from any regular education teacher, special education teacher, related service provider, other service provider, paraprofessional (i.e., teaching assistant or teacher aide), and other provider and support staff person that is responsible to implement the recommendations on a student's IEP, including the responsibility to provide specific accommodations, program modifications, supports and/or services for the student in accordance with the IEP.

The implementation of an IEP has multiple purposes including educational, legal, planning, accountability, placement, and resource allocation. School districts are responsible for ensuring that teachers are informed of their responsibilities to review and implement the IEP. General education teachers are required by law to be knowledgeable of the information in the IEP of any student enrolled in their class. They also have a legal obligation to implement any part of the IEP that is applicable in their class. The general education teacher's



interaction with the student in the general education setting and curriculum allows the teacher to help the IEP team develop realistic goals. It also allows teachers to recommend appropriate activities that can realistically be implemented in the general education classroom. According to Klor (2007), general education teachers find it challenging to meet the legal responsibilities of implementing student's IEPs while also addressing the instructional needs of the entire class.

According to IDEIA all teachers are legally responsible for implementing all aspects of the IEP that pertain to their classroom. IDEIA not only specifies how IEPs are to be developed and what they must contain, they also include intricate due process safeguards to protect the rights of students and ensure that provisions are enforced (Russo, 2008).

***Data Collection/Progress Reports/ESY.*** Data-based decision making is an important part of an educator's role; however, many teachers have difficulty applying evidence-based practice to their daily routines (Ruble, McGrew, Wong, Missall, 2018). Even when teachers carefully select validated practices, there is no guarantee that the individual student will respond positively or sufficiently. For this reason, teachers use progress monitoring—a set of evaluation procedures that assess the effectiveness of instruction on skills while they are being taught. The four key features of this approach are that students' educational progress is measured (1) directly on skills of concern, (2) systematically, (3) consistently, and (4) frequently. The areas of most concern are measured directly to check progress made on the curricular tasks, skills, or behaviors where interventions are being directed. Thus, if reading comprehension is being targeted for improvement, then

it is this skill that is assessed. If the acquisition of subtraction facts is the focus of instruction, then the number or percentage of those problems that are answered correctly is recorded. Instruction and assessment are linked (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2001). These assessments should occur frequently and should be used to provide educators with useful feedback so that they can swiftly modify their instructional approaches. Because this approach tailors the special education a student receives (e.g. guiding the selection of practices and monitoring their effectiveness), it is an important element that must be intertwined in daily practice. Teachers are additionally asked to collect specific data before and after extended breaks such as the winter break and spring break to determine if the student exhibits a substantial amount of regression to determine if the student is eligible for extended school year services (ESY).

IDEIA mandates that periodic reports on the progress the student is making toward meeting the annual goals will be provided to families. This information informs the IEP team about the effectiveness of their instruction and is discussed at the annual CSE meeting.

***Committee of Special Education or IEP Meeting.*** A full committee or subcommittee of educational professionals and parents who work together to discuss if the student requires the support of the special education program and if so, what services would be appropriate. If the CSE, based upon the evaluation(s), observations, and other data, determines that the student has a disability and that special education services are necessary, an IEP will be developed. CSE members include: a general education teacher; special education teacher; school

psychologist; social worker; district representative, the parent; and the child (depending on the age).

Despite 30 years of special education laws, regulations, and policies, school districts continue to experience difficulties with implementation and are out of compliance with one or more areas at any given time (Yell & Drasgow, 2000; O'Dell & Schaefer, 2005; Christle & Yell, 2010; Shuran & Roblyer, 2012). Although many schools have made significant strides in providing special education services to students with disabilities, recent studies indicate that many barriers still exist to fully implementing IDEA. School administrators, general education teachers and special education teachers support inclusive services for students with disabilities but admit there are a lack of resources, unreasonable class sizes and inadequate training for teachers (Cheatham et al, 2012). The implementation of the individualized education program (IEP) is the most cited area of noncompliance and the primary issue of litigation (Smith, 1990; Rotter, 2014). To ensure that a CSE synthesizes "meaningful and legally sound IEPs, administrators and special education teachers need to thoroughly understand and adhere to the procedural and substantive IEP requirements of IDEA" (Christle & Yell, 2010, p. 113). It is essential to understand each component of the IEP and utilize appropriately for achievement of students with disabilities.

***General Education Teachers Expectations.*** Laws are constantly changing. There have been decades of increased responsibilities but little movement in increasing supports for teachers. A general education teacher's role has changed over the years and is "somewhat new to IEP implementation" (Rotter, 2014). Due to

IDEIA students may be placed in an inclusion class, where general education teachers will need to implement the students' IEP. Previous studies indicate that there are inconsistencies in the implementation of co-teacher roles (Strieker, Gillis, & Zong, 2013; Cook & McDuffie-Landrum, 2020) and that schools often do not identify the unique performance expectations of special education teachers (Glowacki & Hackmann, 2016). IDEIA expanded the responsibility of general education teachers. General education teachers are required to be part of the CSE, to gather any data or information about the students and to implement any accommodations or modifications to meet the academic, emotional, social, and physical needs of each student with a disability as per the student's IEP. This requires that teachers should have knowledge of special education law.

Teachers are usually the first to identify children who may need special services and are usually the ones who refer children for evaluation. (O'Connor et al., 2016). As part of the Child Find Law, all schools are required to have a process for identifying and evaluating children who need special education and related services (Williams et al., 2013). Some parents are unable to advocate for their children due a lack of understanding. If a general education teacher can see that their student needs some type of services to benefit them, they need to help inform the parent(s) to advocate to get the required services. Therefore, all teachers and staff members in a school should know the special education law to provide all that is needed to the child and their families.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act essentially governs how states and agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related

services and aids to students with disabilities. School districts in the United States are required by law to identify, locate, and evaluate children with disabilities. An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is developed and implemented in the students' learning process through this evaluation. IDEA allows students with disabilities to receive high-quality interventions that maximize their learning potential.

According to Johns and Crowley (2007) both IDEA (1990/1997) and the improved IDEA of 2004 identify the importance of the general education teacher's role in special education. The importance of the general education teacher's involvement is not only recognized and acknowledged but has been put into law. IDEA '04 upheld the provision of IDEA (1990/1997) that recognized the need for school personnel working with students with disabilities to have access to supports needed to do their jobs. If the general education teacher needs or desires additional training or consultation to enhance his or her ability to work with a student with disabilities, this support should be provided. Based on IDEA 1990, 1997, and 2004, the general education teacher's input is vital to the process. Therefore, the general education teacher's knowledge of the process is imperative.

### **Teacher Needs**

Schimmel & Militello (2007) sought to gain an understanding of teacher's confusion and misunderstandings about educational law. Through this study the authors learned what legal topics teachers were interested in learning more about. They also discuss the consequences of the lack of legal knowledge for classroom teachers (Schimmel & Militello, 2007). Schimmel & Militello (2007) used purposeful sampling,

including 1,317 educators across seventeen states. These educators' range in educational level, the type of school they teach in, years of experience, and grade level they teach. The study consisted of five components; demographic information, survey requesting teachers to report their level of knowledge and interest in ten different law domains, twenty-nine true-or-false questions relating to students rights and teacher rights/liability, asked where they learned their knowledge of educational law and two open-ended questions (Schimmel & Militello, 2007).

The findings from this study suggest that most educators are uninformed or misinformed about student and teacher rights, have taken no course in school law, get majority of their school law information from other teachers; would change their behavior if they knew more about school law, and that they want to learn more about these issues (Schimmel & Militello, 2007). Specifically, 50% of teachers reported that their level of knowledge was none or inadequate in the area of student due process and discipline. As the population of students with disabilities grow, and due to laws, such as IDEA and requirements such as LRE, more and more teachers will be educating students with disabilities. It is imperative to know how to best support teachers who are not equipped with the fundamental tools to carry out the non-instructional tasks. Schimmel & Militello's (2007) study sought to gain an understanding of teacher's knowledge of educational law, which showed that many teachers do not have sufficient knowledge of special education laws, specifically students due process rights. The current study sought to determine both general education teacher's knowledge and special education teacher's knowledge of special education laws and regulations and aim to determine how to best support educators in their role in educating students with disabilities.

Whitaker (2003) aimed to examine the perceptions of a group of beginning special education teachers throughout South Carolina to determine what they perceived as their major needs during their first year of teaching. The purpose was to determine how much assistance they received in each area of need, and from whom they received the assistance. This sample consisted of 156 first year special education teachers from South Carolina. The survey was mailed and follow up phone calls were made. "The survey asked respondents to rate the amount of assistance they needed in eight areas during their first year of teaching special education, and then to rate the amount of assistance they received in each area" (Whitaker, 2003, p. 109). To analyze the data, Whitaker first found the frequencies, percentages, means, and standard for each survey item. Next the author computed a differential index by subtracting the rating of the amount of assistance received from the amount of assistance needed. Then, "the Wilcoxin signed ranks test was used to determine if the differences between the amount of assistance needed and the amount of assistance received were significant" (Whitaker, 2003, p. 110). The amount of assistance needed by the beginning teachers was .87 and the amount of assistance received was .91 (Whitaker, 2003).

The participants reported that they needed the most assistance with system information related to special education (information about policies, paperwork, procedures, guidelines, and expectations related to the district special education program) (Whitaker, 2003). This was also the area in which they reported the greatest discrepancy between the amount of assistance needed and the amount of assistance actually received. The beginning special education teachers reported receiving the most assistance from other special education teachers rather than their building administrator or their assigned

mentor (Whitaker, 2003). This study showed the areas in which teachers need support. The current study will address teacher perceptions of how administrators can best support teachers in their role with non-instructional tasks to better improve the education of students with disabilities.

Co-teaching involves two teachers and while there are many different co-teaching approaches to providing instruction, it is beneficial when both co-teachers are knowledgeable about applying the information from a student's IEP into a lesson. Focusing on the non-instructional tasks, understanding the IEP and being able to work in unity with a co-teacher is essential for a positive experience for both students and teachers. Kosko & Wilkins (2009), suggests that the professional development general education teachers receive is not necessarily preparing them to properly implement inclusion-based practices. Their study investigated the relationship among teachers' years of experience teaching students with IEPs and their perceived ability to utilize the IEPs to adapt their lesson plans appropriately. This study included 1,126 general education teachers who were interviewed over the phone. Results indicate that it may take large amounts of training to have a meaningful influence.

**Professional Development.** Professional development for teachers is essential for their continued growth, effective collaboration, and improving student learning. Professional development can provide educators with the skills to create opportunities for all students to learn. Professional development is also fundamental for implementing educational policies that call for changes to current practices (Pat, Desimone & Parsons, 2020).



Billingsley (2004) reports that not all special educators receive professional development opportunities, and those who do, indicate they are not helpful. Many professional development programs still struggle to advise in a way that provides general educators with the tools to interact effectively with students with special needs in a general education classroom (Byrd & Alexander, 2020). Mastropieri (2001) suggested that school districts offer specific and ongoing professional development activities, especially when teachers' licenses and experiences do not match their current positions.

According to Kosko & Wilkins (2009), teachers who receive little to no professional development in teaching students with disabilities have significantly less positive attitudes towards inclusion than those with extensive training. College coursework can be seen as ineffective because they are not yet in the classroom having to apply that knowledge in context.

**Mentoring.** School districts and administrators are required to assign a school-based mentor to all novice teachers. Previous literature speaks to the unique needs of special education teachers "inclusion, collaboration, and interaction with adults; pedagogical concerns, and managing roles" (Billingsley et al., 2009, p. 16). Further complicating the issues of providing special educators with quality mentoring is that programs intended to improve teacher quality through mentoring programs may not address additional needs such as time management, assistance with paperwork, and collaboration skills. Due to the small number of qualified mentors, research indicates discrepancies between policy and practice (Washburn-Moses, 2010).

**Teacher Shortage.** Many districts across the united states are struggling to find and hold onto qualified special education teachers, the shortage is speculated to be because of, "lack of respect, lack of preparation, lack of support, etc." (Payne, 2005, p. 8). Additionally, Payne (2005) believes that the high turnover rate of special education teachers is due to the "job design and the expectations placed upon special education teachers" (p. 88). The teacher shortage likely influenced the growth of alternative routes to teaching certifications in special education (Quigney, 2010). Previous studies indicate that teacher preparatory programs are not preparing teachers for their role in educating students with disabilities and have found that many teachers are unprepared for all the responsibilities in the field of education (Payne, 2005; Ergül, Baydik & Demir, 2013; Cheatham et al., 2012). Teachers have various responsibilities that must be considered, yet districts often do not identify the unique performance expectation in relation to students with disabilities (Glowacki & Hackmann, 2016). According to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) which became a part of IDEA '04, educators must be "highly qualified" in their specialty area, however, the need for specialized training to teach students with disabilities has been ignored. Teachers have not received training in the broad areas of litigation, legislation, and standards for educating students with disabilities" (*Title II - Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High Quality Teachers and Principals,* 2005).

## **Conclusion**

A review of literature indicates that educators lack appropriate knowledge of special education law. Overall, these studies have shown that teachers report needing the

most help with policies and procedures pertaining to special education and report receiving little support in this area. Through review of previous literature, there is a high need for support with their non-instructional tasks. At this point, there appears to be a gap in the research identifying specific areas that teachers feel they lack adequate knowledge and need assistance in navigating the legal requirements and opportunities for success for students receiving special education services. This study seeks to discover the areas teachers most need support and what teachers feel school administrators or higher education can do to improve teacher preparedness for their role as a teacher specifically with non-instructional tasks pertaining to special education law.

## CHAPTER 3

### Introduction

Chapter three explains the methodology, including participant selection and demographics, data collection procedures for interviews, focus groups and district documents (which was unattainable) on professional development, limitations, data analysis procedures, and the role of the researcher for this qualitative study. The research design within this chapter is based on the collective information from chapter one, which provides the reader with background information on the issues and shows the importance of conducting this study as well as the conceptualizes the theoretical framework and related literature found in chapter two.

This current study explores what knowledge teachers have and do not have in regard to special education law that is necessary in their field to suitably support students with disabilities and their families. This study sought to determine the specific areas in which educators feel they need more training and/or support. This study will serve to educate school administrators and professors within higher education as to what teachers need to know to ensure that laws and regulations pertaining to special education are being followed.

The researcher employed the case study methodology for this study. Case studies are intended to understand the specific activities within a single case in great detail (Stake, 1995). Specifically, the researcher applied an instrumental case study approach. According to Stake (1995) an instrumental case study seeks to provides insight into an issue in which the case itself here is secondary as the researcher aims to understand the case in order to understand the bigger research question at hand. With the increase in

student's being classified as needing services under IDEIA, it is important to dive in and take a closer look within a specific school district at their procedures, policies, and protocol from the educator's perspective. The researcher sought to determine if teachers have the necessary knowledge to ensure students' legal rights are being followed. As a researcher, "we enter the scene with a sincere interest in learning how they function in their ordinary pursuits and milieus and with a willingness to put aside many presumptions while we learn" (Stake, 1995, p. 1).

This case study was conducted in a Nassau County School District within New York State over approximately two months. The purpose of the study was to determine if teachers, both general education and special education teachers, are prepared to teach students with disabilities adhering to federal and state laws and regulations. To do so this, this study was guided by the subsequent research questions as Stake (1995) advises it is essential to have sharpened research questions that will "help structure the observation, interviews, and document review" (p. 20).

## **Methods and Procedures**

### ***Research Questions***

R1: What are teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to implement special education laws and regulations?

- a. How do special education teachers and general education teachers perceive their knowledge of special education laws and regulations?
- b. How do elementary teachers and secondary teachers perceive their knowledge of special education laws and regulations?

R2: How do teachers make sense of their roles and responsibilities in order to complete the non-instructional tasks required?

R3: In what ways do special education teachers believe they are supported by administrators and colleagues to complete the non-instructional tasks associated with special education law and regulations?

### ***Setting***

The population for this study is comprised of teachers from one school district located in Nassau County, New York and encompasses one high school (grades 9-12), one middle school (grades 6-8) and three elementary school (grades K-5). According to data.nysed.gov as of June 30, 2019, there are 2,790 students: 50% male and 50% female, 86% white, 8% Hispanic, 3% Asian, Hawaiian and/or Pacific Islander, <1% African American, 3% multiracial. The district has a 14% population of students classified as having a disability. The students with IEP's range in their classification of disabilities; learning disabled (LD), speech and language impairment, other health impairment (OHI), emotionally disturbed (ED), multiple disabilities etc. Teachers utilize Frontline (formerly known as IEP Direct) to access and create student's IEP's. This study utilized Google Meets video conferencing and was audio and video recorded through google meets and transcribed with the help of the Otter app. According to data.nysed.gov (2019), there are 376 students with disabilities between the ages of 6-21. 71.5% of the students with disabilities are enrolled in a general education program for 80% of more of the day. 9.3% of students with disabilities are educated primarily outside of the general education program, such as a self-contained class.

According to the data received from the district office, there are 272 certified employees of the district, including teachers and related service providers. The demographics of the certified employees are 83.5% female, 16.5% male, 95% white, 3% Hispanic, 1% Asian, <1% African American, and <1% multiracial. There are 211 full time educators, this number excludes guidance counselors, occupational therapists, physical therapists, psychologists, nurses, employees that are split between buildings and all part-time employees.

**Table 1**

*Population of Teachers*

School	Number of Teachers	Number of Special Education Teachers	Number of General Education Teachers
High School	69	11	58
Middle School	59	9	50
Elementary School 1	20	5	24
Elementary School 2	16	2	14
Elementary School 3	47	11	36

*Participants*

The population for this study was comprised of both elementary and secondary teachers from all five schools within this Nassau County school district. The researcher interviewed 10 participants without limitations. There were two focus groups

purposefully arranged to elicit robust discussions, one group consisted of four teachers who work in an elementary building and the other focus group consisted of teachers currently working in the middle school. Participants were selected among those who volunteered, the researcher purposefully selected participants from various schools and with certifications in different areas. The demographic information of the participants is illustrated in the table below.

**Table 2**

*Teacher Demographics*

Participant	Type of Teacher	Years of Experience	Building	Taught Inclusion
A	Special Education	5-9	High School/ Elementary School	Yes
B	General Education (substitute)	0-4	All	Yes
C	Special Education	15+	Middle School	Yes
D	General Education	5-9	Elementary	Yes
E	General Education	15+	Middle School	Yes
F	General Education	0-4	Middle School	Yes
G	General Education	0-4	Elementary	No
H	General Education	15+	High School	No
I	General Education	15+	High School	Yes
J	General Education	15+	High School	Yes
K	General Education	15+	Middle School	Yes
L	Special Education	10-14	Elementary	Yes
M	General Education	15+	Elementary	No
N	Special Education	15+	Elementary /High School	Yes



O	General Education	10-14	Elementary	Yes
P	General Education	5-9	Middle School	Yes
Q	General Education	5-9	Middle School	Yes
R	Special Education	5-9	Middle School	Yes

### *Data Collection Procedures*

The steps in the data collection process were as follows:

Step 1: The researcher contacted the Director of Special Education and the Superintendent of School in her role as a graduate student to obtain preliminary permission to conduct the research within their district. District administrators approved with both verbal and written consent, see appendix F.

Step 2: The researcher sent an initial email to the entire district asking for volunteers to participate complete an initial questionnaire using a Microsoft Forms link which led them to a series of questions such as:

- What building do you work in?
- How long have you been teaching?
- What teaching certifications do you hold?
- What is your current position?
- Do you teach inclusion?

Step 3: From those responses the researcher selected participants and sent a follow up email asking them to read and agree to the terms of the informed consent form. The informed consent will highlight that this is a voluntary study, and they can decline to participate at any time without penalty.

Step 4: The researcher conducted Semi-structured interviews using Google Meets

Step 5: Focus groups consisting of three to four participants each were conducted by the researcher.

Step 6: The researcher attempted to obtain documents for analysis but was unsuccessful

Step 7: The researcher transcribed all interviews and focus group recordings and uploaded the information into Dedoose to complete the coding process.

Step 8: After the researcher completed the rough draft of the findings, the researcher contacted some participants to check for reliability and validity by obtaining feedback from participants.

**Semi-Structured Interviews.** The researcher conducted 10 semi-structured interviews, with teachers throughout the district. The semi-structured interviews followed a protocol derived of open-ended questions, see appendix C, which was devised prior to the interviews and allowed the researcher to focus on a specific topic while also allowing space for topical trajectories as the conversation unfolded. Semi-structured interviews offer more than just an answer, a rationale for the answer. These interviews included special education and general education teachers; ranging in their years of experience, certifications, and the building in which they previously and currently work to ensure the researcher has a diverse sample. All interviews ranged in length from 20 minutes to 35 minutes, with the exception of one whose lasted about 10 minutes due to the lack of experience the teacher had with students with disabilities and the determination of the researcher to avoid having participant feel uncomfortable. All participants were interviewed through Google Meets and signed the consent form prior to being audio and video recorded.

**Focus Groups.** The decision to use focus groups in addition to the individual interviews was inspired by the views of Berg and Lune (2009), as the combination of the two is "a kind of validity check on the findings" (p. 165). To ensure the researcher utilized time appropriately, the researcher designed a focus group protocol (see Appendix D) that was structured around open-ended questions. Two different focus groups were conducted, chosen from recruitment interest but

structured to include various respondent and strategically planned to allow for robust conversations and capture as many perspectives as possible. The researcher created a focus group consisting of four teachers from an elementary building and a second focus group consisting of three teachers in the middle school. Both groups had a diverse set of participants based on the preliminary questions; the teachers had various years of experience and different content area certifications. The first focus group comprised of four current elementary teachers included two general education teachers varying in years of experience and two special education teachers varying in their years of experience. The second focus group consisted of three middle school teachers: one special education teacher and two general education teachers who teach different subject matter and different grades. The focus groups were held google meets and ranged between 40-55 minutes in length. All teachers signed the consent forms to be audio and video recorded. All recordings will be transcribed and stored in a secured location after being entered into Dedoose.

**Content Analysis.** The researcher sought to find documents from within the past five years, as to how the district has supported their teachers within this area. The researcher had requested documents from teachers, and administrators in terms of professional development, new teacher orientation, special education meetings etc. Unfortunately, after numerous emails, the special education administrator explained a technology issue made it impossible to recover previous documents. Some teachers reported they did not feel comfortable sharing the documents. All attempts to gather the documents by the researcher were unsuccessful. In one of

the interviews a teacher reported that while she did attend a new teacher orientation, there were no documents handed out:

Researcher: Do you have those? were there worksheets handed out?

Teacher A: kind of more open- ended conversations.

### ***Trustworthiness of the Design***

This instrumental case study sought to determine, "where and why policy and local knowledge and practice are at odds" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 53). To ensure validity and reliability, the researcher followed suggestions by Miles et al., (2013), checking for representativeness by being mindful to collect data from teachers from different content areas, teachers with an array of years of experience and teachers who hold various certifications. Miles et al., (2013) suggests researchers "look purposively for contrasting cases (negative, extreme, countervailing)" (p. 296). The researcher interviewed individuals with a wide range of experience, from novice to experienced in policies and procedures of the non-instructional tasks involved with special education. Additionally, similar questions were used among the various interviews and focus groups with minor adaptations based on participant knowledge and ability to respond to certain topics.

The researcher attempted to use triangulation which Creswell and Creswell (2018) described as a validity procedure where researchers use different sources to obtain complementary data to formulate themes. The researcher was unable to collect documents from the district for analysis however, the researcher was intentional about capturing data from different building types (elementary, middle and high school) throughout the district as well as teachers with various certifications (e.g., special

education, elementary education, mathematics, science, English, social studies, etc.). Teachers ranged in their years of experience from novice to having 30 years of experience. This allowed the researcher to compare individuals with different viewpoints as Denzin (1978) states is a triangulation source by examining the uniformity of different data sources from within the same method.

The researcher obtained feedback from participants after the transcription of the interviews and focus groups were completed; as findings began to culminate, the researcher spoke with participant A, participant D and participant R and shared the findings as a form of member checking (Miles, 2013). Miles et al., (2013) explains that the researcher can "lay out the findings clearly and systematically and present them to the reader for careful scrutiny and comment" (p. 310). According to Birt et al., (2016) member checking is a technique used for "exploring the credibility of the results" (p.1802). Data was returned to certain participants to check for accuracy in their responses. All feedback confirmed that the transcripts were consistent with the information the participants intended to share.

### ***Research Ethics***

After conversations with the Director of Special Education, an email was sent to the Superintendent of Schools to obtain consent to complete this study's research within the School District. After receiving the required permission, the researcher sent an initial questionnaire; participants were selected from those who responded and were asked to sign a letter of consent, before their participation in the interview or focus group. The consent illustrated that there are no perceived risks for their participation in this study and

that there is no direct benefit. Participants were advised that their participation is voluntary and confidential.

While the researcher maintained strict confidentiality throughout the study's duration, one of the potential ethical issues mentioned by Creswell (p.142) is that participants could share other participants information during the focus groups. Being that the district is on the smaller side and has a community feel, anything shared could potentially be repeated by other participants. According to Burg (2009), the focus group is designed to leverage social interaction to mutually construct knowledge. While faculty collaborations ideally bring out dynamic, the researcher needs to be transparent and explain that while the researcher will not and ethically cannot share information, there is no way to guarantee that other participants will not take information out of the room.

The results of this study may have been influenced by the researcher's professional position this past summer. The researcher worked in the district as a principal of the district's Extended School Year program. While the researcher only became familiar with six of the district's teachers, the researcher built a strong rapport and gained recruitment support. Creswell (2007) recommends initiating the research process by getting to know everybody and the environment. Having a foundation in the district allowed the researcher to use contextual terms such as "collaborative" when speaking about the inclusion setting. In this district, the term "collaborative" or "collab" is referred to as the "collab class" or "collab teacher" referencing the ICT setting. The researcher had the full support of the Special Education Department and some teachers who worked with the researcher this summer. The researcher believes that this led to an

open and honest discussion as the researcher has already established a rapport with individual teachers, potentially creating a more robust conversation.

### ***Data Analysis Approach***

Stake (1995) defines analysis as "a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations" (p. 71). Audio and video recordings of both interviews and the focus group were transcribed. All data were uploaded into Dedoose (a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software) to begin the coding process. The first set of codes were determined based upon prior knowledge, research literature and the research questions that guide this study. The first set of codes were a combination of Emotion codes, "labels the emotions recalled and/or experienced by the participant or inferred by the researcher about the participant" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 75) and In Vivo Codes, "appropriate for all qualitative studies but particularly for beginning qualitative researchers learning how to code data, and studies that prioritize and honor the participants voice" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 74). The researcher looked for homogeneity of repeating ideas and evolving themes. According to Saldana (2016), the researcher needs to strive for the codes to become more polished and distinguished with each cycle. To adhere to this standard, the researcher coded and recoded. Based on the information, the researcher conducted three cycles of coding until themes emerge. The researcher illustrates how these themes and concepts systematically correlate to the research questions (Saldana, 2016).

To start the coding process, the researcher first identified codes while reading through the transcripts initially. The first cycle of coding in this study required the researcher to code twice. Once the first set of codes were established, the researcher met

with her mentor and a qualitative professor to gain insight and other perspectives. This allowed the researcher to see the initial set of codes from a different light, furthermore encouraged the researcher to define each code in great detail, differentiating between similar terms such as "environment" and "culture" or "collaboration" and "communication." These definitions were "expanded upon and fine-tuned as the researcher proceeded through the process" (Miles et al., 2013, p. 84). Having these definitions were essential in finding patterns in the data. "Whether codes are prespecified or developed along the way, clear operational definitions are indispensable so they can be applied consistently by a single researcher over time, and multiple researchers will be thinking about the same phenomena as they code" (Miles et al., 2013, p. 84).

Additionally, the researcher divided some of the codes into two codes, such as "time" as 1) time teachers felt they spent on the non-instructional tasks vs. 2) time teachers needed with either peers to understand their responsibilities or time wanted to understand special education law. "With manual coding, revision is tedious: Every chunk you have coded before has to be relabeled" (Miles et al., 2013, p. 82). With this additional view, the researcher read through the transcripts a second time and coded, adding the codes established in the later transcripts and recoded adhering to the established set of definitions. The researcher deleted two initial codes in the process of recoding with the newly defined codes. This type of deletion is not unusual; "some codes do not work; others decay. No field material fits them, or the way they slice up the phenomenon is not the way the phenomenon appears empirically. This issue calls for doing away with the code..." (Miles et al., 2013, p. 82).



As defined by Miles et al. (2013), the second cycle coding allowed the researcher to group these codes into a smaller number of categories or sub-themes as the researcher uses in this study. For example, multiple participants in the current study expressed frustration, nervousness, excitement, and comfortability in their role to support students with disabilities. The researcher created sub-themes of positive emotions and negative emotions based on the 26 codes that were prominent in the transcripts. Other sub-themes emerged from conflicting perceptions of teacher responses as well as commonalities between teacher reports. From the sub-themes emerged the overarching themes in the third round of coding. This final round involved code weaving, the assimilation of reoccurring code words and phrases into a narrative illustrating how they connect to the research questions further to develop the themes (Saldaña, 2013).

Additionally, during the data analysis the researcher noticed that many differences between elementary and secondary were not generalized but dependent upon their certification and knowledge as a general education teacher or special education teacher. The researcher needed to break down the descriptive for teacher type and teacher building into four categories to help further illustrate the differences: special education secondary teachers, special education elementary teachers, general education secondary teachers, and general education elementary teachers.

**Table 3**

*Organization of Teacher Descriptors*

Special education elementary teachers	General education elementary teachers
Special education secondary teachers	General education secondary teachers

### ***Researcher Role***

Considering one's positionality, "a researcher's sense of self, and the situated knowledge she/he possesses as a result of her/his location in the social order" (Chavez, 2008, p. 474) when conducting meaningful and purposeful research is important. As Banks (1988) explains, "...we are all both insiders and outsiders (Merton, 1972)"; depending on the context, for this study on teachers' knowledge of special education laws and regulations, the researcher is considered an indigenous-insider. The study was conducted in a school district the researcher is familiar with, as she worked the ESY program as the principal this past summer (2020) and was employed for a few months prior. The researcher was embedded in the school's life and culture for a short time but during a time of drastic changes.

The researcher, currently a special education teacher, was drawn to special education due to a lack of science teacher positions. Having both a science and special education certification was rare and opened many doors. Having a master's in education only required the researcher to take five courses and an assessment to obtain a special education certification. This pathway led to unanswered questions revolving around the non-instructional tasks of an educator who works with students with disabilities. At times, the researcher has been asked by peers to advocate for their child with disabilities.

Banks (1988), states that "The indigenous-insider endorses the unique values, perspectives, behaviors, beliefs, and knowledge of his per primordial community and culture" (p. 8). The researcher believes she shares similar views as other teachers in this district. She the opportunity to build relationships with a few teachers at different grade levels and in different disciplines across a few of the buildings was beneficial as the

research commenced. While the researcher's role was different, it was temporary, and the teachers knew the researcher was a teacher. This led to a positive summer environment along with building great relationships. However, Chavez (2008) shares that, an "insider bias may be overly positive or negligent if the knowledge, culture, and experience she/he shares with participants manifests as a rose-colored observational lens or blindness to the ordinary" (p.475). To mitigate the potential biases, the researcher had to be aware of how she phrased her questions and be mindful of her facial expressions as participants share their answers.

### **Conclusion**

This instrumental case study was conducted within a small district in Nassau County on Long Island, NY. The participants were selected strategically from those who volunteered and participated in either interviews or in one of the two focus group virtually. Participants all signed consent forms before participating in the current study and were aware of confidentiality and their ability to remove themselves from this study at any time without penalty. The coding process outlined in this chapter allowed the researcher to analyze the data and synthesize the information in a way that highlights the participants voice.

## CHAPTER 4

### Introduction

This qualitative study sought to understand teachers' knowledge on the non-instructional tasks associated with special education laws and regulations. As outlined in chapter three, this study utilized two focus groups of teacher-participants and 10 individual interviews of teacher participants. Participants were selected among those who volunteered; the researcher purposefully selected participants from various schools, with certifications in different areas and in their years of experience to determine teachers' perception of their knowledge of special education laws and regulations and their ability to apply that knowledge. This chapter provides an analysis of the accumulated data according to themes that emerged from the research questions. The researcher did this by isolating codes, analyzing codes, turning the codes into themes, and situating those themes into a discussion that describes the case study's characteristics. Throughout the findings, the researcher used the teachers' voices to highlight their experiences, knowledge, and feelings. Four themes were identified from this study:

1. Conflicting teachers' perception of their ability to adhere to special education laws
2. Teacher's roles and responsibilities depend on the environment
3. Insufficient support from administration
4. Teacher's mixed emotional responses

Four overarching themes emerged from the analysis of the data collected within this study. The first major theme to emerge was conflicting perceptions of teachers' ability to adhere to special education laws. Within the first overarching theme, there were three sub-themes: prepared vs. unprepared, confident vs. uncertain, and lack of knowledge vs. knowledge. The second overarching theme that emerged was that

teacher's roles, and responsibilities depend on the environment. This second overarching theme emerged from the two sub-themes, teacher communication and environmental impact. The third overarching theme that emerged was an insufficient support from administration. This third overarching theme stemmed from two sub-themes, teachers' having an interest in training and their ideas for improvement. The fourth overarching theme, teacher's mixed emotional responses, emerged from teachers' positive emotions and negative emotions as they discuss their ability to carry out the non-instructional tasks associated with their role in educating students with disabilities. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the findings according to the research questions of the study.

**Table 4**

*Overarching Themes and Sub-themes*

<b>Overarching Theme</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Conflicting perceptions of teachers' ability to adhere to special education laws	Prepared vs. Unprepared Confident vs. Uncertain Lack of knowledge vs. knowledge	Terminology Knowledge Lack of Knowledge Prepared Unprepared Uncertain Confident
Teacher's roles and responsibilities depend on the environment	Teacher Communication Environmental Impact	Collaboration Communication Expectations Experience Differences Relationships Culture Time 1
Insufficient support from administration	Interest in trainings Ideas for improvement	Time 2 Communication Changes Needs Leadership
Mixed Emotional Response	Positive Emotions Negative Emotions	Overwhelming Frustration Nervous

## **Theme 1: Conflicting Perceptions of Teachers' Ability to Adhere to Special Education Laws**

An overarching theme that emerged during the analysis of the transcribed data was teacher's conflicting perceptions of their ability to adhere to special education laws. Each of the participants shared their knowledge and preparedness to carry out non-instructional tasks according to state and federal laws to support students with disabilities. This theme emerged from three sub-themes, prepared vs. unprepared, confident vs. uncertain, and lack of knowledge vs. knowledge. Although the participant's experiences varied, the data shows commonalities among specific descriptors such as teacher type (special education teacher or general education teacher) and the level they are currently teaching (elementary vs. secondary).

### ***Sub-theme: Prepared vs. Unprepared***

One of the first patterns the researcher observed was that teachers were either prepared or unprepared for the first few weeks of schools in terms of being able to carry out federal mandates that followed student Individual Educational Plans (IEPs). Some teachers were well organized and knew student's IEPs well, while others "skimmed" through them specifically glancing at sections they felt were relevant to them. The descriptor of teacher type (special education and general education), as well as their level (elementary or secondary), was evident within this sub-theme. Special education teachers reported feeling prepared regarding knowing the student's needs according to the IEP however, general education teachers regardless of their discipline (e.g., English,

Social Studies, Science) reported feeling unprepared to address the needs of students with disabilities according to their IEPs.

In both the interviews and focus groups, special education teachers assert that general education teachers have little knowledge of the importance of the non-instructional tasks. Teacher C, a special education teacher in the district for over 20 years asked, "Can you can record my facial expression?" when asked if she felt her "collab teacher was knowledgeable on student IEPs." Teacher C's eyes widened, and she smirked as she shook her head. She further explained that the general education teachers she has worked with over the course of her career were limited in their understanding of the IEP stating that she was:

Very aware that it's a legal document. And if that kid has copy of class notes, they make sure that they get a copy of class notes. So as far as that's concerned, but any deeper than that, I would have to say probably not.

Most teachers know that the IEP is a legal document but do not have a deep understanding of how to utilize the information in the document.

Secondary, general education teachers such as teacher Q, teacher I, and teacher E report that they look through the IEP's specifically at the modifications and accommodations sections because they feel that is what pertains to them. Teacher Q, "focuses on the program mods and the testing mods." When teacher I is asked about the information she reviews within the IEP, she responds, "specifically for the accommodations unless there's like the kind of red flag that there is a situation that I happen to be aware of." General education teachers may feel prepared to carry out students' IEPs by only skimming through to find the information that "pertains to them."

However, special education teachers report that it is not sufficient. Teacher I's comment indicates that even though teachers may feel prepared, they are not reading through the IEP in its entirety. Therefore, they cannot apply the information from the legal document to help create and differentiate their lessons to meet the individual needs of their learners to track the appropriate data required. Teacher E, a secondary general education teacher with over 15 years of experience, shared that "maybe we do refer back to the IEP like oh yeah who has that preferential seating [a modification]. You know, just to make sure we're in compliance with the IEP." Teacher E further elaborates that due to the dynamics of working with a special education teacher, they do not feel the need to prepare themselves by thoroughly reading through the entire IEP:

Because I am working closely with a special ed person, you know, they'll tend to, you know, say to me, listen, this is on the IEP and this is on the IEP and, you know, and they make it a point to make me aware, if, if, by any chance I haven't read it, you know, but I to skim more for the things that are going to pertain to me.

Teacher K a middle school teacher with over 15 years of experience, reports an instance of where he was unprepared:

...forgetting this kid needed a reader, forgetting this kid needs to get a second copy of notes, you know, so the parent would reach out and say, Hey, where's our second set of notes and I'm like, acting like oh we have it, we just forgot to put it in their binder and then I'm going to the other people going we're supposed to do that and like, and then we go look in the IEP ...



In this instance it was quickly rectified and there were no consequences. Teacher K also believes that:

All teachers should be given at least a basic intro to IEPs regardless of whether they have any of those students in their class. Just to know what could be because you never know kid could get transferred into your class, and then all of a sudden, it's oh yeah that's right that person never got that before. It shouldn't be a question. Everybody should at least have a basic understanding, because a lot of times what ends up happening is, they just say, you have to sign this.

In this last sentence, teacher K is referencing the 408 forms required by law to be signed by every teacher acknowledging they have read and understand the contents of the IEP for each student on their roster.

Also, on the IEPs are students' goals. Teacher A, a special education teacher who previously worked in an elementary building and who is now in the high school indicates, that she feels prepared for "measuring goals and how to track them" further indicating that is one of her strengths as it was a focus in her educational program. Data collected from teacher A conflicts with the other secondary teacher accounts as she has the elementary experience and tools preparing her for that responsibility. Teacher D, a general education teacher in the elementary school shared that her collaborative teacher (special education teacher) "has not started collecting data yet, it's, I think that she should it's October. We have students that have every two weeks on their IEP. So, I'm concerned because now we're on week six or week seven of school." For clarity, it should be noted that her co-teacher was recently moved from the high school to the elementary school and was unaware of her legal requirement to collect data to demonstrate student progress on

his/her IEP. Data collection should start immediately and be continuous throughout the year.

***Sub-theme: Confident vs. Uncertain***

Being a member of a Committee of Special Education (CSE meeting) is the responsibility of both general education teachers and special education teachers. Teachers report either feeling confident or uncertain about their first few CSE's; some general education teachers, after years of participating in CSE meetings, indicated that they were still uncertain about some of the terminology used at the meeting. Teacher R, a middle school special education teacher, reported receiving a high-quality education. Her program was a special education teacher program, and she felt confident in properly reporting student progress at a CSE meeting in front of parents, other educators, and administrators:

My first experience, I was co teaching at the time so I went in, it was an inclusion class so I went in, you know, I was confident I knew everything about my student and I felt that I was prepared just from college, just grad school, knowing what to expect in a meeting. And like most of our CSEs, I'd be the most talking It's a special ed teacher. And, yeah, I mean I definitely felt prepared. I honestly I knew my role, but a lot of, that's the educational part of it, you know, that's me taking special education classes and getting, you know, a certification in that time.

Teacher A, a special education teacher reported being nervous at her first CSE because she was uncertain of "what the parents would ask you." Despite her nervousness, she was confident in the data that she ultimately shared at the meeting. While a question pertaining to CSE's was asked during the elementary focus group, it was diverted and left

unanswered. Teacher C, another special education teacher, is nearing the end of her career and was unable to remember back to her first few CSE's.

Almost all general education teachers indicated that they were uncertain of what to expect, uncertain of what they would be asked, or uncertain in terms of what materials they needed to bring to a CSE meeting. When the researcher asked, "were you informed of what your role in the CSE would be prior to your first meeting?" Teacher Q replied "no, I think I was just given the student name, and said that I was the gen ed teacher." Teacher Q further explained that he just sat there and listened. Teacher B reported that she had not yet participated in a CSE yet but that she "would not be comfortable with that just because I know on a professional level, I don't have enough knowledge and information." Teacher G replied, "no," when asked if she would you know what to expect at a CSE meeting. Teacher P indicated that she is uncertain of the terminology used at a CSE, "Sometimes they throw out raw scores and it's like, sure I don't know that test well enough but if you throw out percentiles, it makes a little bit more sense." Teacher F indicated that after she shared her piece with the parents, she would leave the CSE meeting:

I would just talk to the parents, but it was usually, honestly, during my lunch periods, or if I happen to have off that period so I had other things to do. I would stick around for my part and then the co-teachers were ones who ran the meetings and I just signed for my part.

This indicates that it could be viewed by some as a formality as according to the literature review in chapter two, there is a substantial benefit for both teacher and students if CSE meetings are conducted properly.

There is a clear divide among general education teachers and special education teachers in their confidence going into their first few CSE meetings and in some instances, the terminology is never explained nor is the information used during the CSE being used to help general education teachers in their planning to support students with disabilities.

***Sub-theme: Lack of Knowledge vs. Knowledge***

The sub-theme of lack of knowledge vs knowledge covers an array of terminology and laws within special education. While some of the responses overlap with the previous two sub-themes as there was evidently a lack of knowledge of IEPs and CSEs, this sub-theme focuses on the responses of participants when they were asked if they were familiar with IDEIA and/or Part 200 regulations as well as instances where participants misspoke or admitted to having a lack of knowledge.

Only one participant, teacher R reported feeling knowledgeable in this area. However, the majority of teachers reported having limited or no knowledge of IDEIA/Part 200. In some interviews the researcher intentionally did not ask the question directly due to participants already showing a lack of knowledge and the researcher wanted to avoid making the participants uncomfortable. Teacher C replied "Out of 10 I'd probably say a three. I know them. I remember learning about them, but I wouldn't say that I am comfortable with it that's definitely not a word I would use," when asked, "if I were to ask you a question about IDEA or part 200. How comfortable, do you think you'd be answering?" The researcher also asked, "Are you familiar with IDEA or part 200?" Teacher H like many others replied, "nope."

Most general education teachers, that could recall their higher education experience remember taking one special education class. Three general education teachers recall learning about special education laws in their higher education. Teacher F indicates, "I remember him talking about 504 plans and IEP s and like the legal jargon, I'm gonna get it all wrong because like you know, like the laws for special ed students."

Researcher: "IDEA?"

Teacher F: "Yeah, that sounds familiar"

Teacher E openly shared:

Chances are, I'm not familiar enough with like current laws right now to even know if I've been in compliance. I mean, I know that I read an IEP to make sure that I'm in compliance with an IEP, and be beyond that, I have to be honest and say I'm not. I'm not familiar at all so I guess as I'm listening to the question, I guess. I guess my answer to that would be, you know, as the gen ed side person it... I guess it should have occurred to me to keep myself, you know, current on whatever laws, there are right now.

Teachers admit that they do not have enough information to know whether or not they are in compliance with federal and state mandates.

For the remainder of this sub-theme analysis, there was no specific question asked to elicit a specific response; instead the code "lack of knowledge" was used when a participant didn't understand a special education term used, incorrectly spoke about a current law or expressed confusion about laws pertaining to special education.

Additionally, there was an interesting dynamic between the general education teachers and the special education teachers in each focus group. During the middle school focus

group, the general education teachers did not know what the PLEPs were or their importance. Teacher R, the special education teacher in the group says, "If I had to guess you probably don't know what PLEPS are on the IEP." Teacher Q, a general education teacher quickly responds that she has no idea what that word is and teacher P indicates that he would likely know what it was if he saw the sub-heading on an IEP. After being given the researcher's friendly nod teacher R explained what the PLEPs are "...like the heart of the IEP." As teacher P expressed that was still confused, teacher R gave a detailed explanation:

No, it's not the goals, it's the narrative. It's not written as a narrative it's their performance. So, it should be labeled in their IEPs as like for the way we do it is we have a section for math section for ELA or reading. There's a section for social, emotional, and if they get a speech service there that's in there too and it gives them the performance of what they did data based, it's not supposed to be written narratively. Your opinion shouldn't be included in it. It's just what they've done what they struggle with. And whenever you put in. As far as what you struggle with must be a need that matches that. So that's the meat of the IEP that gives you the information about the student.

It was further explained that this section of the IEP is what should guide teacher instruction and it was evident that neither general education teacher had any knowledge of this section. While the general education teachers seemed ill-equipped to handle all the responsibilities pertaining to students with disabilities, they heavily relied on their special education teachers and their knowledge to support them. Teacher R, the special education teacher, appeared more than willing to share her knowledge and provide any

support needed by general education teachers to better help students with disabilities. In the second focus group, we saw a similar dynamic where general education teachers needed their peers to provide information on legal requirements because they were unaware and frustrated. Teacher M, a general education teacher shared her frustration about the number of students in an ICT class as she was not aware that there is a law that governs how many students can be in an ICT setting. During this segment of the focus group, special education teachers were able to fill in the gaps and educate the general education teachers:

Teacher M, "I think it should be a law that there should be a limited number of special education students in a collaborative class.

Teacher N responded, "there is a law."

Teacher M expressed frustration and replied, "Okay, they need to change the law and make it less kids."

Teacher M later in the focus group shows a lack of knowledge when referring to the selection process on IEP Direct when choosing appropriate modifications and accommodations for students:

I really liked the drop-down menus that goes with the modifications is it modifications or accommodations? I always mix the two up. And I found that it's frustrating because, as a general education teacher you don't have access to the ability to manipulate to IEPs.

As we saw in the first sub-theme, accommodations, and modifications are the two pieces that general education teachers read through in an IEP yet struggle to differentiate between the two. The researcher is asked if they have a full understanding on how to

determine what students should be given certain accommodations and modifications and while participants from both focus groups were able to provide an answer, they were not consistent with the NYS Part 200 Regulation recommendations. This exchange shows an example of how general education and special education teachers lack pivotal knowledge that is considered foundational to their roles. The conversations demonstrate that teachers lean heavily on each other to help with their unknown and do not seem afraid to show their weaknesses.

Teachers have conflicting perceptions on their ability to carry out the non-instructional tasks associated with students with disabilities. Overall, general education teachers lack preparedness, confidence, and knowledge on special education laws and cannot utilize and implement tools available to them. Overall, special education teachers show they are prepared to carry out the non-instructional tasks to best support students with disabilities. General education teachers indicated a lack of special education coursework in their higher education. The differences between elementary and secondary teachers are not as prominent, but differences remain. Elementary teachers report having more knowledge of collecting and analyzing necessary data for students' IEP goals, where secondary teachers did not demonstrate concern with that task. Certification (special education or general education) and the building (elementary or secondary) the teacher is currently teaching plays a fundamental role in how prepared, confident, and knowledgeable they feel to carry out these tasks.

## **Theme 2: Teacher's roles and responsibilities depend on the environment**

Readers will see in this next theme how teachers' roles and responsibilities depend on their environment, discover how movement of teachers from building to



building and the inconsistencies of co-teachers from year to year have an impact on how prepared teachers are in following students' IEPs. Through the data analysis, the researcher found that there were inconsistencies between the roles and responsibilities of general education teachers in an inclusion classroom as well as the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers. Teacher C explains that "I feel like the roles are not clearly defined, and it's very inconsistent from one teacher to another."

Special education teachers' roles and responsibilities differ due to their assignment, inclusion teacher, resource room teacher or self-contained teacher. As a special education teacher, you can be placed in any of the three types of special education classes and moved within the district's different buildings. Teacher C:

This is my first year as a resource room teacher, I've been doing, I did resource room actually the first year I started but I did mostly self-contained for fourteen years and then I moved into a collaborative setting and now in the resource room, so I've kind of done it all. And I've worked in all five schools.

Teacher C adds that each position carries different responsibilities, here the participant elaborates on her role as a resource room teacher:

I've defined it as I have three, three jobs. One is to see what's happening in all their classes. And that's, that's a job because you're talking about, you know, connecting with a dozen teachers trying to get from them, what are you doing in your class? What do they need to work on? So that's the one thing second thing is I have to work on their IEP goals. So, there might be a time where I just put all the curriculum aside and say, okay, you know, let's work, let's work on this goal

or that goal. And the third one is just to introduce any strategies I can, that they can generalize into their classrooms.

The role of a self-contained teacher is more defined as a self-contained teacher is the only teacher in the classroom and instructs his/her class similar to that of a general education teacher but with less students in the room, at a slower paces, with modified content and differentiated to meet the needs of each learner. Teacher C defines the role as one who "has to do the same curriculum. But of course, it's modified to the students' needs. That's, that's cut and dry." This description indicates that this position is solely responsible for all tasks supporting special education students. The collaborative teachers' roles are the most inconsistent, as a special education teacher's contribution to the class depends upon the general education co-teacher, their personality, knowledge of special education, and ability to form a positive relationship. Additionally, the roles and responsibilities differ depending on the building descriptors (whether the teacher is in the elementary, middle school or high school building).

Some of the differences noted are impacted by the environment (building or specific collaborative teacher). The codes that lead to the sub-theme environmental impact were "time" defined as time spent on non-instructional tasks, "collaboration" defined as a collaboration among co-teachers, both as the type of co-teaching approach in the planning process as well as the instructional process.

***Sub-theme: Teacher Communication***

As conversations about teacher communication evolved through the data collection process, teachers noted the importance of communicating with other teachers, to support students and each other. Teachers emphasize the need to communicate with

each other. An example of this was demonstrated when Teacher K spoke to the proximity of his desk to his co-teachers' desk, and how the set up was beneficial for frequent communication:

And I guess it also helps that our desk is in my classroom, ... So, maybe she might talk to me more so than the other subject area teachers, so she'll just bounce stuff off ...oh I'm thinking about, you know, Tommy, whatever I don't feel like he needs this anymore. What do you think?

Teachers found communication easier with the teachers they shared space with or worked with the same co-teacher more frequently or for extended periods of time. This was especially evident in middle and high school special educators who receive a co-teaching assignment in subjects in which they have had limited professional preparation, their skill and comfort for contributing to initial instruction may take time to develop.

Teacher O indicates, "I happen to be very, very lucky. In, you know my partnerships, I've been remarkably lucky and but like I said... you know I took over from people who did not, you know, mesh well." While teacher O's relationships with her co-teachers had been positive, she has indicated that unfortunately that is not always the case. Conversely, teachers who do not have strong relationships with their co-teachers may experience challenges in communicating with their co-teacher. Teacher D shared, "My special education co-teacher doesn't include me, in a lot of her planning for the students so I'm struggling with that." As the researcher continued this conversation, she learned that teacher D strongly wants the collaboration with her co-teacher but feels her co-teacher is overwhelmed with her new assignment and has not been able to make that connection yet.

It is crucial that new teachers and teachers who are transferring to new buildings build positive relationships and have individuals they can lean on for support; each building has their own culture and procedures. In this study, teachers transitioning to new roles such as teachers that move buildings such as teachers A and N or those who are beginning teachers such as teachers B, F, G expressed needing and receiving a lot of support from their mentor or co-teacher, spending time communicating on various topics. Teacher D elaborates by saying communication helped her learn a lot about her responsibilities, but she wishes someone modeled the tasks first:

And I wish my first year of teaching that I was able to watch someone do it because I learned a lot through just having conversations but I wish that I had someone that I can watch put these implementations into place. I wish that my mentor said to me come watch me in my classroom and I could show you. I'm a visual learner and I didn't receive that it was a lot of like, well here's your student's IEP is I'll teach you how to walk through here some suggestions on how to collect data that day.

The positive communication between teachers is beneficial whether you are new or experienced. Teacher F demonstrates the importance of this communication, stating:

It's not like everyone anyone's ever handed me like a handbook for, for evaluating kids but I think I would either go to my co-teacher first because she just knows, she just knows the department so well that she would be able to be like, oh he had or she had this person in seventh grade let me go ask them.

The participants in the study stress that communication between teachers allows relationships to form. These relationships are not only reciprocally beneficial but are also important for student success.

Teachers report the difference between their roles during their participation at a CSE meeting. Teacher E, reports similar experiences with other general education teachers in that she speaks to the overall progress in the classroom, and the special education teacher discusses data and changes recommended to the IEP:

Generally the special a teacher will, you know, speak to the modifications being made, you know, it's my role has been more just how is a student functioning within the classroom in general, you know, not, not to lots of specifics.

The differences among their roles and the information presented at a CSE meeting seems to be a consistent trend among all buildings.

***Sub-theme: Environmental Impact***

The culture, environment and whether a teacher is in an elementary or secondary building has an influence on their roles and responsibilities. In an elementary setting, elementary collaborative teachers share the benefit of being with each other all day in an ICT setting and having that time and proximity to communicate. Teacher O, "I do think that's an environmental thing too, like in the elementary school. Obviously, we're together, all day long, every single day when the middle school and high school..." she continues to imply the environment and structure is very different. Special education teachers work with different general education teachers and within different content areas. General education teachers could work with two or three different special education teachers too.

As implied earlier, the relationship between collaborative teachers is essential; however, some collaborative teachers struggle with how to work together. The focus groups and interviews indicate that teachers may be reassigned to a different position on an annual basis. Some teachers do not get to find that "groove" with their collaborative teacher. Teacher J reports that "one of the biggest problems ... it's not a steady partnership that they're able to build with a teacher over a couple of years, whether it be because of restructuring or people leaving." Teacher C adds some general education teachers do not show an equality among teachers with different certifications and feel superior to those with a special education license:

If I'm not welcome, or if their role...they think their role is much greater [referring to the general education teacher], I just will make sure to focus just on the students that I'm there for, if it becomes a problem then I will have a discussion with the co-teacher, you know, because there will be times that I think my role there would be helpful not only to the kids that are there for me, but the kids that are there in general, I mean, anything I would bring to the class would be, I think, helpful to the entire population of the class. But having said that, I do understand the teacher's role, because let's say you have an eighth-grade teacher who teaches English five periods a day. Now, she teaches that same class five periods a day, she doesn't want some other teacher coming in and saying, this is how I want to do it today. For me, while she's done it, you know, her way for four periods, you know, I understand why she would want to keep it consistent for all the periods. So, um, so it, that's why I say, roles are difficult, you know.

This was a challenge expressed by both general education teachers and special education teachers. Teachers acknowledge they want to do what is best for the students but aren't always sure how to do that working with another teacher with the limited amount of time to collaborate as well as for some special education teachers the limited amount of knowledge in certain subject areas.

Conversely, some teachers report feeling lucky when they are able to spend years with their collaborative teacher and even luckier when they have a collaborative teacher that truly values the collaborative experience. Teacher F explains, "... there's like eight different co taught relationships, types of relationships that there's all these like acceptable relationships which one's the best one and I think that where it's not so clearly defined here..." Most teachers in this study indicated that while the collaborative settings allow for differences among teacher style that the best co teaching is when someone walks into the room and cannot decipher between the general education and special education teacher. "...I would want somebody to walk into the room and not know who my students are and who the collab teachers' students are that you know we would both be immersed in all of the kids." While this is an instructional approach, and this study focused on the non-instructional aspects of tasks required for special education. Improvements in co-teaching was a reoccurring theme in determining teachers' perceptions and knowledge of special education. Teachers emphasized that their collaborative teacher and their relationship played a large role in what responsibilities they each had and how they were difference from one collaborative team to another. Teachers noted that the ability to carry out a strong co-teaching relationship in where

both teachers bring a richer, deeper and tailored learning experience for students is due to the time spent planning, communicating, and understanding individual students' needs.

Time was another code that frequently occurred within the transcripts. Teacher A, a current high school teacher who previously worked in the elementary school, explains that:

In elementary a lot more hours went into it [non-instructional tasks pertaining specifically to special education]. Umm now it's kind of there's a quick email how's this one going how's that one going, so I would say probably an hour and a half per week.

Many teachers indicated that a lot more time goes into planning, data collections, communicating, etc. at the elementary level compared to the high school level, and not because there is less to do but because of the environment. There is more accountability held on teachers at the elementary level than at the high school level. Both teachers A and R commented about how the data collection process is more lackadaisical in the high school when compared to the elementary schools.

The analysis showed how special education teachers' roles and responsibilities vary depending on their environment, levels of support by administration, and the role leadership plays in creating a positive environment. Communication was a key responsibility among all teachers, both general education teachers and special education teachers indicated being able to support students and each other.

### **Theme 3: Insufficient support by administration**

Throughout the interviews and focus groups it was apparent that both general education teachers and special education teachers within all buildings did not feel



adequately supported by the building and district leadership in the area of special education. While teachers felt like they can go to colleagues and even some administrators if they had specific questions or concerns. Teacher D reported, "I felt like I had enough people to ask without seeming like I was uneducated, like I guess I felt more like I needed support." Additional and varied supports were a frequent concern of participants. Teacher K shared that while he asked for support because he had never taught a collaborative class before, he did not get the support he needed. Describing the situation, he explains "you know, we normally have only one collab class, we got so many kids next year we need to make a second, and you're going to teach it, and we'll get you some PD, which never happened." Inconsistencies in support was reiterated by teacher C who indicated that while administration sometimes checks with teachers to see if giving them a collaborative section is alright with them, that does not always occur.

Here we can see how administration is wanted to step in and provide that support for teachers to ensure a collaborative setting. If an administrator acknowledges this, it could improve the moral of teachers within the district and improve education for students with disabilities. Teachers expressed an interest in having professional development as well as overall ideas to improve teacher knowledge and relationships.

***Sub-theme: Interest in Professional Development***

Teachers expressed an overwhelming interest in professional development in order to better support students with disabilities. Not all teachers expressed interest initially, but as the conversations developed further and teachers realized that there were gaps in their knowledge, they soon felt having this information would best help them and their students. Both general education teachers and special education teachers felt

professional development would be beneficial and shared that they could use professional development in a couple of areas. The first is on collaborative teaching, but for different reasons. General education teachers wanted professional development on collaborative or team teaching to better know how to utilize an IEP in the planning process to help differentiate their lessons to meet individual learners' needs. Special education teachers wanted collaborative teaching professional development, specifically together with their current co-teacher to be able to help general education teachers to see how useful their support could be if they had an equal role in the classroom.

General education teachers expressed that they needed choices for professional development as everyone has different needs, alluding to the fact that general education teachers require more knowledge in the area of special education, whereas special education teachers may not necessarily have the same needs. Teacher O pointed out that, "we'd have to have like seven different menus and choices in order to get everybody something that they needed" but personally felt that she teachers should "continue to educate ourselves on the new disabilities and the new ICT" because students are being placed differently than they were years ago. Teacher K admits that he:

Probably would have liked PD on, like, how to teach a collaborative class, because I ended up figuring it out on the run, which is, some things are good that way. But to me, teaching a class is not. Because in the meantime, you have parents who want to have answers, you know, and you have legal documents that you have to follow.

As indicated by teacher K, teaching an inclusion class is very different and requires support from administration especially for those who haven't taught in this setting previously.

Teachers also indicated that they needed more support with reading and implementing an IEP. We learned in the first theme that teachers do not prepare themselves by reading an IEP; they lack the experience utilizing the information in students' IEP to support lesson planning. Teachers are not confident in CSE meetings. Teacher G hopes that there would be a professional development on:

How to go about doing any data, how to figure out like what should be my first step, I guess is really what I should do and then all the other steps of like what I would do if I thought a child needed special ed and if it was immediate like he's definitely not in the right setting, know what should I do, I would like to have kind of like a, like a road map like okay like you, you're seeing something. This is what you should do.

In this situation the teacher is not confident in determining LRE and that the teacher is unaware of any district procedures and protocols in place to support her. Data collection is a large part of an IEP and as discussed in the literature review is used to support student growth and to determine if a student requires an extended school year program (ESY).

***Sub-theme: Ideas for Improvement***

In education, reflection is a common practice among educators, teachers shared many ideas to improve the culture within the district to best meet the needs of students with disabilities. Participants feel from the very beginning, leaders need to set high

expectations and hold teachers accountable; they need for teachers to understand the importance of an IEP not for teachers to feel that it's just a formality, "...but to the administrators, it's paperwork that's got to be signed." Here teacher K refers to the 408 forms that are required by law to be signed by teachers acknowledging that they have read and understand a student's IEP. Throughout the interviews and focus groups, teachers indicated no internal policies exist to ensure things are being done correctly. Teachers were not sure if this was due to the trust placed within teachers or if administrators themselves were not knowledgeable in the area of special education. Teacher I expressed that there needs to be a better way to receive the forms as "we're getting it from like six different people..." Teacher A indicated she provides her co-teachers with "cheat sheets" that are meant to help her general education counterparts to ensure that they provide students with the proper modifications and accommodations.

Teachers indicated that it would be helpful to have procedures and policies in place as well as resources available to help with consistency within the district and to avoid confusion and frustration. The researcher asked if there were certain procedures or policies in place if they wanted to recommend a student to special education. In answering this question teachers indicated a lack of procedures and protocols or at least not knowing what they were. Teacher G responded with, "I'm not sure exactly... I believe that I would go to the principal first and then I'm assuming she would have me go to the special ed director, but I'm not sure."

As indicated in the previous sub-theme, teachers indicated wanting professional development in co-teaching. Teacher I felt it would be great if that were part of the new teacher orientation:

I would just say that really the way that the collaborative class was explained initially versus what it really turned out to be, is very different. If we can go back to that grassroots movement of what it was supposed to be.

Indicating that encouraging new teachers from the beginning to utilize the collaborative approach as it was meant to be would help teachers and students. Teacher A, a newer teacher in the district, indicated that while there was an elaborate teacher orientation but was not provided any documentation to reference in relation to special education.

Teacher J indicates that it is unfortunate but necessary to move teachers from year to year based on class sizes, course offerings and other factors. Alternatively, teacher K believes that while it is necessary to move teachers for various reasons, leaders can strategically place teachers who would embrace a collaborative setting, instead of setting teachers up for failure. Teacher K shared an example from early in her career, where a teacher was moved between buildings, without an ounce of support and floundered:

I guess she was kind of railroaded they wanted her to retire. She had been working like lower levels, she was like the kindergarten or the first-grade inclusion teacher. They brought her up to the Middle School in sixth grade and she was a mess, you know she was like the nicest woman, but she really had no idea how to deal.

Teachers suggested that administrators should also consider the personality of teachers when making those changes, teacher O specifically indicated "but I think also personality wise and maybe this is just me but a lot of teachers are extremely, anal and OCD about the way they do things I know it's not just me but I'm making it personal" this could lead

to challenges if a teacher's personality doesn't lend itself to a co-teaching environment.

Teacher I shared that:

In my experience, I've always been like the 30-year teacher with a young teacher so it's really, really hard for me to give up the reins. You know, they're also like a co-teacher in the sense that sometimes they'll help me grade like multiple choice stuff not necessarily essays and stuff like that.

Here teacher I admits that her personality does not lend itself to trusting another teacher to take on typical responsibilities when working collaboratively in an inclusion setting.

Teacher I acknowledges that it isn't ideal, but special education teachers want to have an equal role in the classroom and to have a certified teacher "sit back and grade" multiple choice assessments, is an unfortunate circumstance for both teachers and the students who lack the benefit of having a second knowledgeable individual in the room that cannot utilize their potential.

Overall, the data revealed that teachers felt that there was more administration could do to support them in their roles and responsibilities to help students with disabilities and to help co-teachers create a positive environment for co-teachers as well as for an inclusion class. Teachers, who face challenges pertaining to students with disabilities have expressed their ideas to improve the culture in working with students with disabilities and all it entails as well as their desire to learn more through professional developments.

#### **Theme 4: Mixed Emotional Responses**

There were a variety of emotional codes in the researchers' initial round of coding. Teachers had many positive emotions, especially those who have had great

experiences. Others expressed frustration in the way things were done or not done and apprehension in their ability to carry out their responsibilities pertaining to students with disabilities due to their lack of knowledge. Descriptors did not seem to play a role in this theme as emotions ran high throughout years of experience, grade levels and types of certifications. Teacher Q shared, "I remember being super nervous and not knowing like what to bring like what I needed to have what information I should provide" when speaking about CSE meetings. Within these themes we see two sub-themes, positive emotions and negative emotions.

***Sub-theme: Positive Emotions***

Undoubtedly there is a passion from all teachers in their willingness to put students first and a desire from teachers to want to have productive meetings to best support students with disabilities. Teachers expressed an interest in learning, understanding, and creating consistencies within the tasks needed to support students with disabilities. In theme 2, we saw teacher's roles and responsibilities depend on the environment, that teachers enjoyed collaborating with their peers and appreciated the positive relationships they have formed. Teacher A an untenured teacher who has already been moved from an elementary building to the high school as expressed that she feels lucky, "I've had great experiences all around." Teacher I shared the enthusiasm she received from her participation at CSE meetings:

I like getting to meet the parents. I love sharing how I perceive their child. I like hearing about what happens/transpires in all their classes. I love watching the little triumphs from ninth grade to 12th grade... a kid starts to be able to bypass some of their accommodations they feel more independent.

This is an example of the passion expressed during this study, the next shares the power of a healthy collaborative relationship. Teacher K reports how seamless and enjoyable working with a great co-teacher can be, "the one that I currently have, is dynamite ... seamless, So by having, like, I guess you want to call it a seasoned collaborative teacher. To me, that makes all the world because it just makes it, click."

***Sub-theme: Negative Emotions***

Other teachers feel overwhelmed, frustrated, nervous or uncomfortable for various reasons. Teachers expressed having these negative feelings when they felt unprepared to carry out student's IEPs. Teacher G expressed feeling anxious when first getting student's IEPs:

To be completely honest I feel like it makes me a little like oh gosh like I had like I likes it when I first get it and I want to make sure that I'm going to be able to accommodate, you know, to the best of my ability and so on and so forth but, um, it does make me almost a little anxious when I first get it and then when I'm looking through it I know, obviously my face so bad.

Other teachers expressed frustration with CSE decisions, such as disagreeing with students' current placements and accommodations. During the focus group all teachers emphasized doing everything they could within their skill set, trying their best but there was this overwhelming sense of disappointment. Teacher M, who when talking about accommodations shared, "and some of those kids don't need it and it's very hard because if you don't provide that you're not following the law, it's not realistic." Here we see frustration because there are inconsistencies with what is on an IEP and what should be on an IEP and the lack of understanding of IDEIA. Teacher L reports giving up because:



Sometimes, in this case it wasn't really worth fighting it was the third CSE for the same child and at that point you were like it is what it is, its not the end of the world. You have every accommodation known to man. We can't give you anymore.

Teacher L emphasized that at times, depending on the parents and other factors, accommodations and modifications are given out like candy. Teacher M added that sometimes accommodations and modifications are given before a child moves from elementary to middle school and the accommodation does not exist anymore. In other words, in elementary school there could be an accommodation such as separate location in a small group of three to five students. In middle school, there might be a testing room and having limitations on the group size is not feasible. Teacher M also indicated frustration when she comes across students who are "incorrectly placed." This is likely due to the lack of teacher knowledge on special education laws, especially LRE. Teacher L expressed frustration when determining the criteria required for a student to meet that goal usually represented as a percentage on a students' IEP. Overall, these frustrations point to a lack of consistency. Teacher L expressed that some decisions are random and differs between teachers, "I think also writing the goals and then deciding 70% 80%, she went through, while like how what the best way to measure is not always..." This was further expressed in an exchange where teacher M interrupted by stating "It's not always reality you can't always do it." Teacher L also expressed frustration in how goals are chosen by teachers. Teacher L wanted to know why there was such an inconsistency between the selection of goals by teachers:

There's one new student this year, and his goals seem like they're mixed like one is like, okay, you already met this goal, like why is this a goal. And then another one where it's like, it's this is kind of a fourth-grade standard I don't understand why this would be a goal because he should be working on this anyway.

Other teachers such as teacher I, knows she has to provide students with their accommodations but note that the accommodation isn't being used as it was intended, stating "the thing I find really super annoying is extended time ... They get to leave, look up answers and go back and answer that..." In this instance teacher I expresses frustration due to these students having a perceived advantage over other students.

During the elementary focus group, the four teachers all expressed feeling overwhelmed and frustrated. Teacher O expressed feeling overwhelmed like many other teachers with the amount of time spent on non-instructional tasks when working in an ICT setting:

That is the reason why I took a break because of all of the outside stuff, I loved co teaching. I loved my kids. I loved the families, but by year five, the, a lot of things had changed, and I felt like I went home every night, saying, I just want to teach. I just want to make a difference and I just want to teach. And at that point, Brooke and I would look at each other every day and say what are we doing here like this is not what we wanted to be doing we were talking to service providers, all day long, about every single little thing. We were teaching parents, more than we were teaching children, and that's okay. But when it's every day for 50% of your class, it gets to be a lot.

Teacher N felt similar about the amount of non-instructional work required:

I made two phone calls on our special today, went back into the building, I had intended to leave right after school I went back in the building to talk to Lisa, again, about another kid. No, it's absolutely feels more than the workday. It's it many hours, many, many, many, many, many hours...

Teacher M added, "and it's not benefiting the children, necessarily." Teachers frequently indicated that there was a substantial amount of time spent on non-instructional tasks associated with special education, but it wasn't always productive or beneficial.

Teachers were eager to share their feelings, both positive and negative as it related to special education. Whether it be the time spent doing paperwork, talking to other professionals, providing student accommodations and modifications, decisions on student placement, inconsistencies among student IEPs, relationships with co-teachers or their feelings on building/district leadership. Both general education and special education teachers within each building were very vocal about their emotions.

## **Conclusion**

Through the collected data within this qualitative study, the researcher found four overarching themes; 1) Conflicting teachers' perception of their ability to adhere to special education laws, 2) Teacher's roles and responsibilities depend on the environment, 3) Insufficient support from administration and 4) Teacher's mixed emotional responses.

Within the first major theme, conflicting perceptions of teachers' ability to adhere to special education laws, we see the that teachers vary in their knowledge, preparedness and confidence when approaching non-instructional tasks pertaining to students with disabilities. This second overarching theme, teacher's roles and responsibilities

encompasses the communication among teachers and how the roles of teachers are impacted by the environment, within the classroom, building and district. The third overarching theme that emerged was an insufficient support from administration, teachers expressed an interest in professional developments pertaining to special education law, fundamental IEP knowledge and co-teaching relationships. The fourth overarching theme, teacher's mixed emotional responses, emerged from teachers' positive emotions and negative emotions as they discussed their ability to carry out the non-instructional tasks associated with their role in educating students with disabilities.

## CHAPTER 5

### Introduction

Chapter 5 will discuss the interpretation of the findings within each of the three research questions, the implications of those findings, relationship to prior research, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research. It is evident from this current instrumental case study that teachers are lacking essential knowledge of special education laws and regulations. This method allowed for examination of a contemporary trend by analyzing a case to answer how and why questions. There are many times teachers act on a task lacking confidence in how to execute a task properly. This appears to be due to a lack of information provided in higher education as well as inadequate guidance from the district and building level administrators. Teachers are looking for guidance from other teachers and from administrators and appear frustrated with the uncertainties revolving around special education.

. The researcher found that teachers rely on one another or rely on their sensemaking processes to make sense of tasks they are unfamiliar with. This case illuminates that teachers can get caught in it if they do not have the foundational knowledge required for teaching students with disabilities. This study found that many educators do not take courses in special education law, starting their first job lacking the knowledge they need to support students with disabilities, this leads to frustration and inconsistencies. Relationships and culture are crucial in helping teachers gain confidence and be successful. Strong relationships foster an understanding of what is needed, and everyone needs different things at different times (depending on current position and other environmental factors). When teachers feel a lack of understanding and support,

they expect administrators to provide support and fill that void. When these needs are not filled it leads to greater frustration on the part of teachers which leads to less collaboration among teachers and administration. However, when teachers feel the support, have structure, and know what is expected of them, there is a feeling of preparedness and confidence that allows them to be successful in educating students with disabilities.

### **Interpretations of the Findings**

Findings from the present study suggest that there are conflicting perceptions of teachers' ability to adhere to special education laws and regulations, that teacher's roles and responsibilities depend on the environment, that there is insufficient support from administration and teachers have a mix of emotional responses as they fulfill the non-instructional tasks related to special education.

### ***Research Question 1***

The first research question sought to determine teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to implement special education laws and regulations. The analysis of the data found in theme 1, conflicting perceptions of teachers' abilities to adhere to special education law, shows that teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to employ the contents of a students' IEP varied depending on their knowledge of special education laws and regulations. There were two sub questions within this research question; the first "How do special education teachers and general education teachers perceive their knowledge of special education laws and regulations?" Throughout the data analysis, there were grave differences in general education teachers and special education teachers knowledge.

This current study found that general education teachers show they do not have adequate knowledge in special education and the non-instructional tasks associated with supporting students with disabilities. During the data collection process, general education teachers expressed their unfamiliarity with IDEIA and Part 200. General education teachers shared their lack of knowledge with IEPs, CSE meetings and the purpose of paperwork such as 408 forms or protocols in relation to IDEIA. General education teachers admitted that they often do not read a student's IEP in its entirety and focus specifically on the accommodations and modifications. The district utilizes cheat sheets to make teachers aware of student accommodations and modifications, however, this could be viewed as giving teachers a crutch and not requiring them to read the IEP in its entirety. The IEP contains significantly more information that is useful to an educator besides the accommodations and modifications. As stated in the literature review, IEPs are meant to serve as a tool to help guide instruction (Lee-Tarver, 2006; Yell & Stecker, 2003) but the data indicates that they are often treated as artifacts (Rosas & Winterman, 2010). Likewise, teachers in this study admit not using the IEP as it was intended to be used to guide instruction because they lack the knowledge and importance of the other sections of the IEP. Van Boxtel (2017), describes how important the present levels of educational performance (PLEP) are to the IEP, yet notes that most general education teachers were not aware of what the PLEPs were let alone the purpose. These are significant concerns. Schimmel & Militello (2007) illustrates how not reading an IEP in its entirety could potentially have legal ramifications. While the teachers in this study did not indicate that they have faced legal problems, they knew of others who had and did

wish they knew more to avoid potential problems in the future. These types of stressors lead to negative emotions.

General education teachers indicated negative emotions such as frustration and feeling overwhelmed by not having adequate knowledge of non-instructional tasks. As noted in the literature review, more and more students are recommended for special education (O'Connor, Yasik & Horner, 2016). However, teachers from this study are not knowledgeable about how to recommend students, when to recommend students, or what data to collect before making these recommendations.

Most special education teachers show that they know the necessary information to carry out tasks associated with their position such as preparing for CSE meetings, writing and implanting an IEP and collecting appropriate data. The data shows that there are uncertainties for special education teachers in writing appropriate goals and determining the criteria required for students to meet that goal.

The second part of the first research question sought to determine differences between elementary teachers and secondary teachers' perception of their knowledge of special education laws and regulations. This case illustrates that the difference between elementary and secondary teachers could not be generalized, they were dependent upon their certification and knowledge as a general education teacher or special education teacher. To answer this question, the researcher separated this further into special education secondary teachers, special education elementary teachers, general education secondary teachers, and general education elementary teachers.

The researcher found that special education elementary teachers were the most knowledgeable about special education law and regulations. Findings indicate that special



education elementary teachers had participated in higher education programs that prepared them to carry out their responsibilities. Special education elementary teachers had knowledge of special education law, procedures, and are prepared to create and implement IEPs. Beyond the initial and expected nervousness of doing something for the first time, these teachers felt confident in the information they were sharing at CSE's and in their data collection process. Special education secondary teachers did not know special education law and regulations as well as special education elementary teachers but seemed to demonstrate more knowledge than general education teachers, which is consistent with previous literature. Participants in this current study could not speak to the laws of IDEIA and expressed not receiving the tools in their higher education yet, were not concerned because they felt confident in their ability to complete their responsibilities.

General education elementary teachers did not have as much knowledge on special education law and regulations as special education teachers but more than general education secondary teachers. They report heavily leaning on their colleagues and obtaining most of their knowledge through their co-teaching experiences and "on the job," doing their best to make sense of it themselves. The findings suggest that general education secondary teachers have the least amount of knowledge on special education law and regulations and do not feel they need to know. General education secondary teachers have a "hands-off approach" and expressed that they feel they are doing their job by simply providing students with an IEP their accommodations and modifications.

## ***Research Question 2***

The second research question looks to determine how teachers make sense of their roles and responsibilities to complete the non-instructional tasks required. It was apparent that general education and special education teachers have different roles in supporting students with disabilities. General education teachers report taking one, if any special education courses. They also indicate that they are unsure of their responsibilities when they start. General education teachers typically have students in an inclusion setting but can have a student with an IEP in a general education class without the support of a special education teacher. The general education teachers either lean on the case manager or their co-teacher heavily. They expressed that there are limited to no expectations from administration and that leadership has not specifically identified the unique performance expectations working in an inclusion setting. Due to not having their roles and responsibilities clearly defined, the way teachers work together in a co-taught class are immensely divergent from one co-taught class to another. The relationship, years of experience and personality of both teachers along with their knowledge of special education play a role in how the pair communicates and collaborates to support students with disabilities. In other words, the co-teachers determine their own roles and responsibilities for themselves and they vary depending on the pair and the dynamics, culture and environment of the building. Care must be taken to by co-teachers to outline roles and responsibilities so that both professionals do have meaningful roles capitalizing on their strengths as well as an equitable workload.

Special education teachers have different responsibilities based on their role. Their responsibilities vary depending on whether they are a resource room teacher, self-

contained teacher, or inclusion teacher. Special education teachers report gaining a substantial amount of knowledge in their higher education classes in regard to differentiating instruction, generalizing information contained within IEPs and an overview of CSE meetings. However, as students they did not have access to student's IEPs and reported learning most of what they know about IEPs in their first year of teaching. Special education teachers indicate that they rely on their prior experiences, interactions with others and the synthesis of putting various pieces together based on their prior knowledge to make sense of their roles and responsibilities as they change frequently depending on their position and the individual needs of their students. Carl Weick's sense making theory is used on an ongoing basis for teachers to make sense of their responsibilities and changes continually based on various factors such as years of experience, education, and relationships. Some teachers only have a deep understanding after experiencing a particular event and support from those with more experience.

Both general and special education teachers indicate that they have learned a lot from their peers and what they have not learned, they slowly hoped to pick up along the way. The various experiences they have shared have also helped educators make sense of their roles and responsibilities.

### ***Research Question 3***

The third and final research question allows the readers to see how teachers believe they are supported by administrators and colleagues to complete the non-instructional tasks associated with special education law and regulations.

Teachers shared that they feel more supported by colleagues than by administrators in completing tasks associated with special education law and regulations,

which aligns with previous literature. Specifically, they report they feel they can go to administrators anytime with questions or concerns yet receive more direction from special education teachers. Teachers indicate that they could use more support to have procedures or protocols to follow and professional development programs. This professional development is necessary, but it is necessary early in the career of teachers that are teaching inclusion classes as the teachers nearing retirement report already being set in their ways and unwilling to make changes.

The CSE needs to ensure that the IEP is meaningful, according to Christle & Yell (2010), and administrators need to make sure their teachers have a thorough knowledge of IDEIA. The data analysis showed that the IEP was not being used as intended.

### **Implications of Findings**

This study can help both teachers and administrators in building awareness to challenges teachers face and address these challenges. To do this, administrators can provide resources for teachers to easily access special education laws, create ongoing professional developments, establish roles among co-teachers and help teachers build positive relationships. Specialized professional development in different areas such as importance of reading an IEP, how to collect and analyze data to track student goals, or how to best use co-teaching strategies.

This study found that there is a lot of teacher confusion and unknowns revolving around special education, overall districts need improve the culture and moral surrounding special education. From the findings, teachers indicated that they need support with building relationships with their co-teachers and support in understanding their roles and responsibilities when in a co-taught class. Districts can find or create a

professional development specifically designed for co-teachers, where they have an opportunity to see all the pieces of co-teaching laid out and discuss and plan how to best educate students in their class, making the most of having two professionals in the room. This professional development would be best before the start of the school year or at the very beginning of the school year. Teachers can learn the different styles of co-teachings and the pros and cons of each. The co-teachers can discuss their roles/responsibilities, spend time getting to build a good relationship and learn each other's strengths. Building leaders should do their best to keep co-teachers together for a few years as it does take time to build a successful co-teaching relationship, one that is beneficial to each other and for the students. While change can be beneficial too, many co-teachers do not find their groove until after a few months.

From the findings, teachers indicated a lack of knowledge in the non-instructional tasks related to students with disabilities such as reading and writing an IEP, preparing for a CSE meetings, collecting and analyzing data and in referring students to special education. All teachers should have a refresher in reading and understanding an IEP. They need to be reminded of the importance of reading the entire document, the function of PLEPs and how that information should be helpful to the planning process. Through the focus groups, the general education teachers learned some useful information. Leaders may want to consider creating some sort of turn-key training with those who are knowledgeable and respected within the district. Special education teachers could use a review of how to write meaningful IEPs, what information should be in the PLEPs, how to create appropriate goals and how to determine what modifications and

accommodations to recommend to a CSE. This could easily be done during department meetings or professional developments.

This study can inform current and future administrators on the importance of creating a foundational knowledge in special education for all teachers. This foundational knowledge can be shared during faculty meetings or department meetings. Providing teachers with artifacts to refer to would be helpful and would help create consistency throughout the district. These artifacts could directly from the “Testing Accommodations Guide” such as appendix F: A Guide to Reading Math Symbols or appendix I: Student Accommodations Refusal Form, which allows teachers to keep accurate records when students are not utilizing their accommodations. This information should be discussed at a CSE to determine if a student continues to need that accommodation. Other artifacts could be a protocol for teachers to follow if they have concerns about a student and may be considering making a referral to special education. This document could include the 13 categories of disabilities, steps in the process, who to contact, resources, etc. Of course, all artifacts need to first be discussed and reviewed in a meeting prior to being shared among teachers.

The findings can also serve to inform higher education on integrating special education law into teacher education programs, regardless of the special education specialization. It can also help provide policymakers with information to improve New York State teacher certification requirements for both special education teachers and general education teachers.

## **Relationship to Prior Research**

"In the United States, increasingly more children are being identified as needing special services" (O'Connor et al., 2016, p.7). This study found that there was a lack of teacher knowledge on special education law and regulations. Results indicate that special education teachers demonstrated more knowledge than general education teachers, yet not enough. This statement aligns with previous findings that suggest that teachers were unclear about their responsibilities and felt unprepared to work with students with disabilities (Washburn-Moses, 2005). This study's results are concurrent with prior research that a vast majority of the teachers lacked essential information about IDEA/IDEIA (O'Conner et al., 2016) and reported not having any coursework related to special education law (Schimmel & Militello, 2007). According to Smith (1990) and Rotter (2014), the implementation of the individualized education program (IEP) is the most cited area of noncompliance and from the limited knowledge teachers in this current study had. With the minimal information they could speak to about the IEP this study suggests that IEPs are not being used as they were intended. While the researcher was unable to physically see the IEPs and how teachers utilized them in the classroom, there was enough evidence collected to suggest that there need to be improvements in creating and implementing IEPs so that they are in compliance with federal and state laws/regulations.

This current study aligns with the findings by Shuran & Roblyer (2012), in that training for teachers in the area of special education is limited, and predominantly occurs from on-the-job experiences with more experienced teachers. This current study's findings are consistent with previous studies as they both indicate that there are variations

in the relationship and execution of co-teacher roles (Strieker, Gillis, & Zong, 2013; Cook & McDuffie-Landrum, 2020) and that schools often do not categorize the performance expectations of special education teachers (Glowacki & Hackmann, 2016). This study showed the dynamic difference of the partnerships between co-teachers and how diverse special education teacher responsibilities can be based on an array of factors. Vannest et al. (2011) also specified that special education teachers' responsibility could vary across their specific position.

The participants in this current study reported that they needed the most assistance with co-teaching and collaborating with their cooperative teacher. In a study by Whitaker (2003), participants reported they needed the most support with system information related to special education (information about policies, paperwork, procedures, guidelines, and expectations related to the districts special education program). While this was not the primary need within this current district in Nassau County, New York, participants reported needing support with system information related to special education as well. Payne (2005) found that teachers leave the field due to the amount of paperwork required and O'Dell & Schaefer (2016) report that teachers expressed frustration over the amount of time needed to complete paperwork and the amount of time it took away from teaching students. In this study, we saw one teacher request not to teach inclusion again because of the amount of outside work (paperwork, parent communication, and communication with related service providers) involved as she explicitly stated that she just wants to teach. Many teachers in this study expressed frustration with the amount of time they spent on non-instructional tasks.



## **Limitations of the Study**

Despite the contributions this study makes to our understanding of teachers' knowledge of special education laws, several limitations could affect the generalization of the findings. This study's primary limitation is that it relies on the self-reports of teachers through both interviews and focus groups, and it does not include data based on independent assessments or direct observations of what teachers know and can do. Second, the participants were solicited from only one school district on Long Island, New York. The district's characteristics may not be representative of other districts on Long Island in terms of school size, demographics, and teacher responses may not be reflective of the procedures and cultures within other school districts. The third limitation of this study is that it included only a relatively small sample of teachers; there were a total of 17 teachers (12 general education teachers and five special education teachers); participants were selected from those that volunteered.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

Empirical evidence is limited in the relationship between the quality of IEPs and students' educational progress and outcomes. A future study that offers an in-depth analysis of the quality of an IEP and its direct correlation on student achievement would be beneficial to mitigate this. Research analyzing best practices in writing IEP's can help teachers acknowledge the importance of a quality IEP and its usefulness in meetings the student's unique educational needs.

Future research is also needed to determine if professional development and new teacher orientation on special education laws and co-teaching would help teachers overcome the challenges they face. The researcher recommends a study on the co-

teaching relationships and its direct effect on teacher knowledge and co-teaching relationships and its direct effect on student achievement. The researcher also recommends qualitative and quantitative research on integrating productive professional developments to determine the impact of improving teacher knowledge on supporting students with disabilities.

Lastly, research that will inform the field of special education for new teachers would help determine what information related to students with disabilities and special education law is a part of teacher education programs across New York State.

### **Conclusion**

After speaking and listening to the stories of several teachers within this district, I determined that teachers make sense of the non-instructional tasks related to supporting special education students in complex, nuanced ways. In this study, the themes conflicting perceptions of teachers' ability to adhere to special education laws and regulations, teacher's roles and responsibilities depend on the environment, insufficient support from administration, and teachers have a mix of emotional responses describe the competing responses to understanding special education law, collaborating with other teachers, and serving as a support to peers, parents, and students.

The researcher found that teachers desire knowledge, and they want to and are willing to follow federal laws and NYS regulations to do what is best for their students. Teachers need information and guidance from administrators. With more support from administration in providing the knowledge of special education laws and in guidance/expectations of co-teachers' responsibilities in an inclusion classroom, the

researcher would expect a decrease in the negative emotions associated with the non-instructional tasks for students with disabilities.

**APPENDIX A: Letter of Consent**



Letter of Consent for Semi-Structure Interviews

My name is Marissa Scholl, and I am a doctoral candidate from St. John's University. As the researcher of this study, I would like to invite you to participate in a research study. This study will seek to determine your perceptions of how prepared you feel to implement special education law and regulations.

As part of this study, I am interviewing general education teachers as well as special education teachers individually consisting of a series of short, open-ended questions that should take approximately 30 minutes. The sessions will be conducted virtually through Google Meets and audio and video recorded using a digital device.

There are no perceived risks accompanying your participation in this study. While there is no direct benefit for your participation in the study, you will be supporting researchers with the knowledge you provide. Your participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. Your name and the schools name will not be identified in any documents within this study other than this form consenting to be a participant. If at any time you decide not to participate, just let me know.

If you have questions about the purpose of this investigation, you may contact myself, [REDACTED] if you have questions concerning your rights as a human participant, you may contact the University's Human Subjects Review Board at St. John's University, specifically Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact Dr. Ceceilia Parnter, Assistant Professor Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

Your signature acknowledges receipt of a copy of the consent form as well as your willingness to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant      Date

Marissa Scholl  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher      Date

**APPENDIX B: Letter of Consent**



Letter of Consent for Focus Groups

My name is Marissa Scholl and I am a doctoral candidate from St. John’s University. As the researcher of this study, I would like to invite you to participate in a research study. This study will seek to determine your perceptions of how prepared you feel to implement special education law and regulations.

As part of this study, I am interviewing general education teachers as well as special education teachers in groups consisting of a series of short, open-ended questions that should take approximately 30 minutes to 60 minutes. The sessions will be conducted virtually through Google Meets and audio and video recorded using a digital device.

While the researcher will maintain strict confidentiality throughout the duration of the study, the researcher cannot ensure that other participants within the focus group will not share information outside of our time together. While anything shared could potentially be repeated by other participants, the researcher will state that any information shared during this time is strictly confidential and cannot be repeated. While there is no direct benefit for your participation in the study, you will be supporting researchers with the knowledge you provide. Your participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. Your name and the schools name will not be identified in any documents within this study other than this form consenting to be a participant. If at any time you decide not to participate, just let me know.

If you have questions about the purpose of this investigation, you may contact myself, [REDACTED]. If you have questions concerning your rights as a human participant, you may contact the University’s Human Subjects Review Board at St. John’s University, specifically Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact Dr. Ceceilia Parnter, Assistant Professor Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

Your signature acknowledges receipt of a copy of the consent form as well as your willingness to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

Marissa Scholl  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher      Date

## APPENDIX C: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Introduction: Hi! My name is Marissa Scholl. I am a doctoral student at St. John's University. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. The purpose of this interview is to learn about your perceptions of the non-instructional tasks associated with your role as an educator of students with disabilities. There are no right or wrong answers, or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like to encourage you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and how you really feel. If it's okay with you, I will be recording our conversation; it is hard for me to write down everything while also having an attentive conversation with you. Everything you say will remain confidential, meaning that only I and my dissertation chair will be aware of your answers. the purpose of that is only so we know whom to contact should we have further follow-up questions after this interview. Any quotes used from our conversation will be listed under a pseudonym.

I've provided you with an informed consent that reviews the potential risks and benefits of participating in my study. Thank you for signing it electronically. As a reminder, this study is completely voluntary, and you are free to end your participation at any time. Do you have any questions? Great, I'll begin recording.

1. How often do you refer to the IEP? Probe for daily or weekly.
2. How comfortable are you with creating (if special ed teacher)/ reading (if general education teacher) an IEP?
3. What sections of an IEP do you feel most comfortable with, enough so that you would be able to explain to a new teacher?
4. Are there any parts of an IEP you don't fully understand (or that you would like more support with)?
5. How do you collect data to measure your student's goals?
6. Can you describe your first CSE experience? What did you enjoy? What was most surprising? What did you feel inadequately prepared for?
7. If your district offered a professional development on what? IEPs? What would you suggest is the biggest need?

## **APPENDIX D: Focus Group Protocol**

Introduction: Hi everyone! My name is Marissa Scholl. I am a doctoral student at St. John's University. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. The purpose of this interview is to learn about your perceptions of the non-instructional tasks associated with your role as an educator of students with disabilities. There are no right or wrong answers, or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like to encourage each of you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and how you really feel. If it's okay with you, I will be recording our conversation; it is hard for me to write down everything while also having an attentive conversation. Everything shared here is expected to remain confidential, however, I cannot guarantee confidentiality as there are other individuals participating. Any quotes used from this focus group will be listed under a pseudonym.

I've provided each of you with an informed consent that reviews the potential risks and benefits of participating in my study. Thank you for signing it electronically. As a reminder, this study is completely voluntary, and you are free to end your participation at any time. Do you have any questions? Great, I'll begin recording.

1. Can you share some examples of things you learned in higher education that helped you be successful in teaching students with disabilities?
2. What knowledge do you believe is imperative to have prior to teaching students with disabilities? Give examples.
3. What are some things you wish you learned/learned more of in regard to teaching students with disabilities?
4. What experience do you have with special education law/regulations?
5. What are the most important pieces to know when writing an IEP?
6. What do you feel are the easiest and the hardest parts of writing/understanding an IEP?
7. What challenges do you face when implementing accommodations or modifications?
8. When considering special education law, what was one thing you wish you learned in higher education prior to obtaining your first job?

## **APPENDIX E: Content Analysis Protocol**

Documents to be collected:

- Teacher Schedules
- Professional Developments related to special education
  - Inservice
  - BOCES
- New teacher orientations/workshops related to special education
- District policies and procedures related to special education

Document analysis:

Step 1: Gather all relevant documents

Step 2: Classify documents into categories (who received documents)

- secondary teachers vs. elementary teachers (or just a specific building)
- general education teachers vs. special education teachers or both

Step 3: Determine what if any additional resources were provided

Step 4: Determine if the documents were written in a way that were understandable to teachers

Step 5: Determine if there are any trends



**APPENDIX F: Written District Approval to Complete Dissertation**

**Dissertation Info**

[REDACTED]

Mon 8/10/2020 11:03 AM

[REDACTED]

Hi-

Marissa may obtain info from you so that she can complete her dissertation. [REDACTED] is aware.

Thanks,

[REDACTED]

## APPENDIX G: Definition of Codes

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**Terminology** – Language used specific to IDEA or Part 200

**Knowledge** – Teachers showed knowledge specific to IDEA or Part 200

**Lack of Knowledge** – Teachers showed they did not have specific knowledge in areas of IDEA or Part 200

**Prepared** – Teachers perception of their readiness to carry out a students' IEP

**Unprepared** - Teachers perception of their lack of readiness to carry out a students' IEP

**Uncertain** – Unsure of what to expect, bring to a CSE meeting

**Confident** – having full assurances of carrying out non-instructional tasks such as CSE meetings

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**Collaboration** – working with other teachers and school professionals to best support students with disabilities

**Communication** – exchanging of knowledge or ideas with other teachers

**Expectations** – teachers' expectations in their role or responsibilities

**Experience** – current or past experiences that have impacted teacher practice

**Differences** – teachers noted differences in their experiences based on descriptors

**Relationships** – co-teaching experiences, mentorships and relationships between teachers and support staff

**Culture** – environmental characteristics, attitudes, values and common practices

**Time 1** – time spent on non-instructional tasks

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**Time 2** – time teachers felt they needed to improve

**Communication** - exchanging of knowledge or ideas between teachers and administrators

**Changes** – teachers indicated that change was needed to improve

**Needs** – more direction required to carry out tasks related to special education

**Leadership** – challenges due to decisions or lack of decisions made by leadership

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**Overwhelming** – feelings of confusion or too difficult

**Frustration** – feelings of anger or annoyance

**Nervous** – feeling apprehensive

**Uncomfortable** – feeling uneasy, unsure,

**Comfortable** – feeling confident, more than adequately prepared

**Exciting** – feeling of joy, happiness or feeling proud in oneself or others.

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## APPENDIX H: IRB Approval

Date: 11-13-2020

IRB #: IRB-FY2021-103

Title: TEACHERS KNOWLEDGE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW AND PREPAREDNESS TO CARRY OUT NON-INSTRUCTIONAL TASKS ASSOCIATED WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW

Creation Date: 9-9-2020

End Date:

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Marissa Scholl

Review Board: St John's University Institutional Review Board

Sponsor:

### Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Expedited	Decision	<b>Approved</b>
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### Key Study Contacts

Member	Ceceilia Parnter	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	[REDACTED]
Member	Marissa Scholl	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	[REDACTED]
Member	Marissa Scholl	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	[REDACTED]

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