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AUTHOR Morvant, Martha; Gersten, Russell
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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study investigating the issues that most significantly influence urban special education teachers' decisions to leave the field voluntarily or transfer to a different type of educational position. First, it presents the results of post-attrition interviews with 17 special educators who left their positions during or immediately following the 1991-92 school year and then reports results of a survey of 868 special educators in three urban areas. The first section of the report describes the sample; explains the interview design, guide, and process; and reviews data analysis procedures. The second section focuses on three recurrent themes drawn from the interviews: job design, the nature of relations with the central office, and the professional and/or personal fit of their special education teaching assignment. The report then describes the development of the questionnaire used in the survey and procedures employed for descriptive analysis, including factor analysis of all teachers who completed the survey, analysis of those who expressed an intent to leave in the near future, and analysis of differences in profiles of work-related leavers and those who stayed. Data are reported by factors relating to support, preparation, stress related to job design and workload manageability, affective issues related to students, satisfaction and personal assessment of rewards, and role conflict. Appendices provide additional analytical detail. (DB)

ATTRITION/RETENTION OF URBAN SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS: MULTI-FACETED RESEARCH AND STRATEGIC ACTION PLANNING

FINAL PERFORMANCE REPORT
VOLUME 1

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Project Directors:
Martha Morvant
Russell Gersten

Research Staff:
Janet Gillman
Thomas Keating
Geneva Blake

Project Officer:
Scott Campbell Brown

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This packet contains:

CHAPTER THREE
A Closer Look at the Decision to Leave Special Education Teaching: Themes and Issues from In-Depth Interviews with Former Teachers

CHAPTER FOUR
Survey Results

CHAPTER 3
A CLOSER LOOK AT THE DECISION TO LEAVE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHING: THEMES AND ISSUES FROM IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH FORMER TEACHERS

A primary goal of the project was to explore in depth the issues that most significantly influence urban special education teachers' decisions to voluntarily leave the field or transfer to a different type of educational position. During the second year of the project we met with a group of teachers who had left special education teaching the past spring and talked at length about their work in the field and the circumstances surrounding their attrition from special education teaching. This chapter presents the results of post-attrition interviews with 17 special educators who left their teaching positions in District 1 during or immediately following the 1991-92 school year.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section overviews the methods used in the interview study. Included is a description of the sample; an explanation of the interview design, guide, and process; and an overview of the data analysis. The second section focuses on three major themes drawn from the interviews. These three themes represent recurrent issues in the stories about leaving as presented by these 17 former special education teachers. The chapter ends with a brief look at several broader observations about the leaving process.

3.1 Methods

3.1.1 The Sample: 1991-92 Teacher Leavers

We defined a teacher leaver as any individual who was working as a special education teacher in District 1 during the 1991-92 school year and was no longer working in that capacity at the start of the subsequent school year. Excluded from this definition were any teachers who were officially listed as on leave of absence. Also excluded were any involuntary leavers, including those who lost their positions as a result of district reduction-in-force actions or teachers who left due to serious health conditions that specifically precluded them from continuing to teach. Based on this definition, the 1991-92 attrition rate for District 1 was 6.4%, reflecting a total of 27 teachers.

Our intent was to include all 27 teacher leavers in the study. However, six relocated and could not be traced. In addition, one teacher declined to participate. As a result, the original sample consisted of 20 1991-92 leav s. During the initial phases of the analysis process, 3 of the 20 were dropped. I.. two cases, the decision was based on the teachers' brief length of tenure with the district (i.e., less than half of one school year). The third teacher worked in a position where students did not receive services in a school-based setting. The analysis described in this paper, therefore, reflects findings from 17 interviews.

These leavers varied in age and had diverse training and work histories. They were positioned in a wide range of the district's special education programs -- cross-categorical resource, self-contained special classes, and itinerant services; and programs for students with learning, emotional and/or physical disabilities. Career starting points ranged from 1953 to 1990. The careers of some of these teachers were virtually uninterrupted, while others reported taking breaks of up to 15 years, for example, to raise their children. Some of these teachers had worked solely in special education, while others had moved into special education after some years in general education classrooms. One teacher described a career of 36 years spent predominantly in two schools -- one as a fourth grade teacher and the second as a special education resource teacher. In contrast, another former special educator chronicled a 23-year career path that wove in and out of the classroom and various supervisory and semi-administrative assignments and covered bilingual education, counseling, and special education.

A comparison of the interview group with those 1991-92 leavers who were not interviewed (N=10) revealed that the compositions of the two groups were roughly parallel in terms of gender, ethnicity, and school level taught. The interview group tended to be somewhat more experienced, however. In fact, only 1 of 17 teachers interviewed could be considered a beginning teacher (i.e., in the first three years of teaching), and only 2 could be considered beginning special education teachers.

Table 3.1.1 summarizes the post-attrition employment status of the 17 leavers who made up the interview group. Roughly one third were retirees, with ages ranging from 56-64. Of the 11 remaining leavers, 9 continued working in the district, seven transferred into general education positions and 2 into non-teaching special education assignments.

Table 3.1.1
Interview Sample: Current Employment Status

In District	
General Education, Teaching	7
Special Education, Non-Teaching	2
Outside of District	
Private Speech Therapy	1
Unemployed	1
Retired	**6**

In keeping with the differences in experience noted above, the interview group included a somewhat higher proportion of retirees (N=6 of 17) than did the non-interviewed group (N=1 of 10). A second contrast was evident in employment status with the district. With the obvious exception of the retirees, 9 of 11 members of the interview group were still employed in the district, while all but one of the members of the non-interview group left the district at the end of the 1991-92 school year.

3.1.2 The In-depth Interview

Interview Design

The interview study design was heavily influenced by our belief that a teacher's decision to make a career change or a significant shift in career focus (i.e., a shift from special education to general education) is related in important ways to factors stemming from a teacher's recent or current personal and professional circumstances, as well as the collection of experiences stemming from their career history and personal biography. In order to keep our work scope manageable, however, we limited our focus to teachers' professional and personal experiences stemming from the period of their career.

We assumed that the decision to leave special education teaching would be greatly influenced by a variety of interacting personal and professional factors taking shape during the career, including a teacher's goals, values, interests, and the extent to which those are recognized and shared by the organization; the content and focus of a teacher's initial training program, as well as the cumulative effect of subsequent professional development opportunities and on-the-job experiences; professional expectations and the extent to which those are met over time; the balance struck between the demands of an individual's personal and professional life; satisfaction with working relationships and other working conditions; and levels of support, encouragement, professional treatment, and reward received.

We specifically sought to understand how teachers' prior work experiences and, to some extent, their personal circumstances, influenced their current experiences as special educators and ultimately their decisions to leave their jobs. We paid particular attention to unresolved conflicts and sources of disappointment, unmet expectations, and/or unrealized professional aspirations.

We believed that these teachers' experiences would be better understood if communicated with as much explanatory and contextual detail as possible, so we sought ways to solicit unrestricted streams of thought, feeling, and perception from teachers. Methods appropriate for gathering such data were those associated with qualitative inquiry, specifically in-depth interviews, structured to elicit information through story.

The Interview Guide and Process

The interview guide and process were influenced by a review of literature in the areas of teaching as work and career, with specific emphasis, whenever possible, on the work of special educators. We were particularly influenced by the work of Cohn & Kottkamp (1993), Goodson (1992), Hargreaves & Fullan (1992); Huberman (1992; 1989), Johnson (1990); Rosenholtz (1990); Yee (1990); Huberman & Prick (1989), and Lortie (1975).

Rather than attempting to structure responses, the interview protocol was designed to guide teachers in revealing their experiences through story. Specific questions were used to help teachers reflect on broad topical areas (see Table 3.1.2). The interviews were conducted by Gillman and Morvant. We met with each teacher in person, taking two to three hours to complete each interview. With the permission of these teachers, all interviews were tape recorded.

Table 3.1.2
Broad Areas Covered in the Interview

- Job history
- Entry into the field of special education
- Initial and evolving expectations
- Positive aspects of the work experience
- Negative aspects of the work experience
- Leaving special education teaching
- Work opportunities at the time of leaving
- Suggestions/recommendations for adjustments in the work

Documenting the Job History. Each interview started by reviewing the teacher's work history. Teachers were asked to list and describe all of the jobs they had held since college, providing "snapshot" descriptions of the positions or organizations, dates of employment, and brief explanations for their decisions to leave each job. When a position was education-related, we inquired into the levels and categories of students served and the program or service delivery type. We recorded these histories on job history forms (see Exhibit A) which were then used as reference documents for both teachers and interviewers during the interview to assist in stimulating memory and grounding teachers' experiences in time. We let the teacher determine the pace of the job history portion of the interview, allowing each individual to warm up at his or her own pace. If the process stimulated a

discussion of other issues relevant to the broader inquiry, we let the interview move in that direction, always coming back to the job history until it was complete.

Exhibit A
Employment History Form

Position Title	Location (district, school, or organization)	Level of students	Category of students	Program type/ service model	Duration: From To	Why did you leave?

Exploring Career Experiences. Subsequently, the interview explored selected aspects of the teachers' professional career and experiences, following a modified *critical incident* approach. For instance, we asked teachers to identify particular periods during their career which stood out as "most enjoyable." In doing so, we asked teachers to describe these times and what they felt contributed to them, and we encouraged teachers to give as many illustrative examples from the time as possible.

Likewise, when we asked teachers to describe times in their careers in which they felt least effective, we asked for examples or stories which would most fully illustrate the circumstances. If any change in a teacher's feelings was noted over time, we probed factors that may have influenced the change.

One objective of our interview design was to let the teachers determine the extent to which they spoke about a given topic, allowing them to bring up or discuss topics of importance to them without our prompting. If, however, we noticed that a teacher's responses tended to reflect work-related issues over non-work-related issues or vice versa, we carefully probed into the undiscussed domain to provide an opportunity for teachers to consider a broader range of issues.

For example, if when discussing a period of dissatisfaction with work, a teacher continued to exclusively cite personal influences, we asked if there were any things about the school or district that may have also contributed to their dissatisfaction. If on the other hand a teacher's responses tended to focus more heavily on work-related influences, we asked to what extent the teacher felt family or personal issues contributed to his or her experience.

The interview also explored the factors that influenced teachers' decisions to leave special education teaching. We asked teachers to describe what they saw as leading up to the decision, to give us examples of incidents that could illustrate the

circumstances, and to describe how these circumstances contributed to their leaving. We gave teachers as much time as they needed to fully explain their decisions.

3.1.3 Data Analysis

Analysis proceeded in stages, starting with a detailed examination of each teacher's individual story, then moving on to a search for themes that recurred across multiple stories.

Individual Teacher Portraits

A primary goal in conducting the analysis was to preserve the integrity of each leaver's story. To this end, we first constructed a portrait of each teacher drawn from the interview material. The portrait provided a means of condensing some 40 to 50 pages of transcribed material into a more manageable document, while also organizing the story both temporally and thematically.

Each portrait included a tabular summary of the career history of the teacher. For every job or assignment held throughout the career, the table listed the position title, employing organization, program type or service model, disability categories, grade level of students, start and ending dates, and a brief summary of reasons for leaving. In addition, the narrative material was loosely organized to highlight:

- the circumstances surrounding the individual's *entry into the field;*
- specifics of the teacher's *career progression;* and
- the teacher's account of the final *decision to leave* special education teaching.

The portraits also summarized teachers' retrospective assessments of their attrition decisions and feelings about their employment status at the time of the interview. Additionally, we noted any evidence of interaction between personal and work-related factors in the stories.

Each portrait was, to a large extent, unique. The exact outline of an individual's portrait was shaped by the content of that teacher's interview. Material was organized around the major themes or threads that wove through the individual's career story. For this portion of the analysis, we used Hyperqual (Padilla, 1991; Tesch, 1992), a software program that facilitates coding and manipulation of narrative data.

As much as possible, the final portraits reflected the words of the teachers. Our commentary was designed primarily to summarize major sections and smooth transitions.

These portraits became the foundation for all subsequent analyses. As we began to search for broader patterns and themes across the 17 interviews, we continuously returned to the portraits to ground our interpretation in the context of the individual stories that contributed to each theme.

Thematic Analysis: Factors Linked to the Decision to Leave

The thematic analysis focused on factors which appeared most strongly to influence teachers' decisions to leave special education teaching in the district. Drawing primarily from the portraits, we sought to identify factors that individual teachers had directly linked to the leaving decision, as well as any other major themes judged by the research team to have significantly influenced the teacher's decision.

Because we did not ask teachers to provide running lists of all their reasons for leaving, but rather to tell us stories that reflected the culmination of their experiences over time, we found it necessary at times to draw our understanding from the broader interview. For example, if a teacher experienced a series of profound disappointments or difficulties over an extended period of time prior to leaving, *and if these disappointments appeared strongly related to issues raised as reasons for leaving*, we factored these experiences into the leaving story, whether explicitly linked by the teacher or not.

As the process of identifying factors and major explanatory themes proceeded, instances of similarities across stories became evident. We noticed, for example, that clusters of teachers reported similar experiences with the central office administration or faced similar difficulties in trying to manage their changing caseloads. We kept a written list of these common experiences, describing them in as much detail as possible and noting any hypotheses about their relevance, particularly in terms of understanding attrition.

As this list grew, it was continually reorganized and refined. For example, we created new categories when specifics of an individual story failed to fit existing categories. Conversely, when common themes were observed within stories filed under two or more separate categories, we combined the information into a broader, more inclusive single category. Our goal was to identify the minimum number of categories *that would accurately and comprehensively represent each teacher's story.*

3.2 Results: Factors That Influence Attrition Decisions: Themes From The Interviews

In looking across these interviews, we were struck by the wide range of emotion reflected in the leaving stories of these 17 former special education teachers. At one end of the continuum, a veteran teacher discussed her sense of grief as she

began her transition into retirement after a highly satisfying career. At the other end, we spoke to teachers who, after early- to mid-career resignations, were coming to terms with heightened feelings of bitterness and disappointment in their work experiences as special educators in District 1.

A similar level of complexity was evident when looking at the individual stories of each leaver. Each interview provided support for the conclusion that the decision to leave a job or to change careers is rarely simple. In no case did a single factor fully explain a teacher s leaving decision. In each case, the decision was based on an interaction of multiple factors.

There were several themes raised consistently by a majority of teachers in this cohort -- themes they clearly identified as contributing factors in their decision to leave special education teaching. The stories of these leavers revealed concerns about:

- job design;
- the nature of their relations with the central office; and
- the professional and/or personal fit of their special education teaching assignment.

3.2.1 Job Design

> *Every organization has ways of balancing out the many demands for its time, attention, resources, and energy. Depending on the balance that is struck, the system performs and delivers certain results. Think of this balancing act as design. Design is not just structure. It is not always formal or conscious. This balancing of resources isn't always fixed — you may not do things the same way every time, and your results may vary (even drastically!) from month to month. But, . . . the fact that certain results occur (and not others) verifies that some design has been perfectly executed.* (Hanna, 1988, p. 39)

Since the passage of The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (E.H.A.) in the mid 70s, through the period of the Regular Education Initiative in the 80s, and on to the current focus on inclusion, the field of special education has been gradually but consistently undergoing massive changes. For students in special education, these changes have meant movement from separate special schools to mainstream campuses, from geographically organized special programs in distant schools to enrollment in their neighborhood schools, and from self-contained special classes to general education classrooms.

Such shifts, especially the current movement to integrate special education programs and students, have propelled marked changes in the work roles and responsibilities of many special education teachers. A key consideration is the extent to which the special education teacher's job, as it is currently designed, is capable of handling the new requirements of the work.

Job design can be viewed as the set of structures, systems, and processes through which work is conducted. Included are the particular ways in which people are organized to perform work, the relationship between time and work demands, organizational decision-making processes, and systems for sharing information.

At a basic level, the adequacy of a job's design is a function of the degree to which the structure or processes established for doing the work facilitate the successful completion of assigned tasks and responsibilities. In some cases, the way work is structured -- such as the way it is staffed, scheduled, and generally organized -- actually inhibits its efficient and effective completion. For an organization, this results in failure to achieve valued goals. For an individual, it results in frustration and work-related stress, which in turn could lead to employee attrition.

When we asked these teachers to describe times during their careers when they felt least effective, the vast majority didn't have to look back that far; they often pointed to the two- to three-year period leading up to their final days in special education. Many indicated that it had become increasingly difficult for them to meet the needs of their students and that their waning sense of efficacy played a major role in their decisions to leave special education teaching. It was clear that the difficulties these teachers were experiencing were a reflection, at least in part, of the evolution of their job responsibilities and the perceived adequacy of the current job design for meeting the challenges presented by the emerging special education paradigm.

We did not conduct a systematic study of the work design of these 17 special educators. Rather, we listened to and documented what teachers expressed about the barriers they faced in performing their work, particularly when these barriers were tied to their decisions to leave special education teaching. Through these conversations, we gained insight into a number of design problems.

Time and time again teachers reported feeling that they were not able to conduct the work the way that *they believed they were trained and hired to do it*. In most cases, the issues for these teachers were not their own levels of preparation for the specific tasks that made up their jobs, but the mechanisms, or designs, through which they had to work.

Based on the work of Hanna (1988), we have labeled those design elements which emerged as highly problematic for this group of leavers as work structure, information systems, and decision-making processes. Each is discussed below.

3.2.2 Work Structure

From the perspectives of many of the 17 leavers with whom we spoke, the ways in which their work was structured, both in terms of the human resource arrangements employed and the balances struck between time and work demands, were inadequate for meeting the challenges presented by the district's efforts to integrate special education.

Reflecting trends in the broader field of special education, the special education programs in District 1 had been undergoing significant review and revision, with a primary aim being the increased integration of students with special needs. While a few categorical programs still existed in the district, the reported direction was toward increased use of multi- and even non-categorical student groupings. The composition of special education caseloads was also being influenced by a marked increase in the numbers of students with multiple and/or more challenging disabilities, including children with significant behavior and emotional needs, many the result of fetal drug or alcohol addictions. As one administrator explained, "We're constantly being faced with more challenging kids, and kids that require more services...which impacts our programs and impacts the teachers."

Self-contained special classes in District 1 were gradually being phased out in favor of more part-time, flexible service arrangements that allowed maximal inclusion of students with special needs into general education settings and programs. Simultaneously, the district was increasingly attempting to place students with special needs in their neighborhood schools rather than bus them to more centrally located special education programs.

The district's newest special education program -- the non-categorical services (NS) model -- represented the convergence of all of these trends. This program also reflected a growing concern about the failure of the educational system to adequately address the needs of the "gray area" students, those who were struggling in school but had failed to qualify for special education services.

Following a one-year pilot and a two-year phase-in, an NS program had recently been established at each school building in District 1. In all cases, the NS program was the major service delivery model available in a given school, and in many cases it was the only special education program at a school site. As such, a single NS caseload might well include students from a variety of special education eligibility categories representing an even wider range of instructional strengths and needs.

The emphasis of the NS program was on maximal inclusion of students with special needs in general education settings. Beyond simply scheduling these students into combinations of general and special education classes, NS teachers were encouraged to facilitate the integration of the students by bringing special

services to the general education classroom whenever possible -- working individually with groups of students and/or co-teaching with the general educator. Success of the model was dependent upon increased communication and collaboration between the special educator and the individual classroom teachers who were also providing instruction to students with special needs.

In describing recent changes in service delivery models within the district, many of the leavers spoke of a dissonance between the ideal and the real. As before, *the central issue was the extent to which these teachers perceived work structure as promoting or inhibiting equitable student gains in an increasingly complex instructional environment.* Reflecting her philosophical support for the new direction, coupled with skepticism about its feasibility, one teacher spoke for many of her colleagues when she said: "The idea..., idealistically, is good. But when you begin to work it out, there are too many complications. In order for it to work, there has to be more time or more teachers."

In looking across the 17 interviews, it was clear that these various innovations could not be viewed as separate and distinct; rather, they were intricately interwoven. For example, the goal of working in general education classrooms to facilitate successful inclusion of students became more challenging in the context of an increasingly diverse student caseload. The goal of planning collaboratively with classroom teachers placed an even heavier demand on the teacher's daily schedule when coupled with the reality of growing paperwork demands.

Yet, as each teacher reflected on his or her experiences, certain aspects of the work emerged as central to the story. These teachers spoke particularly about challenges stemming from: (1) the changing composition of their student caseloads, (2) the complexity of scheduling instructional time, (3) the increased emphasis on providing consultative services to classroom teachers; and (4) rapidly expanding paperwork responsibilities.

Concerns about Changing Student Caseloads. For many special education teachers, both the change in the types of students enrolled in the district and the move away from self-contained classrooms meant a measurable increase in the severity of needs of their students. Further, as some of these students were integrated into general education classrooms for part of the day, the teacher assistant assigned to the special education program was often pulled to follow the student and assist with integration. *This left the special educator faced with a more challenging caseload composition, but without the support of an instructional assistant.* As one administrator acknowledged, "Seventeen students in NS is workable with a teacher assistant. But seventeen kids with more severe needs and no assistant is not."

One teacher working in a self-contained classroom for students labeled "learning disabled" talked at length about the increasingly severe behavioral needs of the students being placed in her classroom. This teacher was confident that she had the skills to work with each of these students individually, but she was

concerned about the challenge presented by the group as a whole. Thus, caseload diversity, rather than class size or severity, was the more pressing issue. *The question was how one teacher, with support from a part-time instructional assistant, might simultaneously meet the individual needs of such a diverse group of students.*

> I've worked with severely disturbed kids like Newt before, but you can't give him to me along with one that sets fires and one that's bringing screwdrivers and trying to slice kids throats on the playground. They have me in a regular elementary school with one aide, and I have 14 kids. I had a child that was autistic. And the one that really was so hostile he was taking my autistic child and trying to stick his hands in a fan. And I also had some kids that were LD, and I said either let those poor kids go somewhere and get their academic service, and if you want me to have these more severe kids, I can have them, but it's not fair to the others, the few straight LDs that I had to be dealing with this.

A colleague across town worked in a cross-categorical resource setting. Some level of student diversity had always been the norm in resource rooms. This diversity was typically addressed through scheduling: students with mild disabilities spent less time in the special setting and more time in general education classes, while the reverse was true for students with more severe needs. The movement to non-categorical services, coupled with the gradual elimination of self-contained programs, had resulted in a significant increase in the diversity of this teacher's caseload. Although a full-time instructional assistant was assigned to assist her, the assistant was often pulled out to work with students who were being integrated into general education classrooms.

> Prior to the change, our most severe students were in self-contained classes, and those students that really needed to be with a special ed teacher were. And those students who were able to be helped and integrated into the regular program were with the resource teachers. After we changed to cross-categorical, however, we had those severe students with us half a day. And so I became more like a self-contained teacher. I had very severe students half a day and multiply handicapped students -- students who required a tremendous amount of my time and attention. I was not able to help those students who were mildly handicapped who could have been brought up to grade level . . . I wasn't able to do that, because my energies were going to working with these very severe students. In addition, I had two languages to deal with.
>
> I couldn't do any grouping whatsoever. There were different handicapping conditions, seven different grade levels, and two different languages.

For both teachers, recent caseload changes in the context of the existing work structure presented a direct threat to their sense of efficacy. As one teacher put it: "You start apologizing for what you knew you could do. You can't see any progress. That's what you're there for."

The Increased Complexity Of Scheduling Instruction. For those teachers striving to increase the integration of their students, scheduling was a major issue. This scheduling problem played out at two levels. First, the special educator needed to negotiate an individual schedule for each child that reflected the appropriate balance of general education instruction and special education support services.

Then the special educator needed to combine the special education portions of these respective student schedules and construct a feasible instructional schedule for the resource room. The task was challenging enough to begin with, but was made even more difficult by unpredictable adjustments in the schedules of individual classroom teachers, a host of itinerant related services specialists, or even the school as a whole. A teacher working in a resource setting for students with physical disabilities referred to herself as an FAA agent: "I was in charge of directing -- just fly here, fly there." She described her work this way:

> Well, it's just so scattered. I tried to do what each kid needed, I tried to touch on that area and it's just too much. There was just a lot of times I couldn't make it in here. There are special programs, or the therapist was out on a certain date—could she have that kid right at the time that I was going to finally get to work with that kid? Could she see him then? And it's like—well, she's here once a week, and I always [said], "okay, go, go, go, go." And still trying to give them what I thought they needed whenever I could jump on them.

From the perspective of a number of the leavers with whom we spoke, the work became even more complex when the special educator attempted to deliver special instruction in the general education classroom, a stated goal of the district's new NS program. *The comments of two NS teachers illustrate the tensions between competing work requirements and available time.*

> I tried real hard for two years, but I failed to get in and do the collaborative model that they're all talking about doing with the teachers. You can't schedule with the teacher when they've got to go to computer lab and AIDS instruction or sex ed. It's a scheduling nightmare. You're constantly the one that had to juggle the schedule in order to get into the classroom.

> It's an idealistic situation, and I can't see it working. If I have children from three different classrooms and two different grades, they can come together and form a group. And I can work with them in a short time period and accomplish something. But now, with [the new model] I am supposed to go to these individual rooms. Now where in an hour can I go to three different rooms and accomplish anything?

The Expectation for Meaningful Teacher-to-Teacher Collaboration.

Meaningful collaboration between special and general educators is intended to serve as both the foundation and the framework for ensuring that an appropriate education is provided to each student with special needs. Yet, sufficient planning time was not available to these teachers, *primarily because existing work demands had not been modified or redistributed in any way*. As one teacher put it: "To collaborate with the teacher -- to get carryover -- you need time with the teacher. And there isn't that time. It's not built in. Your caseload hasn't gone down; you still have to service the same number of kids." The result was that teachers had to try to squeeze the time for this central activity into an already packed day:

> Virtually the only time I could meet with teachers was lunch. I don't know if you know what teachers are like at lunch? There's barely time to go to the bathroom and eat your lunch and get your wits together and make essential

> phone calls. There's no way you can really effectively interface with teachers at lunch. So, it was almost impossible for me to find enough time to spend with one teacher, let alone all of them.

This special educator's comments point to the importance of laying the groundwork necessary to ensure innovations can have a chance to succeed. Attention must be given to basic logistics surrounding increased instructional interdependence between special and general educators.

Expanded Paperwork Responsibilities. As expected, we found that the non-instructional parts of the job were definitely a source of stress for many of these teachers — with particular emphasis on growing paperwork demands.

Some teachers spoke of the sheer volume of paperwork and administrative tasks they were being required to complete. Several veteran teachers observed that the paperwork load had increased significantly since they began teaching. According to these teachers, *paperwork demands and other non-instructional tasks which generate it, such as testing and meetings, had grown to require significantly more time than a teacher had in normal working hours.* One veteran remarked: "Little did I know that in 30 years [the paperwork] would increase 30-fold! I was working from 6:45 in the morning, and I was always trying to leave the building by dark." This concern was echoed by her colleagues:

> You don't only have to test 'em. You have to write up your results. But, before you ever do it, you have to get all these permission forms signed and all the referrals and the request for services—and the paperwork . . . gets worse every year. And then test, write up the results, get all the paperwork ready for the first conference, notify all the other people that have to sit in on that. And then you have your professional conference, and then you have to have another one where the parent comes. And it just goes on and on. And you have paperwork for every one of these conferences.

> I expected there was a lot of paperwork. . . . but then it has surprised me how it has increased over the years . . . And I know, going around to several different schools now — special ed teachers are so overwhelmed with it, and it's just worse, more and more and more.

Non-instructional tasks were seen as a threat to instructional time. Teachers felt the way the work was organized actually set up competing priorities: attention to one was at the expense of the other. One teacher asked rhetorically: "Do you want me to do it, or do you want me just to spend all my time writing about it?" Two others echoed her concern:

> You spend one day a week as an elementary special ed teacher handling paper. You don't teach. You handle paperwork and you test; you write IEPs; you have meetings. I think they could probably train educational assistants to do a lot of it.

> I work with children. And I said, heck with the paperwork. I'd rather do activities in the classroom, or work with small groups, or even work with discipline problems or whatever. But I didn't like filling out all the umpteen [forms]. I wanted to spend my time with the children, with students—versus doing paperwork.

Some teachers felt that many of these non-instructional tasks were irrelevant to their instructional work, neither serving their original purpose nor used by their intended audiences. In fact, one former special education teacher noted that, while paperwork was somewhat more extensive in her new position, she did not resent it as much because it was more directly tied to her daily lessons with students.

Others described feeling frustrated or even insulted that their education and training were being squandered on tasks so clerical in nature. These teachers felt the clerical elements should be delegated to clerical support staff, or the entire task should be streamlined or computerized:

> I was working 60 hours a week and at least probably 45 hours of that was just blasted paperwork and assessment in class of the kids and all the stuff that went with that. And it just got to be too much. I mean, I was trained to teach — not to be a secretary. And so, that's why I got out of it. Pure and simple.

> We had to photocopy for everyone of those kids, a copy for the cum, a copy for the special ed folder, and a copy for the regional office. That's three copies of this. And some of these pages, mind you, are like—well all of them are at least two pages in length, 'cause you've got to have a cover sheet, you've got to have what the assessment was that you've used in the instructions. So we had to photocopy all those, and send them. You've got to do it twice a year! Now to me that's a lot of waste of time for somebody who has an education, to stand and xerox, 60, 100, about 200 copies. I thought, this job is not what I was trained to do. If they want it done, send out somebody that's going to xerox it.

> I think once I counted, and we have to write the students' identifying information—name, date, birth, matrix number, address, parents' names, grade, teacher—at the top of about 30 forms. And it could have been . . . streamlined . . . They could get that part of our work down to nothing, if they just would eliminate the duplication and get the crucial information.

A few teachers reported bringing paperwork home or trying to squeeze it into meetings or classroom hours. In order to cope, others simply looked for ways to cut corners:

> The way I coped with it was, if I had just too much to do, I would—this is probably not legal—I would put the kids in class and try to do what I had to do.

> Well, was I 100% in compliance? Oh, you bet! Did I fabricate everything? Oh, you bet!

For those teachers who felt they could neither compromise nor do an adequate job, the anxiety and/or resentment were especially high:

> I was dealing with a lot of paperwork and a lot of timelines and had to send these papers here and there. Well, I found that was definitely . . . not becoming my forte. I could evaluate and all that. I was having trouble with papers. Like everybody else, I like to do a good job. I like to have that satisfaction at the end of the day that I've done things well. And if I'm still thinking about where is that paper, you know, it worries you, it worried me tremendously.

> And I resented it all the time . . . I was conscientious . . . I went above and beyond what I needed to do . . . And I just got bitter towards the special ed department when they would sit there in their little offices and send us this little [compliance] report card type thing . . . I didn't want that crap. . . . Someone's sitting there, judging you by papers that they have in their hand . . .

Teachers often did not fully understand the requirements, let alone the rationale behind them. Further, *given the reality of a finite block of time, these tasks were perceived as a real threat to attainment of the teacher's most valued goal -- student learning.*

3.3.3 Information Sharing Systems

How information flows through an organization greatly impacts individuals' work experience, especially in times of change. Hanna (1994) emphasized that in productive organizations, information systems are designed "primarily to provide information to the point of action and problem solving," in contrast to more traditional organizations, "which provide information based on hierarchical channels . . . "

Stories from a few veteran teachers in the district suggested ways in which information sharing may have changed in the district as it grew larger and more bureaucratic over time. Their testimonies were consistent with research on the evolution of organizations, which posits that as organizations (such as a district's special education division) grow and mature, knowledge and information tend to become more centralized. One veteran teacher echoed the voices of several in her discussion of this shift.

> One of the problems is that none of us really know what the guidelines are any more. I don't know what qualifies anybody any more. I got to the point where I didn't even know what they were working with to make their decisions. I mean, *I used to* --and now I don't know what the district's guidelines are for placement, what they are for category, what the different programs mean.
>
> In the past, the teachers always had hands-on, and we were highly knowledgeable --in fact, we'd have in-services, they'd *want* the teachers to stay current and knowledgeable. But in recent years it got to the point where I couldn't even keep track of who qualified for what.

Several teacher leavers expressed concerns with the limited amount of information they received or the extent to which the district promoted opportunities for information exchange between teachers and their colleagues, particularly for the purposes of managing changes taking place in their work. As a result, they felt inadequately prepared to make decisions or provide appropriate services for students.

One teacher whose position had recently changed from traditional resource to non-categorical services with integrated instruction reported: "It was like a whole new job. They changed the way we were delivering services and our role changed totally." She went on to recall her sense of frustration with the information void that followed implementation of the new non-categorical model:

> I don't think they ever asked for feedback about their new model. We had a very nice in-service on the consultation model and how to work with teachers. It was very helpful.
>
> But there was no follow-through on that. There were not follow-through meetings. There were meetings about specific concerns like, you know, mainstreaming and maintaining behaviors in the classroom. But we never were brought together to talk, to even share our feelings or talk about common problems and how to implement them.
>
> And I think it would have helped us to get together because, when I got to the school I was at last year, they had a really effective way of doing it that was much better than what I had tried myself, and it would have helped me to have heard them discuss how they were doing it.

3.3.4 Decision-Making Processes

In successful workplaces, workers, managers, and staff specialists achieve a partnership through learning together, bringing skills, expertise, information and mutual support to economic and technical problems. There will always be a certain class of "real-time" information and expertise among workers, specialists and managers that can be accessed only through joint discussion and mutual learning. This is notably evident under conditions of uncertainty and fast change. (Weisbord, 1987, p. 64)

Along with the centralization of information comes the centralization of control. For many of these teachers, the two went hand-in-hand. In describing her lack of current knowledge of eligibility criteria in the district, one teacher remarked: "It is like some big secret. They [the central office] will tell you whether a kid qualifies or not!"

These teachers' stories reflected a wide range of concerns about their perceived lack of involvement in key decisions that directly affected their work. At a basic level, one teacher spoke about her request for materials and equipment to support her instructional program. The first response was "no" due to lack of funds. The items were finally ordered, but she was left out of the decision . In her opinion, the materials and equipment supplied to her classroom addressed neither her original request nor her students' needs.

Two other teachers described their frustration at being separated from important decisions around curriculum selection and instructional philosophy in the district. Both were proponents of phonics, and had reservations about the whole-language method for teaching reading to students with disabilities. They were frustrated that the central office dictated a method of instruction, and particularly that it dictated a single approach for all students. One teacher described it this way:

> [The district is] saying, "This is THE way you must teach now. ...I feel you have to know what's been used, what's available. And then, you have to draw the best from each of these programs and put them together to fit the child. Some children need phonics. Some children don't. I don't say you have to stand up there and teach everybody phonics. But some children need it. They should have the opportunity to learn those skills ther

A lack of involvement in decision making around student placements was a significant theme for a number of teachers. As previously mentioned, changes in caseload composition were creating serious repercussions for many special educators.

Some teachers with longer tenure in the field remembered a time when they had been active members of the placement team, integrally involved in decisions about student placement. In contrast, they reported that these decisions were now made at the district level by administrators and supervisors, and they often only learned about a new placement when the student arrived at the classroom door. Beyond its day-to-day impact on their classroom, such lack of involvement in placement decisions represented for some teachers an implied lack of confidence in, and devaluing of, their professional opinions:

> It just seems like that special ed teachers have to follow rules that are dictated by people, maybe the program specialists and . . . the administrators who are in a service center apart from the school. Maybe they are following a higher demand that's coming from somewhere, I don't know that.

> But I know that my word has no clout whatsoever. That I can be easily overridden by people in administrative positions, people who have never met the child. And that was very upsetting to me. And I always got the feeling, too, that when I recommended a placement for a child, whether it be more restrictive placement, or-- Usually when I recommended a more restrictive placement I always felt that the people who were supposed to be on my team were feeling like I wanted to get this child out of my class, that I wanted to get rid of a behavior problem. And that was really upsetting to me, too, because I consider myself to be a professional, and that's not my way.

Finally, one teacher described her experience with school-based management, a movement founded on principles of collaborative decision-making. For this teacher, implementation of the site-based model at her school was a far cry from authentic involvement for teachers:

> I suppose in an ideal situation it could work, but it just wasted all our time and we weren't having any input into anything, it was just a total farce. We weren't able to make decisions — we weren't given decision-

making power. *We weren't empowered at all to do anything, we were just ordered to sit through more meetings and listen to people talk.*

The perceptions of a number of these leavers were reflected in the comments of one when she placed teachers squarely at the bottom on the decision-making hierarchy: "This whole district is too big. ...They hand their directives down to people, who hand them down to other people, who hand them down. And by the time things get to us--"

3.4 Central Office -Teacher Relations

Most teachers interviewed raised concerns with one or more aspects of their relationship with the central office administration, and many linked those concerns to their decisions to leave special education teaching. Teachers didn't limit their focus to "administrative support," or lack thereof — language which has become commonplace in the literature and other discussions of teachers' work. Rather, teachers discussed a more extensive range of issues, and in doing so, provided a fuller illustration of the complex nature of central office-teacher relations.

The interviews exposed several patterns of interaction between teachers and central office staff, including frequency and purpose of contact, and the effects of these patterns on teachers' work experiences. In addition, teachers discussed the extent to which they felt that their efforts were recognized and valued by the central office. We refer to the latter as "perceived support," first defined by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, and Sowa (1986) as an employee's perception of being valued and cared about by his or her organization. Over half of the teachers indicated that some or all of their special education administrators were guided by organizational values and/or priorities that were in conflict with their own. These perceptions were typically based on teachers' own assessments of administrative actions or decisions made over time.

3.4.1 Perceived Distance from Administration

In a study of organizational communication and relationships, Ray (1991) asserted that supportive ties are characterized by "depth, breadth, and a shared definition of the relationship" (p. 92) — qualities stemming largely from patterns of communication between individuals. Ray contended that as the information base that individuals share grows in depth and breadth, so too will the potential for greater trust due to an expanded basis on which individuals can accurately predict another's behavior. In order for relationship depth to develop, Ray (1991) argued that strong communication links, determined by greater frequency of interaction, are necessary.

Many teachers reported that they had little to no contact with their special education administrators while employed as special educators for the district. Some

teachers said that, after several years of employment, they had not even met many key central office staff.

> I didn't feel supported, because I didn't even know who these people were. I mean, you know, I had never met them, I had spoken to them over the phone, but I feel it's important for your superiors to become familiar with their employees.

Lack of contact was problematic for teachers because they perceived that the central office held considerable decision-making power over issues that directly affected their work. Teachers believed that judgements or decisions being made about their work were not adequately informed due to low levels of administrative contact and exposure to their day-to-day routines and caseloads. This sense of being managed from a distance left many teachers feeling misunderstood, undervalued, and powerless to effect change. As one teacher put it, "the special education teachers' hands are tied, they can do nothing, because they have to answer to people that never see children all day long and yet make significant decisions for them." One teacher spoke of her frustration when receiving feedback from a central office staff member who had never visited her classroom and was unfamiliar with it.

> One of the head people from special ed wanted to come out and see me and bring some material. This person suggested things that would really be insulting to my students if I gave it to them. And I was insulted because I thought, "You question my knowledge and you have never been out here before. You don't even know what I'm doing. You haven't sat in on my classroom, and you're telling me what to do, when you have no knowledge at all of what my classroom and my students are, and what I'm doing with them. It was just sort of mind-boggling to me, it really was. In fact, I really had to keep the tears away that day.

Ray (1991) also talked about the importance of expanding "communication breadth," and cited types of information that, if shared, may expand breadth and serve to reinforce supportive ties. These included job-related communication or discussion of job performance; social and personal concerns, defined as informal friendly communication and non-work related talk; and communication regarding innovation, that is, new ideas and new ways of doing things related to the job.

In contrast, many of the teachers we spoke with raised concerns about the narrow range of issues addressed in their dealings with central office staff. For example, teachers indicated that administrators focused, for the most part, on *monitoring their work* or unilaterally implementing quick-fix solutions to problems rather than on *proactively providing assistance* or coaching to help them successfully accomplish their work.

> I feel that they do not know what we do or care what we do — unless there's parents bitching. And then all of a sudden they just want to settle the conflict. They don't care what's going on, just settle it. I just don't feel like we're 'together for children.' So the teachers try hard. But you can't do it if you don't have support all the way up.

One teacher captured the feelings of several when she claimed that the central office was "like the police out there to make sure that I didn't qualify anybody who didn't meet the strict standards of the district." Another simply felt at a loss for what the role of the central office really was.

> I'm coming down hard on them, I guess, because I really never got a handle on what they were supposed to do (referring to program specialists and central office staff). They certainly didn't help me. At all! You know?

Further, many teachers spoke at length about their innovations in teaching and/or program design. Often these achievements, as perceived by the teacher, were based on long-term, self-initiated efforts. With frequency, teachers reported dissatisfaction with the amount of recognition they received for such work, often making statements to the effect that "nobody even noticed."

3.4.2 Perceived Support

Eisenberger et al. (1986) defined perceived organizational support as an employee's perception of being valued and cared about by his or her organization. The concept involves an employee's trust that his/her effort will be noticed and rewarded. Employees who perceive positive support are more likely to incorporate organizational membership into their self-identity (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990).

Teachers most often expressed frustration with the extent to which they felt their efforts were recognized and valued by the central office. For example, several teachers felt that their administrators rewarded them for meeting legal requirements yet paid little attention to their successes with students.

> We would get reinforced for completing our IEPs by certain dates, and it didn't matter if I had gotten 13 kids out of the self-contained in the past three years. They never recognized that. But it was, "All right, Sara, get all your paperwork done!" But it wasn't, "See, Johnny's making it, he's getting Cs and Bs in high school, in the regular class." You'd hear that from a social worker. But administration as a whole, no. They didn't really recognize that.

While teachers often talked about their paperwork responsibilities as a source of frustration, some also talked at length about going the extra mile to get it done on time, with attention to quality. Teachers reported feeling that even these efforts were not recognized or appreciated by the central office if compliance rates were not met at 100%.

> And I resented it all the time that I had my IEPs because I would try to have my IEPs way ahead of time. I was conscientious. I went above and beyond what I needed to do, you know. I made sure everyone knew way ahead of time when I was going to have an IEP planned so that they could start getting their act together. Which, you know, teachers do, but I would make them reminders and then do additional

> reminders on that. And I just got bitter towards the special ed department when they would sit there in their little offices and send us this little report card type thing, "You have an 88%" or "You have a 69%," or, you know, "You don't have 100% on your IEPs. If the speech IEP didn't come in, which is not my fault, you know. A lot of times I would hand my IEP to our program director. And if she didn't get it from everyone, I would get cited for it, or for a speech evaluation that hadn't come in, or the report from the psychologist. It always bounced on the teacher. It's not enough that you're working and trying to do your best for the kids, but then they'd-- one time I got like an 88%. And for those that got 100% they got this little packet of-- stickers and pencils . . . I didn't want that!

Some teachers described incidents in which their supervisors failed to back them up in critical situations, especially with parents and/or building administrators, or to go to bat for them in acquiring resources.

In one case, a teacher described increasing difficulties with a group of parents who were critical of her instructional program. Support from the administration was limited to a single visit by a supervisor to suggest alternative instructional materials. Problems with these parents continued for the remainder of the year. She described her final year as a special education teacher this way:

> Downtown could have backed me up. I don't feel they did; I think they were afraid of a lawsuit. But it was easier for them, see. They don't worry about what's best for the kids, at all. That's way down the line. Because what's best for the kid would have been to back me up in trying to do what was best for the kid. Instead, they want to placate the parents and to heck with the kid. And the kid goes down the tubes. It was just so physically and mentally draining, and it was degrading. I really needed an escape.

Several teachers reported feeling that they were not valued, that there was an apparent lack of regard for their opinions, and that they were not treated as professional equals. And as one teacher put it, the important thing was not always in getting the resources, but rather in feeling that someone was out there advocating for her needs.

> I always knew that if I asked for another person or something that was going to cost money, I might get it and I might not. But for people to feel that what I was doing was worthwhile is really what I would have wanted.

> I think if I had felt that they really cared about what was going on. And even if I felt they cared and they couldn't do anything about it, it'd be better than, just this feeling like they really didn't care.

Other times teachers felt devalued as a result of the way they were informed about changes that would affect their work. For example, several teachers reported being notified of their program's elimination or transfer by mail. According to these teachers, such notifications often came at the last minute, and it was not clear to them that such a delay was necessary. Teachers interpreted the style and timing of

these communications as impersonal, as they left teachers feeling devalued and questioning the importance of their role in the organization.

3.4.3 Perceptions in Conflicting Priorities or Values

Eisenberger et al. (1986) argued that "perceived organizational support would be influenced by various aspects of an employee's treatment by the organization and would, in turn, influence the employee's interpretation of organizational motives underlying that treatment (p. 501)." Over half of the teachers interviewed discussed a common belief that some or all of their special education administrators were guided by underlying values and/or priorities that were in conflict with their own. Teachers often cited this type of conflict as a sizable contributing factor to their decisions to leave special education teaching. Many of the stories suggested that these teachers perceived an adversarial basis to their relationships with the central office.

In most cases, teachers formed perceptions about administrative values and priorities, not based on direct discussion with administrators, *but rather on their interpretations of administrative decisions and/or actions taken over time.* In the absence of direct communication, teachers tended to draw their own conclusions regarding administrators' values and priorities. For example, when administrators recognized or rewarded special education faculty for meeting paperwork goals, while paying little attention to teachers' successes with students, teachers often interpreted this to mean that administrators prioritize or value legal compliance over making meaningful strides with students.

Several teachers reported receiving a packet of "pencils and stickers" from the special education division as kudos for meeting paperwork goals. This response to compliance, when coupled with the absence of positive feedback regarding teachers' student-related achievements (or with ongoing shortages of resources), was often perceived as a conflict in values by teachers and was discussed as a marked source of frustration.

> And they sent me my little packet of pencils. What a joke. (laughs) But I think that probably drove me over, those kind of things. To have new forms every year . . . and here I begged for computers for my kids, because they couldn't do the work.
>
> I don't, I didn't feel that people were backing up the students' needs. But that they were covering their legal behinds.

In one case, a teacher discussed her conflict in values as they became evident through a conversation with one of her administrators:

> I've even had the administration tell me to my face, "We are only required to do the minimum. We don't have to do a maximum. We just have to do what the law says." Period. That's it. Anything more, and there's no support for it. They draw the line right there. I mean, there's

> no vision for what a good special education department does. There's no good vision for what good teachers do.

Additionally, several teachers reported believing that administrative decisions were based, to a large extent, on economic criteria without regard to what is best for children. Again, teachers drew these conclusions from their interpretations of decisions made by administrators and not from any discussion between the two parties regarding the underlying values giving rise to these administrative decisions.

> You know, not caring that you need equipment for those kids. In this program, not caring that these kids needed computers, because they were physically handicapped, but "Oh, we don't have the money right now." And yet when they purchased computers, they purchased all kinds of crap that we didn't need.

> They're looking at figures and money on paper. And they see that, "Oh, this program takes a teacher, an aide, and an interpreter. Wow! That's a lot of money! Let's cut that one out."

Several teachers talked about unfavorable administrative decisions regarding their special education programs and attributed these to a perception that administrators tended to be more concerned with containing costs and meeting efficiency standards than they were with providing and maintaining optimal learning environments for children. In each case, administrative actions were seen as reflecting conflicting values, and teachers were left feeling outside of the decision loop.

> I see people putting kids in slots and not really even caring if it's the right slot. It's just like they come in and we're going to stick 'em over here, and nobody cares. I don't see any caring from the administration now as to what's happening with these kids. And I don't think anybody's saying, "Hey! We're in this for the kids!"

> You know, before [the current administration], any time that we said, "You know, this child needs to either move out or move on," they didn't say, you know, "Well, he hasn't been there long enough," or "It's not the right time of year." Or you know, anything. I mean, it was done, it was done for the child, it wasn't of convenience to anybody else, it was for the child.

In one case, a teacher explained how the NS program in her school had been dismantled because a school administrator determined that it was not financially "sound."

> Then the administration changed and decided that this was not appropriate . . . having two teachers in a classroom with 25 students was not sound. And that this would have to end. All teachers were withdrawn from classes.

In the absence of discussion between administrators and teachers regarding what influences administrative decisions, teachers tended to draw their own conclusions. Often they assumed an "us" versus "them" relationship, believing that

their fundamental values for special education directly conflicted with those of the central office. In a recent study of teacher workplace commitment, Kushman (1992) asserts that organizational commitment is reflected in the degree to which a person experiences a sense of shared values with their organization:

> Organizational commitment refers to the degree that an individual internalizes organizational values and goals and feels a sense of loyalty to the workplace. This type of commitment reflects an alignment between individual and organizational needs and values, thereby resulting in a strong unity of purpose among workers and work groups. (p. 7)

Based of the frequency and intensity with which these teachers discussed conflicts in values with their special education administrators, there is evidence that these leavers experienced particularly low levels of organizational commitment during the period leading to their decisions to leave special education teaching.

3.5 Match: Fit Between Teacher and Assignment

There are many dimensions upon which an individual and a job must match in order to form an employment relationship that is satisfactory to both the job holder and the employing organization. Teaching assignments, for example, are characterized by numerous and diverse requirements and rewards, both intrinsic and extrinsic in nature. Teachers, on the other hand, are characterized, minimally, by their level of qualification, professional and personal expectations, values, and pedagogical beliefs. A critical and often overlooked issue in staffing is the degree of fit or match between the characteristics of the person and the job. The importance of match cannot be overemphasized, as it impacts many vital organizational outcomes including job performance, employee satisfaction, and retention.

The importance of match was evident in the career stories of all 17 of these former special education teachers. In two cases, match appeared as a central theme of the story. Both of these teachers chronicled years of unsuccessful attempts to secure an assignment that fit their professional interests and perceived skills. In both cases, their low seniority in the district served as a major deterrent to their success. Using a more fluid conception of match and mismatch helps to understand the series of frustrations and successes in the twenty-plus year career of a teacher who wove in and out of bilingual education and special education, through a variety of teaching, counseling, and administrative jobs that variously fit her *evolving* professional interests and skills.

In the majority of cases, the decision to leave special education teaching in the district was influenced, at least in part, by teachers' dissatisfaction with the low degree of match they experienced with various aspects of their current assignments. For a few teachers the reverse was true. These teachers had secured well suited

assignments but were faced with district-initiated changes that necessitated a move. In each case, the teacher tended to go where the degree of match appeared greatest, even if that meant leaving special education.

In most cases, the basis of poor fit went well beyond teachers' personal preferences for a particular type of assignment. Match appeared to relate, more often, to a heightened degree of incompatibility between teachers' professional expectations and values, and the various requirements and rewards embedded in their assignments. For some of these teachers, professional interests or approaches to teaching may trace back to what sparked their initial interest in special education teaching as a career, or to the focus and content of their initial teacher training program. For others, their professional views were tied to their career experiences, reflecting many years of trial and error and pedagogical development.

In the context of match, three major aspects of assignment surfaced repeatedly in teachers' stories: a) the specific special education service delivery model or program, b) the school in which the teacher worked, and c) the particular population of students assigned to the teacher.

3.5.1 Special Education Service Delivery Model

Over half of the teachers with whom we spoke raised the issue of match between themselves and aspects of the service delivery model in which they had been working the year they decided to leave. Highlighting the truly individual nature of the match question, several separate themes and sub-themes were evident.

Most frequently, these teachers indicated a desire to spend more time providing direct instructional services to students and less time coordinating with classroom teachers and serving essentially as "case managers" of students' schedules and programs. The particulars of each case were relative to the nature of the current assignment.

For three teachers, the fragmented nature of the resource model presented a barrier to doing the kind of teaching they were dedicated to. One had been working in a self-contained special classroom but was forced to make an assignment change due to enrollment shifts. Three years before, she had worked briefly as a resource teacher and had never felt comfortable with the fragmented nature of the schedule in that setting. She described her decision to return to a 6th grade classroom this way:

> [The district] was going toward more and more integration into the classrooms. I feel--I need a classroom of my own. There's something about the challenge of this bare room and making it into a learning environment that I enjoy. And so I needed that. I missed that when I was [in the resource room program] there. It changed every hour -- the components changed. That resource room would not be, quote, my room. They're pushing you to get out into the [general education classrooms] -- it's not a pull-out [model] You go to their room more often than

not. And I didn't want that. [I wanted] a situation where I could have my room and my space.

Two others who were each working in a more traditional resource, pull-out model expressed a similar desire to return to a self-contained classroom:

> I wanted to get out of resource. I wanted my own class...so that I could teach content areas -- so that I could teach P.E., and art, different things like that -- the units -- instead of just targeting skills. Although I would do units and group things, but, it wasn't like they were my students. They'd just come in, we'd work on certain skills. I wanted my own class. I wanted that kind of bonding and to be able to have a whole day to do whatever I wanted.

> With a self-contained class, you just do your own thing. You can, you know. And that's why I wanted to get out of special ed anyway, because I wanted again to be able to have control of my own class. I wanted to be in charge of what was going on. Because once I got into resource I wasn't in charge.

Both left special education for general education classroom teaching assignments in their respective schools.

For four others, the concern centered more on the increased push toward a more collaborative/consultative model. For each of these former special educators, being a teacher meant working directly with students and being able to actually see their progress. Further, several had both philosophical and practical reservations about the new consultation model. They were clearly not convinced that this approach to special education service was truly in the best interests of students.

One teacher's story provides an illustration of this concern. Hired as a speech therapist, she had been told her role was to consult and collaborate with the classroom teacher rather than to individually work with the students. Yet she noted, for example, that one student diagnosed with autism clearly needed direct therapy time. "He was nonverbal. He needed sign language. The teacher didn't sign." She went on: "I saw a lot of these kids, especially in the preschool population, that were very needy, and I really strongly believe in early intervention. And we were just told that we're consultants." This teacher ultimately left and set up a private therapy practice in her home.

Another speech/language pathologist had spent many years working in a self-contained special education classroom teaching reading to students diagnosed as having significant language delays or impairments. When the self-contained classes were closed by the district, this teacher returned to an itinerant service delivery model, providing short-term speech therapy to students. As she spoke, the lack of match on pedagogical grounds was glaring. After several apparently frustrating years, she chose to retire early. Before turning in her paperwork, however, she negotiated an instructional assistant assignment in a middle school where she was allowed to teach reading to small groups of students who were experiencing difficulty learning to read through conventional instruction.

Professionally, this assignment was a perfect match for her. She started this new job immediately after retirement.

In contrast, the frustration of two other teachers stemmed from their *not* being allowed to implement the recommended consultative, co-teaching model in their respective schools. Both had prior experience working as co-teachers in general education settings and were firm believers in that approach for meeting the needs of students with disabilities. In one case, the school principal deemed the program economically unsound and eliminated it, requiring a return to the more traditional pull-out service approach. In the other, the program was eliminated due to a drop in student enrollment at the school, coupled with similar administrative concerns about the fiscal efficiency of staffing an in-class approach for a small group of students.

The following excerpts are taken from the interview with one of these teachers. They illustrate the connection between this teacher's professional philosophy and beliefs about what her students most need and her stated "preference" for a particular service delivery model.

> For the first two years [at this school] I sort of got my bearings and I also became involved in diagnostic work. So I got to see more about how the students were identified and placed into the programs, and really what their capabilities were. And I became convinced that they weren't that different, that I'd been right all along. What is required is better teaching and better material. . . . Holding them in a place where they felt even more unusually set apart, and [were] made to feel less worthy was not the way to entice them into learning the skills they needed. I came from the philosophy that it is not *your* kids and *my* kids, but *our* kids. And there were several teachers . . . who embraced that. . . . And they became my core of support in the school environment. They were such good teachers, and they had no special education experience, but it just proved to me that good instruction with exciting materials and that essence of commitment and absolute love for what they were doing was what was important. . . . For four years I taught with [these teachers]. Then the administration [of the school] changed and [the new administrator] decided that this was not appropriate -- that the numbers of students in the classes with the numbers of teachers, having two teachers in a classroom with 25 students, was not sound, and that this would have to end.

After the return to the more traditional special education model, this teacher continued to work in the school for 3 years. At that point, however, based on the interaction of several work-related and personal factors, she was faced with a decision about continuing her work there or moving on. In contemplating her options, the tension resulting from the poor current match between her beliefs -- based on what she had seen to be both effective and exciting -- and the service model mandated by the new principal was listed as the "number one" consideration. As she put it, "I realized I was in a place where I was more or less alone philosophically. This special education program was not the one that I was devoted to. It was not working the way I believed it should work." She chose to leave special education, and moved into a general education teaching position in her school where she could continue integrating students diagnosed with mild academic disabilities.

Finally, one leaver based her decision, at least in part, on a basic philosophical disagreement with the premise of *all current* special education service models. When asked to summarize the factors that influenced her decision to move out of special education and into a compensatory reading instruction program, she quickly explained:

> I really like to be more proactive than reactive. Because special education won't identify children until they're in 2nd grade at least, or 3rd grade, it means that these kids have already had two years of failure. I don't like to see kids experience failure for so long. If we could intervene earlier without labeling, it would be much more productive. So that was one -- the labeling, and the late intervention versus early.

Most prominent across the stories of match between teacher and service model is how these teachers' stated preferences are based on their professional philosophies and beliefs. Understanding the origin of these beliefs might provide a key to designing efforts to enhance match in this area.

In some instances, stated beliefs could be traced back to the perspective of the initial special education training program. The speech pathologist's emphasis on one-to-one and small group therapy presents an excellent example. Further, the current skill repertoire of an individual teacher is also worth consideration. Inherent in these different service models are different roles and responsibilities for the special educator -- each requiring a somewhat unique set of skills. For example, the skills required for consultation with other adults are different than the skills required for teaching reading. Interestingly, few of the teachers made an explicit connection between their preferred service delivery model and their perceptions of their own current levels of professional skills.

Stated philosophies can also be linked directly to the specifics of career experiences -- to what the teacher has done, what is familiar and comfortable. New models generally represent significant change away from the familiar, and as such include inherent risks, particularly for a veteran.

It should be noted, however, that most of these teachers tied their stated philosophies to what they had personally seen work and not work. They were not arguing merely for a return to the familiar. To some extent, their concerns about service delivery model may reflect the fact that, in initiating programmatic changes, local districts frequently fail to take into account either the individual or the collective craft knowledge of its teaching staff. Yet teachers' experiential knowledge can represent a rich source of data to guide a district's efforts to improve programs and services for its students.

3.5.2 The School Site

The school site as an important component of assignment is a comparatively new theme for special educators. Some 30 years ago, most special education programs were housed in segregated locations. Later, even as these programs moved onto general education campuses, the choice of school was not viewed as a particularly important decision. Initially, special education programs were most often located in separate wings, basements, or backyard portable buildings, and they operated on a schedule independent of the instructional schedule of the host school. Further, these programs were both staffed and administered separately.

Increasingly across the last two decades, however, the operative word in the field of special education has been "integration." The focus is on integrated locations for special education programs, integrated service models for students enrolled in special education, integrated administration of the various instructional programs serving all students, and integration of the work of special and general education teachers. Based on our interviews, it was clear that the school is no longer viewed narrowly as simply the location for the special education program. In fact, for many of these former special education teachers the choice of school was frequently central to the overall discussion of teacher-assignment match. More to the point, these stories provide evidence that choice of school at times played a key role in special education teacher attrition.

As was the case with service delivery model, several themes were evident in the career stories told by these teachers. At the most basic level, one theme was that of *history* -- possibly translated as familiarity. A number of these teachers had spent many years working in the same school. When faced with either their own desire for a program change or, more often, a district-mandated program change, allegiance to school played a clear role in their final decision about their next assignment.

One leaver had moved infrequently over her 36 year career as first a general education and later a special education teacher. In fact, her last 11 years had been in the same building. As she described it, she was nearing, but not quite ready for, retirement when a drop in the enrollment of her NS program presented her with a major choice. She could continue working in her current school at a reduced FTE, transfer to a full-time NS position in a new building, or combine part-time NS positions in two buildings to equal a full-time FTE.

She quickly rejected the third option, preferring not to attempt to juggle a split school assignment, but also felt strongly that she could not transfer to a new building in order to retain her full-time job. As she described it: "I wanted Central Elementary because I enjoyed it there so much. I thought it was an outstanding faculty and principal and the general esprit de corps and cooperation and the whole outlook of the school, I thought, was so positive. ...I didn't want to go anywhere else except Central." A particularly attractive retirement incentive was offered by the

state that spring. In this teacher's case continuing to work part-time would have actually produced lower income than retiring. Very reluctantly, she opted to retire.

The role of school preference based on longevity was somewhat more indirect -- but clearly a contributing factor -- for two other teachers. Here, school preference ultimately led to problems. One had spent all 12 years of her teaching career working in the same school in a self-contained special classroom for students labeled Educably Mentally Habdicapped, when an enrollment drop forced relocation of the program. The other had been in her building for the last 18 years providing resource services to students with hearing impairments when she became faced with a required assignment change. In order to remain in their schools, both of these teachers opted to transfer into the NS position in their respective buildings, a move which represented a significantly different type of special education setting for them.

The first teacher described her decision this way: "I didn't want to leave the building. I really liked the people; and it's close to home. I was really involved in activities, faculty things." After a most difficult year as a NS teacher, she worked out an early retirement, and left feeling very bitter about her lack of success that final year. The second teacher held out in her new assignment for three years, but never really seemed to settle into the NS model. Ultimately, she also took early retirement.

One aspect of school allegiance worthy of special note was that of strong, positive collegial relationships. Most often, these relationships were between the special educator and one or more classroom teachers. In some cases, however, the supportive role of the principal was also key. The story of Anne provides an excellent illustration of the power such relationships can have on the overall functioning and success of the special education teacher's work.

Over a 10-year period starting in 1975, Anne had worked in both self-contained classroom and itinerant special education assignments in a number of schools in the district. In 1985, she took a position at White Elementary working in what was then set up as a pull-out program for students with varying degrees of hearing impairment. She remained in that position for the next seven years. In reviewing her career, Anne called her time at White "a period of growth that I just will treasure forever."

Anne described her initial frustrations with the pull-out model and her desire to increase the meaningful integration of her students. Then she related the slow but steady process she undertook to build strong working relationships with her general education colleagues to facilitate that end. According to Anne, what helped most was the consistent support and encouragement she received from her building principal.

> She was concerned about educating the kids. She talked about the important stuff and she cared about what the kids were learning and how they were learning it. [As part of a district-wide initiative on improving schools,] she had

> meetings with all of us, and asked US what we wanted to work on, what we thought we'd like to see happening in the school.

Sometime during her fourth year at White, the principal arranged for Anne and two of her general education colleagues to participate in a summer leadership academy. During this time together, the three formed a real team, resulting in the subsequent development of a functioning co-teaching model between these special and general educators. Anne was obviously extremely proud of the model they built and the success they were having with the students enrolled in the program. She described the overall effect on her this way: "I started feeling a sense of power -- in being able to do something and being able to change things."

Three years later, however, as a result of low student enrollment, the program at White was discontinued. Understandably, Anne was devastated. In relating her decision to leave special education and move into a general education classroom at White, Anne stated simply:

> I had tremendous support from the principal at that school, and didn't want to lose that support. So I decided to get out of the special education program because I was hating what was going on. And I knew that I'd still get supported by her, so I just wanted to stay there.

Allegiance to the school did not always depend on a long tenure or a stellar principal. For some, their current school was *just a good overall fit* resulting from some combination of the kids, the faculty, the administration, and, in a couple of cases, even the location. Of the 27 teachers in the full 1991-92 leaver cohort for this district, eight moved into general education teaching assignments in the district. Interestingly, for six of these eight, their move to a classroom teaching position allowed them to remain in their current and *preferred* school.

In the area of teacher-school match, more than any other, the issue of personal -- as opposed to professional -- preference was occasionally evident in the discussion. Two teachers specifically indicated that personal factors played a role in their decisions to remain in their school. One noted she had recently purchased a home in the neighborhood and wished to work close to her home. The other spoke about the close personal friendships she had developed at the school. More often, however, the personal and professional somewhat merged. Teachers spoke generally about liking the school and the people -- the students, the faculty, the administrators -- and feeling comfortable there.

The other end of the continuum was also evident, however. There were several clear cases where teachers had spent years cultivating positive working relationships with colleagues -- relationships that they saw as essential to the success of their efforts to integrate their students into the academic and social life of the school. These relationships, then, became for them tight links to the school.

3.5.3 Population of Students Taught

In listening to these teachers, it was clear that while special educators generally see themselves as relatively eclectic, they also have some preferences regarding the types of students with whom they work. Special education students range from three-year old preschoolers to 21-year-olds ready to transition into life after school; from students experiencing mild academic difficulties to those experiencing significant developmental disabilities or delays; from those who have some level of hearing or vision impairment to those classified as medically fragile.

For some, affinities for teaching a certain type of student can be traced back to a time before they began their careers -- to those factors that initially influenced them to consider working in special education. A teacher of students labeled hearing impaired or deaf spoke of two close high school friends who were deaf, and how her friendship with them had led her from what was initially a mild curiosity to what eventually became a strong professional interest in language and communication. Another went back to her college days and spoke of her experience working part-time in a residential home for people with significant physical and developmental disabilities. She eventually switched her major to psychology and then to special education so that she could continue this work professionally. One teacher spoke of the rewards of working with teenagers to learn job skills, while another shared her enjoyment of helping preschool children learn language.

For others, the preferences appeared tied to the content and focus of their training programs, to their prior teaching experience, or even to their own assessments of their current skill levels.

Across these 17 interviews, there was only one case in which a mismatch based on type of student was directly linked to the leaving decision. The first 19 years of Mary's career had been spent teaching in general education classrooms in rural Iowa. She worked at the elementary level, particularly grades 5 and 6. In explaining her decision to seek a Master's degree in special education, Mary said: "I wanted to use what I thought would be some new techniques for behavioral problems in a regular classroom."

Mary's first special education assignment as a middle school resource teacher was a reasonable match for her, though the resource room model itself took some getting use to. But after two years in that setting, staffing cut-backs and reassignments eliminated her position. Because her Masters included an ED endorsement, she was offered a position in a primary, self-contained special class for students labeled emotionally handicapped. The move represented a double challenge for Mary in terms of student population -- the age of the students and the nature of their needs. She describes it this way:

> I remember asking them at that time, "Are you sure you want me in a primary classroom?" I had not taught 3rd grade even for years, and that's not as primary as you're talking. "Are you sure?" "Yes. Are you saying you don't want it?"

> "No, no, no, I want to teach!" So that's how I got into it. But, you know, rural Iowa -- the severity of the student is very different. It's a very different picture in this city. ...The kids that I had before were certainly not behavioral disordered; they were just going through a rough time and having some rough adjustments to life that affected their behaviors. They would not be, quote, labeled, I don't believe.

Mary lasted for two years and told of multiple highs and lows during that time. She described her decision to leave special education and return to a 6th grade classroom this way:

> It was my choice to go back into a regular classroom. I was fairly burned out. I had to have a hysterectomy last summer. So it was one of those deals where I think maybe I'd rather go back to a regular classroom.

At the time of leaving, Mary said: "I felt defeated -- or like I hadn't done what I was supposed to do somehow or another." In contrast, she described her new assignment as "essentially what I started out to do when I first started to take classes [for my Master's]."

While not as central as Mary's, some sense of mismatch between teacher and student population did play a role in a number of other leaving stories. Reflecting both social changes and district-initiated changes in service delivery models, several teachers spoke of the gradual increase in the severity of disabilities in the students being assigned to their classes. One teacher, for example, moved from a self-contained to a resource program at least in part due to her sense of the changing composition of her caseload. Her background was teaching academics, and many of her new students required a more functional curriculum. She never settled into the new setting, however, and after what she described as a particularly frustrating year she chose an early retirement.

In contrast, another teacher whose interest and background was working with young students with multiple physical and developmental disabilities told of struggling through 3 years in an intermediate resource room where the focus was academics. The stress of that adjustment, coupled with multiple organizational and personal factors, led to her decision to move out of special education and into a general education classroom.

Particularly in the area of match with student population, some teachers' stated preferences reflected work assignments where they felt they could be most effective. The comments of these two teachers provide illustrations of the concerns expressed by a number of their colleagues:

> I feel I was mostly successful with kids who had learning problems, or skill deficiencies. I wasn't terribly successful with kids who had social dysfunction, kids who were coming out of very dysfunctional families with no support at school, no support from social agencies.

> I had children [in my resource room] that had been labeled I D, but I thought that they were more [developmentally disabled]. There weren't many, but I think that's maybe what started my frustration -- that I didn't have the background. I was always having to call my girlfriend [and ask], "Am I doing this right? Is this too much? What's typical?"

Discussions with a local administrator reinforced this issue. She noted that until very recently local special education teacher training programs had been categorically organized. As such, the content and focus of these programs were often a poor match for the realities of the NS programs used in the district.

3.5.4 General Observations About Teacher-Assignment Match

These three aspects of assignment, service delivery model, school site, and student population seldom surfaced alone. Rather, they were most often interrelated such that the search for a good match required a trade-off of sorts for the individual teacher. While each story had its own unique set of circumstances, the story of Jane provides a representative example. Having worked in both self-contained special classes and resource programs across her 13 years in special education, Jane expressed a clear preference for the classroom setting. During what was to be her last year in special education, however, Jane agreed to take a resource position in her school at the request of her principal. For a number of reasons, the year did not go well. At the end of the year, Jane concluded, "I wanted to get out of resource. I wanted my own class." Unfortunately, there was no special class opening at the school. Allegiance to her school further complicated the decision for Jane: "I didn't want to just leave the school and teach someplace else. I like the school. I also like the people. And I just bought a house...in the neighborhood." Ultimately, she opted to remain in the school, leave special education teaching, and move into a general education classroom position.

In looking across these interviews and considering the theme of assignment-teacher match, several general observations deserve mention.

The Temporal Link Between Match And The Attrition Decision

In looking across these stories, we were interested in the temporal link between teacher-assignment match and the decision to leave special education teaching. Would, for example, a teacher's perception of serious mismatch lead immediately to attrition? Conversely, to what extent might perceived mismatch contribute to overall job dissatisfaction which, over time, would influence first a desire and ultimately a decision to leave?

The 17 stories of this leaver cohort included examples of both ends of this continuum and many that fell somewhere in between. Several teachers left when their assignment no longer matched their professional interests and skills. In contrast, one teacher spent her whole career unable to get an assignment that was

truly a fit for her. Her great interest and career goal was to work with primary level children who had physical impairments: "...to me that was ideal. To me, that was something to strive for." There were only a handful of these positions in the district, however, and low seniority generally prevented her from securing one of the slots. Thus, she spent nine years as a special education teacher in the district, working in three different schools and special education settings, none of which were a particularly good fit for her. She never seemed to actually settle in. Rather, the stress seemed to build and, particularly over the final four years of her special education teaching career, overflowed to her home, negatively affecting her health. This teacher described her career this way:

> The way I see it, I was put somewhere or I went somewhere and I made the best of it. Then I went somewhere else and I made the best of it. I never really-- My long-term goals when I first started were to be in the physically handicapped class. And even until last year my goal was to get into the physically handicapped--in primary class. I just got really burnt out. . . . I've never really had [the experience of]: "This is what I'm going to do" -- and had that happen.

She finally opted to move out of special education and into a general education classroom.

More often, the timing of the link between mismatch and attrition was less extreme -- neither immediate nor stretching through the entire career period. Rather, the career stories of a number of these teachers revealed that individuals often lasted one, two, three or even more years in an assignment that represented a poor match for them before making a move to change the situation. Yet it was equally clear for several of these teachers that their final decision to leave traced back at least in part to frustration built up over time resulting from poor teacher-assignment match.

The Effect Of The Move On Assignment-Match

We were interested in the degree to which the move out of special education represented an actual move toward a better fit for the individual. Once again, the stories reflected great variation.

Even across the six teachers who chose retirement, reactions to the move ranged from some degree of contentment to some level of regret -- what one retiree labeled "retirement grief." In fact, several retirees indicated that they continued to be available as substitutes and enjoyed the opportunity to return to the classroom. One went even further and began working after retirement as an instructional assistant in order to be able to teach in a setting that better matched her educational philosophy and career goals.

Of the eleven teachers who resigned, rather than retired, from special education teaching, there was evidence that five made changes that reflected a clear improvement in teacher-assignment match. One teacher, for example, who had been

prevented from implementing a co-teaching model in her school, moved into a general education classroom assignment in the building where she was able to continue working with her general education colleagues to enhance the integration of students with mild academic difficulties. Another who seriously questioned the remedial focus of special education moved into a compensatory reading program with a strong preventative focus.

In contrast, the remaining six resignees would have to be characterized as "in transition." Their current assignments reflected more a move away from what was troubling them in special education than a move toward a better assignment match.

Current Challenges to Teacher-Assignment Match.

Finally, these interviews provided some evidence that teachers' efforts to improve the fit of their assignment may be increasingly coming head-to-head with both fiscal realities and current trends in special education service delivery. This played out in a couple of ways.

Undeniably, special education was changing in this district. In the face of these changes, mismatch did not always happen as a result of a new assignment. Rather, at times it happened gradually to a teacher who had been in the same assignment for years as the nature of that assignment changed. Teachers, for example, who desired to work in self-contained special classes were finding that these programs were gradually being eliminated. Teachers whose professional interests, training, and/or perceived skills were matched to a particular population of students were increasingly facing greater severity and diversity of need in their caseloads.

Further, it appeared that the changes in the district's programs were also causing more frequent movement of special education teachers across assignments within the district. When we looked at the list of in-district transfers for the 1991-92 school year, only one move represented a voluntary transfer initiated by the teacher. The remaining transfers were termed "district-initiated" and resulted from enrollment fluctuations, student and/or program relocations, and program redesign or elimination. Each forced change presented a challenge to teacher-assignment match.

The challenge was made even more difficult by the transfer policies of this district, many dictated by the existing contract with the teachers' union. Given that the teacher held the appropriate credential for the position, reassignment was generally based predominantly on seniority. Although dislocated teachers did have an opportunity to apply for positions that interested them, in most cases a job went to the most senior applicant who qualified for the position. Teachers who failed to secure preferred assignments were matched by district administrators to the remaining openings based in large part on the special education credential they held. Because special education credentials were generally broad and qualified

teachers for a wide range of program types and disability categories, the potential for mismatch from the perspective of the teacher -- as well as the district -- was great.

The new NS program presented another example. Because the program was non-categorical, any special education certificate was acceptable. As one administrator explained, if in August, as most of the openings have been filled, you are left with an NS slot and a teacher with a certificate, training, and experience in hearing impairments, you are in effect forced to make that match because it is appropriate by the guidelines -- even though that teacher may have no background either in behavior or learning disabilities. She went on to say that some teachers refused to report having certain certificates, particularly SED endorsements, because they did not want to be matched to those classes.

One interesting loophole was reported, however. Teachers in a given building had first choice for any openings in that building. The only requirements were that the teacher have the proper teaching credential and the principal agree to the move. This policy may well account, at least in part, for the increased movement of special education teachers into general education classrooms in their current school buildings.

3.6 The Dynamic and Complex Nature of Leaving

Beyond the focus on specific factors that influence attrition decisions, these interviews taken as a group provide support for a number of broader observations about the nature of leaving. Most importantly, they reaffirm the view of leaving as a complex process. The decision to leave a job or to change careers is rarely simple; more commonly, it emerges gradually from the interactions of multiple factors, both personal and professional, which change in shape and influence over time.

In the final section of this chapter, we briefly discuss four broad observations about leaving drawn from the career and leaving stories of the 17 former special education teachers of District 1.

3.6.1 Leaving: The Interaction of Multiple Factors

Taken together, the three themes discussed in this chapter (job design, relations with central office, and fit of assignment) reflect the full range of work-related issues raised by these teachers as influential to their leaving decisions. At some level each theme is distinct, thereby allowing us to look more closely at its meaning and the various ways it plays out in the careers of individual teachers.

However, it should be stressed that in no case was the leaving story of a teacher based solely on one of these three themes. This interrelationship among the themes makes it impossible, with any confidence, to attempt to quantify or compare

the relative influence of one to the other. In fact, themes lose meaning when viewed as competing rather than interrelated forces. Taken together they provide a more realistic indicator of the complexity of the work experience and, therefore, of the work-related issues that influence the leaving decision.

3.6.2 The Influence of Personal Factors

As reflected in our original framework, work-related factors are not presumed to be the sole explanation for attrition. Factors external to the work often clearly play some role. As part of these interviews, we encouraged teachers to reflect on the relationship between their lives outside of work and their lives as special education teachers. We particularly asked teachers to talk about their sense of the influence of their personal lives on their leaving decision.

Drawing strictly on these teachers' own attributions, 3 of the 17 cited personal factors as *primary* in their decisions to leave special education teaching. The issues for these teachers centered on their own health, the health of a family member, and/or various life style changes such as remarriage or a spouse's recent retirement. It should be noted, however, that all three stories also included clear evidence of dissatisfaction with major aspects of the work experience.

An additional five teachers cited personal factors as *contributing* to their decisions. For each of these teachers, the decision was presented as a combination of work-related concerns and personal factors that supported the attrition decision. In looking across their stories, two patterns emerged. In some cases, teachers talked about a desire to achieve a better balance between their work and family lives. Ultimately, their search for balance influenced their decision to leave. One teacher, for example, had been working part-time. Her inability to continue her current part-time assignment in special education, coupled with some very real concerns about the way her work was structured, led to her decision to transfer to a part-time general education teaching position in her building. In other cases, however, the issue was not simply one of balance. Rather, the leaving stories reflected simultaneously increasing stress in both work and home environments. In an effort to reduce this stress, two teachers moved into general education classroom positions, and a third chose to retire.

Interestingly, for over half of these teacher leavers, personal factors were not viewed as relevant to their leaving decisions and were not included in the leaving story presented during the interview.

Roughly one third of the teachers we interviewed retired at the end of the school year. We were curious about the nature of those retirement decisions and the extent to which they differed from the attrition decisions of colleagues who remained in education but outside of special education teaching. In fact, the six retirees were represented in all three groups. Two of the six cited personal factors as

primary, reflecting both health and lifestyle changes. One retiree saw personal factors as contributing but acknowledged growing dissatisfaction with aspects of the work experience.

The remaining three did not feel that personal factors entered into their retirement decisions. Two of the three stressed that they were retiring earlier than they had planned based solely on growing frustrations with their work. For a third, enrollment shifts in her program had presented her with a dilemma. She could continue working in her school but drop down to part time; she could continue in her school part time and add a second school to complete her full-time position; or she could request a transfer to a new building. Based on the retirement incentive being offered, the first option would have actually netted her less income, as she already qualified for retirement at full salary. Because she felt that the second two options were not acceptable, she reluctantly retired. While some of these leavers reported missing aspects of their work in special education, this teacher was the only one of the seventeen to express unqualified regret about her leaving decision. While acknowledging that she was looking forward to increased time to travel, she described herself as currently in a period of "retirement grief."

3.6.3 A Decision Made Over Time

Our interviews with this group of leavers clearly supported the assumption that the attrition decision is made over time. With only a few exceptions, the stories of these teachers provided evidence of issues dating back multiple years. This was true even in the cases of two teachers who concentrated their attention on issues stemming from their final year in the special education classroom.

Across the group, a couple of different patterns were evident. For some teachers, the decision to leave could be traced back several years either to a significant work-related event never recovered from or to some imposed change never fully adjusted to. In these cases, the past event or change prompted a desire to leave that increased with time.

The stories of other teachers more closely reflected the proverb that "it is not the 500th blow that cracks the stone of granite, but the 499 that came before." These leavers presented a series of smaller work-related issues, concerns, or events that were somewhat cumulative.

Reflecting the work-related categories outlined in the previous section of this chapter, teachers' concerns most frequently centered around changes in the service delivery model -- both the instructional and non-instructional components of the job--as well as the adequacy of support available to them as they attempted to respond to those changes. Further, for several teachers who had longer careers and were, therefore, in a position to compare or contrast the present with their memory of the past, the various changes they were dealing with were translated into an

increasing sense of conflicting priorities, values, or goals between themselves and the district.

3.6.4 External Forces Prompting Reflection and Change

Focusing more narrowly on the final year or months of their tenures as special education teachers, the stories of these leavers document an interesting pattern. Fourteen of seventeen attrition decisions can be linked to an external force. This included both the availability of a new opportunity as well as forced changes. The key is that in each case it was something unplanned for and external to the teachers' ongoing personal and work-related issues.

For eight teachers, a newly presented opportunity was the stimulus. In five cases, the opportunity consisted of a special retirement incentive offered by the state. In two additional cases, it consisted of an unsolicited offer for different work which better matched the teacher's personal or professional needs. The final teacher had a personal opportunity to relocate with her partner.

Rather than seeking an opportunity, the remaining six teachers reacted to a forced change in their working situations. Due to some combination of enrollment shifts and programmatic adjustments, these teachers were notified that their current positions were no longer available for the coming year. They were given no choice but to investigate alternative assignments.

While there are obvious differences between the availability of new opportunities and the realities of mandated changes, the two have something in common. Both provide teachers with a stimulus for reflection on their current work situations and assessment of future options.

Most teachers directly linked these opportunities or forced changes to their actual leaving decisions. Some teachers went even further by observing that without this turn of events they would probably still be working--though somewhat reluctantly -- in their former positions as special education teachers.

> [Due to a programmatic change] I was able to transfer out, but that was just an accident. I mean, if that hadn't happened, I probably would still be there, and I would just be doing a lot less than could be done. I mean, I would do my best, but it was not what I wanted to be doing.

This pattern of external stimulus as a pre-condition for reflection upon working conditions, and ultimately as a prompt for attrition decisions, is evidence that dissatisfaction alone does not automatically lead to attrition. More importantly, it supports the notion that there are a number of dissatisfied stayers in some of our special education classrooms -- teachers who have either not yet reflected on and recognized their feelings about their work, or who are aware of their desire to leave but see no other alternatives.

CHAPTER 4
SURVEY RESULTS

4.1 Procedures

This section of the final report focuses on the responses of special education teachers from District One to the questionnaire, *Working in Special Education: The Experiences of Special Educators*, administered in spring 1992.

The following sections present a brief description of the development of items included in the questionnaire followed by the procedure employed for the various descriptive analyses, and a presentation and discussion of results. Three major analyses are reported: (a) factor analysis of all teachers working in the district who completed the survey; (b) analysis of those who expressed an intent to leave in the near future; and (c) analysis of differences in profiles of work-related leavers compared to those who stayed.

Sample. The questionnaire was administered in a large urban school district in the West, in a city that is among the 100 largest cities in the country. This is the same district that participated in the interview study discussed in Chapter 3. The district serves approximately 2000 special education students out of a total student enrollment of almost 60,000. The student population is approximately one third Hispanic and one half Caucasian. The remaining 16% is divided roughly evenly between Native American and African American.

The questionnaire was sent to all special education teachers in the district; 298 returned the questionnaire, representing a response rate of 84 percent. Table 4.1 below describes salient demographic features of the sample of special education teachers.

A second sample including an additional 570 special educators drawn from two other urban areas in the West was used for reliability analyses and for the factor analysis.

Instrument Development. Questionnaire items were identified through a multi-stage process. The first consisted of a literature review and synthesis by a team of researchers based on the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter One.

The questionnaire did not attempt to assess personal factors such as economic resources or life cycle variables. The main reason for this decision was that we were most interested in understanding factors on which school districts might have the greatest potential impact.

Retention topics of primary interest were refined through successive discussions among team members, and through discussions during initial site visits with staff from the participating districts.

Three overarching conceptual categories emerged from this process:

- *Preparation*
- *Workplace Conditions of Teaching*, and
- *Affective Responses to Conditions of Work.*

Table 4.1.1 Sample Characteristics (N=298)

	M	SD
Age	44.28	8.08
Years as special education teacher	12.02	5.88
Total years teaching experience	15.34	6.84
	Percent of Sample	
Gender		
Male	18.5	
Female	81.5	
Teaching Environment		
Resource Room	54.9	
Self Contained Class	32.3	
Special School	7.4	
Itinerant/Other	5.4	
Grade Level		
Preschool	3.7	
Elementary	43.4	
Middle	15.8	
High	23.9	
Special School	8.8	
Other	4.4	

After these topics were identified, existing research instruments were examined. Relevant items for each area were extracted and used verbatim in some instances, while in other cases item wordings were modified for specific use with special education professionals. The key existing instruments and other literature sources utilized in this process included several from the field of special education (Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Coladarci, 1991), many others from the general education literature (Dansereau, 1972; Glidewell, Tucker, Todt, & Cox, 1983; Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970; Rosenholtz, 1989; Louis Harris and Associates, 1985; The School and Staffing Survey of the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Educational Statistics, 1991; Yee, 1990) and several from the occupational literature (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Porter, Steer, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974)

When items available from these sources were exhausted across the key questionnaire topics, the resulting item clusters were examined and compared. Redundant items were eliminated. Some items were reworded to address the specific purposes of this project and the characteristics of the target sample. New items were generated where needed by project staff.

Review of the resulting draft questionnaire occurred in several stages.. Copies of an early version were sent to Dr. Bonnie Billingsley, a researcher on the Research Triangle Institute Retention Project, and to several members of our National Advisory Panel. Dr. James Kauffman, Dr. Mary Beth Fafard, and Dr. Joan Thormann, along with Dr. Billingsley, responded to this draft. In addition, three doctoral students at the University of Oregon reviewed the draft and provided feedback on both the constructs and individual items. All suggestions were evaluated by project staff, and appropriate changes were made to the document.

Subsequent drafts of the questionnaire were reviewed by three additional University of Oregon doctoral students and nineteen special education teachers from the Eugene/Springfield area. The three doctoral students were all former special education teachers, only one year out of the classroom. The teachers were drawn from a variety of experience levels, programs, and settings -- elementary through secondary schools; self-contained, resource, and itinerant service models; and teachers of students from a range of disability categories.

In most cases, individuals first completed the questionnaire and then either provided written feedback or met with a staff member to discuss the draft. The review focused on a number of aspects of the draft including: (1) the issues addressed in the questionnaire; (2) the clarity and relevance of the individual items; and (3) overall length and ease of response. Feedback from all respondents was summarized and used in the revision process. In particular, on the basis of input from the special educators, a series of items was added asking to what extent teachers felt their building principals, central office, fellow teachers, and parents understood what they did.

Additional input from outside consultants was solicited on specific topics. Dr. Theodore Coladarci (a professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Maine), who has done research on special education teachers' feelings of efficacy, reviewed our items on this construct. In early March, Dr. Lewis Goldberg, from the University of Oregon's Psychology Department, met with project staff to discuss data analysis issues. Throughout the month of March, 1992, ongoing meetings were held with Dr. Patricia Gwartney-Gibbs, Professor of Sociology at the University of Oregon and a specialist in the area of survey research. These meetings focused on several aspects of survey methodology including strategies to increase response rates, item wording and format, the overall layout of the final questionnaire, and logistics of dissemination. Dr. Gwartney-Gibbs provided written feedback on various drafts of the questionnaire through its development process.

In March and April, 1992, project staff visited District One to get feedback from staff on the final version of the questionnaire. A variety of personnel reviewed the questionnaire during this phase, including special education directors and assistant directors for (1) speech/language and transition services; (2) bilingual special education; and (3) services for students with emotional or behavioral disabilities. In addition, we conducted interviews with two service center directors, two school psychologists, three program specialists, and a teacher on special assignment who handles compliance issues. Feedback focused mainly on item clarification and a few suggestions for additions to the item pool.

Data Analysis. Data were entered and analyzed on microcomputer, using *SPSS for the Macintosh* (1990). Frequency distributions with means and standard deviations were generated for all items, and coefficient alpha reliability was calculated for the 125 Likert-type and frequency items in the questionnaire. Subsequent to generation of these descriptive statistics and after careful inspection and cleaning of the data set, demographic descriptors were assembled to provide a portrait of the full sample and to serve the later purpose of examining demographic differences among key subsamples.

Factor analysis was then performed according to the procedures described below, utilizing principal components analysis and varimax rotation. Subsequent to identification of these factors and calculation of reliability for the resulting factor scores, the scales represented by these factors were utilized for comparative analysis of subsamples.

Reliability. Coefficient alpha reliability was computed for the 125-item instrument based on a sample of 868 special educators and speech therapists in 3 cities. The alpha obtained was .92, a high reliability coefficient, indicating that there is some overarching construct that this instrument measures. Based on the content of the items, it appears to measure some overall sense of job satisfaction.

The average inter-item correlation was .17. This would indicate that there were several relatively distinct (i.e. non-correlated) facets or factors that contributed to this sense of job satisfaction. It thus seemed reasonable to conduct a factor analysis of the entire instrument.

Scoring and Data Display

Scaling of items and selection of response categories varied depending on the questionnaire section. Most utilized a 5-point scale. Twelve out of the 125 items employed a 3-point scale. These were recoded so that 1 remained 1 whereas a 2 became 3 and a 3 became 5.

The 1 to 5 points on the Likert scale corresponded to different response categories in different sections of the instrument. Response categories are of three basic kinds. For one Likert-type format , the midpoint value of "3" reflected a response of "neutral" or that the respondent "neither agrees nor disagrees" with a

given statement. In the second Likert format, the midpoint was less clearly a true neutral value—items, for instance, that sought to measure respondents' perception of the adequacy of a variety of resources that may be available to them, where a value of "3" signified "adequate." In the third category type, Frequency items, all items are on a 5-point scale. Frequency items delineated a range of frequencies with which respondents might experience an event (e.g., daily, once a month).

In all statistical analyses, we always used the actual numbers in the Likert scale (converting the 3 points to 5 points and reverse coding when appropriate). Means, standard deviations, and frequency distribution are presented for all tabled items. To make the process less cumbersome, we often collapse the 5 categories into 3. For example, in some items, "very satisfied" and "somewhat satisfied" are collapsed into "satisfied"; "very dissatisfied" and somewhat dissatisfied" are collapsed into "dissatisfied", whereas "neutral" remains one category.

Items were reverse coded if the preferred wording of items resulted in responses whose initial point values were in the opposite direction conceptually from the others. For example, for the item "I do not feel included in what goes on in the school", 1 means not feeling included and 5 means feeling greatly included. In the area of stress, a score of 1 means very little/infrequent stress and a score of 5 rare, infrequent stress. In the area of support, 5 means frequent or extremely helpful feedback, and 1 means not useful and/or rare feedback. *Thus, higher scores always indicate less isolation, greater satisfaction, lower stress, etc.*

4.2 Preliminary Analysis: Job Satisfaction

Since the entire survey could be conceived in a broad sense as a gauge of respondents' satisfaction with various aspects of their work and training, we began our preliminary analysis with items that asked special education teachers how satisfied they felt:

- with their choice of profession; and
- with their current teaching assignment.

The overwhelming majority—more than 85%—reported experiencing some degree of satisfaction with their work. Just under half of those who responded felt very satisfied with both their choice of career and their current positions. Table 4.2 summarizes the responses teachers gave to these two questions.

Table 4.2.1 Frequency Distribution for Global Satisfaction Items (N=298)

	very satisfied	somewhat satisfied	neutral	somewhat dissatisfied	very dissatisfied
How satisfied are you with your choice of profession?	50 %	37 %	6 %	4 %	3 %
How satisfied are you with your current teaching assignment?	48	37	3	8	4

Correlation Between Total Survey Score and Global Satisfaction Items. Each of the two Satisfaction items were correlated with the total score on the survey. We reasoned that the total score would be a measure of each special educators' overall satisfaction with a comprehensive multi-faceted view of her or his position. The two satisfaction items on the survey would be a more narrow view – inquiring as to satisfaction with the profession, and current assignment. We therefore expected significant but moderate correlations.

In fact, this is what we found. Correlations were .50 for satisfaction with the profession and .51 for satisfaction with current position assignment, both significant at the level of $p=.001$.

As another indicator of job satisfaction, we asked teachers: "If you could go back and start over again, how likely is it that you would choose to become a special education teacher?" Nearly two thirds (65%) said it was somewhat likely or very likely, and 16 percent said that chances were about 50-50. Approximately one in five (19%) said it was somewhat unlikely or very unlikely that they would make this choice.

4.3 Factor Analysis Methodology

Initially we considered using a set of *a priori* scales based on concepts from the literature. However, as we pursued this tactic, we noted a large number of items that could fall into two or more scales. Because of this conceptual overlap, it seemed advisable to not make these judgments on an *a priori* basis.

We also originally separated analyses of "Conditions of Work" items (e.g., quality of support from principal, adequacy of instructional materials) and affective items (e.g., sense of accomplishment with students, stress). However, as we pursued this line of inquiry, we also noted that some items did not easily fall into one or the other set. In reality, *we were always measuring perceptions* – not the actual technical quality of the feedback from the principal, but rather a person's sense of how adequate the feedback was and how well it met his or her needs. Thus, a factor analysis on the entire bank of 125 items seemed the best course to follow.

Extraction of Factors

Data from two urban districts with disparate demographics but similarly constructed samples were pooled for the factor analysis (n=524) in an effort to derive factors that would have the greatest possible external validity. (The third city was excluded because it did not include all special educators who taught students with disabilities in that city.) Preliminary replication of the factor analysis, conducted separately for the two districts, indicates a stable factor structure with slight differences in percent of variance explained by different factors.

The initial factor analysis on these data included all Likert-type items contained in the questionnaire. A total of 125 questionnaire items were included in the initial procedure. A second analysis was conducted in which items with simple correlations less than .30 with all other items were deleted. Eight items were deleted. After examining the results of the second procedure, the conceptual clarity of the resulting factors and their replicability across subsamples was not satisfactory and a third analysis was run. For this analysis, ten items were deleted that did not have simple correlations of at least .30 with a minimum of two other items.

From the final procedure utilizing the remaining 107 items, a total of 26 factors were extracted, thirteen of which constituted conceptually distinct clusters of 3 or more items that were identified for subsequent use in data analysis. Table 4.3 lists these 13 factors and the percent of explained variance attributable to each factor. Greater detail on each of these factors is incorporated into the tables and text that describe the results in the following section.

A coefficient alpha reliability was computed for each factor; they range from .69 to .92. These reliabilities are also presented in Section 4.4.

A factor correlation matrix was also computed. The matrix appears in Appendix A to this chapter. By and large, correlations between factors are weak, confirming that each factor measures a fairly distinct construct.

Table 4.3.1 Thirteen Major Factors

I. Relationships with Building Principal (19% of variance)

II. How Well Prepared Teacher Feels for Current Assignment (6%)

III. Central Office Relationships (6%)

IV. Stress Related to Job Design (4%)

V. Relationships with Fellow Teachers at School Site (3%)

VI. Satisfaction and Personal Assessment of Rewards (3%)

VII. Role Conflict (2%)

VIII. Affective Issues Related to Students (2%)

IX. Manageability of Workload (2%)

X. Parent Support (2%)

XI. Opportunities for Growth and Advancement (2%)

XII. Autonomy (2%)

XIII. Adequacy of Material Resources (2%)

4.4 Descriptive Results by Thirteen Major Factors

Data are presented and discussed in terms of the thirteen factors derived from the questionnaire on an item-by-item basis. These 13 factors account for 53% of the total variance. This section is organized as follows. First, three factors dealing with support relationships are discussed, followed by the Preparation factor, and Stress Related to Job Design and Workload Manageability. These first five factors are the most salient and therefore given the most attention. The final section briefly presents data from the remaining eight factors, focusing on three that seemed particularly interesting: Affective Issues Related to Students, Satisfaction and Personal Assessment of Rewards, and Role Conflict.

Support Factors

The explained variance for the three factors related to support from building principal, support from central office, and support/relationships with fellow teachers at the school site totaled 27.8%.

Relationships with Building Principal. For special education teachers, issues related to the principal seem to be key to understanding teachers' perceived satisfaction (Table 4.4.1). Of the cumulative explained variance of 53%, 18.7% is accounted for by this factor alone.

These special education teachers appeared relatively ambivalent (slightly better than neutral) about the quality of the support and feedback they received from their principals. Although many (70%) did feel "backed up" by their principals, fewer felt that the principal assisted them in specific problem-solving (only 60%) or integration efforts (only 57 %). Only half the teachers felt satisfied with the support and encouragement they received. In all likelihood, however, many principals probably have only minimal special education training.

About half felt the principal often recognized their good work; the other half felt this rarely. In most cases, feedback from the principal and vice principal was infrequent. Finally, although most special educators liked their current school (83%), only about half felt included in what went on in the school.

Table 4.4.1 Relationships with Building Principal

Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
83%	8%	9%	I really like the school in which I am currently working. [M=4.23; SD=1.05]
70	11	19	My principal backs me up when I need it. [3.84 (1.28)]
60	15	25	My principal (or vice principal) works with me to solve problems. [3.56 (1.31)]
57	18	25	My principal (or vice principal) actively assists my efforts to integrate students. [3.53 (1.35)]
62	10	28	I can count on my principal to provide appropriate assistance when a student's behavior requires it. [3.50 (1.39)]
53	16	31	I feel included in what goes on in this school. [3.45 (1.35)]
Very Much	**Somewhat**	**Very Little**	
34	41	25	How helpful is the feedback your receive from your principal or vice principal? [3.16 (1.53)]
45	32	23	To what extent does your building principal understand what you do? [3.35 (1.20)]
Satisfied	**Neutral**	**Dissatisfied**	
51	10	39	Satisfaction with quality of support and encouragement you receive. [3.15 (1.33)]
			Frequency
Daily/ Often	**Sometimes**	**Seldom/ Never**	
50	28	22	How often principal recognizes the good teaching you do. [3.33 (1.14)]
50	26	24	How often do you receive encouragement to try out new ideas? [3.25 (1.10)]
At Least Once /Mo.	**Several Xs/ Year**	**Once /Year or Less**	
32	40	28	How often do you receive feedback from your principal or vice principal? [3.15 (1.13)]

Reliability: α = .92
Percent of variance explained=18.7%

Central Office Relationships. The third factor (see Table 4.4.2) accounts for 5.7% of total variance, with item means ranging from 2.61 to 3.70. These are among the lower scores in the survey.

Table 4.4.2 Central Office Relationships

Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
63%	22%	15%	The special education division supports me in my interactions with parents. [[M=3.70; SD=1.12]
52	18	30	A contact person from special education works with me to solve problems. 3.21(1.34)]
45	31	24	The special education division backs me up when I need it. [3.21 (1.22)]
Very Much	**Somewhat**	**Very Little**	
27	41	32	How helpful is the feedback you receive from your special education contact? [2.89 (1.53)]
58	25	17	To what extent do you feel your special education contact person understands what you do in your job? [3.57 (1.17)]
30	38	32	To what extent do you feel the district special education department understands what you do in your job? [2.93 (1.13)]
			Frequency
Almost Never/ Several Xs/Yr	**Once / Month**	**Weekly/ Daily**	
64	16	20	Frequency of stress due to lack of support from special education administration [3.64 (1.31)]
At Least Once a /Mo.	**Several Xs/Year**	**Once /Year or Less**	
27	27	46	How often do you receive feedback from your special education contact? [2.61 (1.40)]

Reliability: α = .37
Percent of variance explained=5.7%

Item means suggest that, on average, teachers did not feel particularly well-supported by their district central office. The highest mean shows a moderate level of agreement that there was support for teachers' interactions with parents (M=3.70), but this kind of united front would perhaps be expected as an organizational response. There was a limited sense that special education contact persons understood teachers' jobs (M=3.57). The degree to which teachers felt the district

special education department itself understood teachers' jobs is also quite low with a mean of 2.93. Only 30% felt the department understood their jobs well, and 32% not at all.

Teachers did not feel particularly "backed up" by the district; nor did they feel very positive about the specific problem-solving support available from the contact person (M=3.21), reflecting a certain "distance" between teachers and the central office.

Feedback from the special education contact was perceived as helpful by only one quarter of the teachers. It was also infrequent: between "several times a year" and "about once a year." The overall lack of support was rated as a frequent (weekly or daily) source of stress by one out of five teachers.

Relationships with Fellow Teachers at School Site (Table 4.4.3). Special education teachers reported that other teachers in their schools (those not in special education) generally did not understand very well what they do as special educators. Only 13% felt well understood by other teachers at their school. A full 60% agreed that most other teachers don't know what special education teachers do in their classrooms. Almost a third expressed dissatisfaction with their school staff's attitude toward special education, and only 54% felt satisfied.

This perceived lack of understanding, however, did not necessarily appear to translate to a perceived lack of appreciation. Most special educators felt other teachers valued what they had to offer; 66% said that other teachers at their school came to them for help or advice, and 63% said they shared materials with non-special education teachers at least once a month or more frequently.

While only half of the special education teachers indicated that other teachers provided them with feedback about how well they were doing, 78% reported that other teachers at least sometimes recognized the quality of their work.

Table 4.4.3 Relationships with Fellow Teachers at School Site

Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
60%	11%	29%	Most of the other teachers in this school don't know what I do in my classroom. [*reverse-coded*, M=2.59; SD=1.29]
66	15	19	Teachers at this school come to me for help or advice. [3.58 (1.16)]
50	22	28	My fellow teachers provide me with feedback about how well I am doing. [3.25 (1.26)]
Satisfied	**Neutral**	**Dissatisfied**	
54	15	31	Satisfaction with school staff's attitude toward special education [3.33 (1.28)]
Well	**Somewhat**	**Very Little**	
.13	44	43	To what extent do teachers who are not in special education understand what you do? [2.62 (.92)]
			Frequency
Weekly/ Daily	**Once / Month**	**Almost Never/ Several Xs/Yr**	
42	21	37	How often do you share materials with teachers who are not in special education? [3.06 (1.40)]
Daily/ Often	**Some-times**	**Seldom/ Never**	
36	42	22	Other teachers recognize the quality of my work. [3.16 (.94)]

Reliability: α = .80
Percent of variance explained=3.4%

Preparation: How Well Prepared Teacher Feels for Current Assignment

For the *Preparation* factor, accounting for 6.1% of total variance, all but two of the items are drawn from a section of the questionnaire devoted to that area, where 1="not at all prepared", 3="adequately prepared", and 5= "very well prepared" (Table 4.4.4).

Note that the items in this factor refer to preparation generally, rather than to a specific area such as quality of university training experiences or district inservice. Note, too, that we intentionally referred to each teacher's current position. A teacher, for example, may feel well prepared to teach students with reading problems but may currently be assigned to a class of students with moderate to severe learning problems and therefore not feel prepared for his/her current assignment.

Areas of preparation addressed included instructional techniques, curriculum modifications, behavior management, case management activities and paperwork, consulting with classroom teachers, collaborating with others, working with parents, supervising aides, responding to severity of student needs, and responding to diversity of student needs.

Scores on these items ranged from 3.69 to 4.11 suggesting that most of these teachers felt relatively well-prepared for critical aspects of their work. However, there was a group who did not feel prepared for some aspects of their current assignments.

Table 4.4.4 How Well Prepared Teacher Feels for Current Assignment

Well Prepared	Adequately Prepared	Not at all Prepared	How well prepared do you feel for each of the following components of your job?
77%	17%	6%	Instructional techniques [M=4.11; SD=.90]
76	19	5	Working with parents [4.10 (.91)]
60	25	15	Collaborating and/or consulting with classroom teachers [3.99 (.97)]
71	21	8	Collaborating with others (e.g., psychologists, social workers, etc.) [3.99 (.97)]
70	19	11	Responding to the severity of your students' learning needs [3.90 (.98)]
68	21	11	Responding to the diversity of your students' learning needs [3.90 (.97)]
70	21	9	Curriculum modification and/or development [3.92 (.97)]
69	21	10	Behavior management [3.89 (.99)]
61	24	15	Training and supervision of instructional aides [3.71 (1.19)]
55	30	15	Case management activities and corresponding paperwork [3.69 (1.11)]
Agree	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	
83	5	12	I have enough training/experience to deal with students' learning problems. [4.07 (.97)]
25	14	61	It's hard to know how I'm doing in my teaching [*Reverse coded*- 3.64 (1.25)]

Reliability: α=.91
Percent of variance explained=6.1%

Eleven percent were not prepared to deal with the severity of their students learning needs or the diversity of the learning needs. Fifteen percent didn't feel

prepared to collaborate with other teachers. Another group of approximately 20-30% felt just adequately prepared for key aspects of their jobs. The reader is reminded that, in terms of explained variance, the factor analysis indicated that how prepared a person feels for crucial aspects of her or his position was the second most powerful force in determining overall satisfaction.

The two areas where teachers felt most prepared were in "instructional techniques" (M=4.11, SD=.90) and "working with parents" (M=4.10), while the two areas in which they felt least prepared were "case management activities/paperwork" (M=3.69) and "collaborating/consulting with classroom teachers" (M=3.71). In addition, one fourth felt it was hard to know how they were doing in their teaching, indicating a need for more feedback than is currently provided.

Stress Related to Issues in Job Design and Workload Manageability

Table 4.4.5 shows that almost 40% of teachers felt their workload was not manageable – an alarming statistic. Two thirds of the sample said they frequently experienced stress due to this type of overload. Not unexpectedly, major sources of stress were bureaucratic requirements, behavior, and discipline.

Table 4.4.5 Stress Related to Job Design

Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
51%	10%	39%	My workload is manageable [M=3.13; SD=1.30]
Almost Never/ Several Xs/Yr	**Once/ Year**	**Weekly/ Monthly**	
27	16	57	How often do you feel under a great deal of stress? [2.56 (1.18)]
			Frequency with which you experience the following as sources of stress:
32	11	57	The severity of students' needs [2.60; 1.43]
28	14	58	Too great a range in the needs and abilities of students [2.50 (1.43)]
26	13	61	Student behavior and discipline problems [2.42 (1.39)]
15	16	69	Bureaucratic requirements— rules, regulations, paperwork [2.13 (1.11)]
17	15	68	Too much to do and too little time to do it [2.13 (1.26)]

Reliability: α *=.87*
Percent of variance explained=4.2%

The severity and diversity of student learning needs was also a frequent stressor. This is in all likelihood related to what administrators described as shifts in placements for special education students towards more of an inclusion approach, with increasing numbers of students placed in resource settings rather than self-contained classrooms or special schools, and an increased move to place students in neighborhood schools, regardless of the severity of the disability.

Manageability of Workload. A separate factor focused solely on the issue of workload (Table 4.6). Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which the stated aspect of workload affected workload manageability, using a scale where 1="greatly affects", 2="somewhat affects", and 3="does not affect."

Table 4.4.6 Factors Contributing to Manageability of Workload

Does Not Affect	Somewhat Affects	Greatly Affects	Indicate the effect on your workload of the following items:
11%	28%	61%	Total number of students you work with each week [M=2.00; SD=1.38]
10	27	63	Size of the group of students during a given block of time [1.93 (1.34)]
4	25	71	The number of things you are expected to do as part of your job [1.65 (1.09)]
4	22	74	Severity of students' needs [1.59 (1.06)]
3	20	77	Diversity of students' needs and abilities [1.52 (1.01)]

Reliability: α *=.79*
Percent of variance explained=1.8%

For each item, at least 60% felt that the designated issue greatly affected workload manageability. A strong majority of teachers felt both student diversity and severity of student needs contributed most strongly to workload manageability.

Other Factors

The following tables present results for three of the remaining factors. Appendix B to this chapter presents four additional factors.

Affective Issues Related to Students. These items (Table 4.4.7) are among the highest rated in the questionnaire, typical in research with teachers. Note that 83% felt satisfied with their accomplishments with students, and 85% felt they were making a significant difference in students' lives; 96% enjoyed their students.

On the other hand, 5% felt they made no significant difference in their students' lives and another 10% felt neutral about this issue. Fourteen percent

On the other hand, 5% felt they made no significant difference in their students' lives and another 10% felt neutral about this issue. Fourteen percent indicated no sense of accomplishment. In all likelihood, these were teachers confronting serious problems in their professional careers.

Table 4.4.7 Affective Issues Related to Students

Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
96%	2%	2%	I really enjoy my students [M=4.63; SD=.62]
85	10	5	I feel that I am making a significant difference in the lives of my students [4.22 (.90)]
80	14	6	I find that my relationships with students have gotten better over my years of teaching [4.21 (.95)]
13	5	82	When all factors are considered, spec. ed. teachers are not a powerful influence on students' achievement. [*reverse coded*, 4.17 (1.09)]
71	8	21	I have as much enthusiasm now as I did when I began teaching. [3.77 (1.30)]
Satisfied	**Neutral**	**Dissatisfied**	
83	3	14	Satisfaction with sense of accomplishments with students [4.00 (1.02)]
			Frequency
Daily/ Often	**Some-times**	**Seldom/ Never**	
59	31	10	How often my students show that they appreciate me [3.73 (.98)]

Reliability: α =.79
Percent of variance explained=2.1%

Satisfaction and Personal Assessment of Rewards. Most teachers appeared satisfied with the profession (Table 4.4.8). There was a group of 14 percent who felt neutral or dissatisfied. Overall, the satisfaction rate was high for the items in Table 4.4.8, with the exception that 42 percent did not agree that there were many rewards for being a special educator, and one in five said that if they had the decision to make again, they would not choose special education teaching as a profession.

Table 4.4.8 Satisfaction and Personal Assessment of Rewards

Very/ Somewhat Satisfied	Neutral	Very/ Somewhat Dissatisfied	
87%	6%	7%	How satisfied are you with your choice of profession? [M=4.23; SD=.96]
Very/ Somewhat Likely	**Chances About Even**	**Very/ Somewhat Unlikely**	
69	14	17	If you could go back and do it over again, how likely is it that you would become a special education teacher? [3.90 (1.32)]
Agree	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	
14	11	75	I think the disappointments involved make special education teaching not worth it. [*reverse-coded*, 4.07 (1.13)]
77	11	12	One of the things I like about this job is that I'm always learning something new. [3.99 (1.07)]
32	10	58	There aren't many rewards for being a special educator [*reverse-coded*, 3.52 (1.39)]

Reliability: α=.76
Percent of variance explained=2.6%

Role Conflict. For these items (Table 4.4.9), response categories pertain to frequency of various possible work conflicts and are represented by a 5-point Likert scale where 1="always or almost always", 2="often", 3="sometimes", 4="seldom", and 5="never or almost never". Higher scores reflect a perception of lesser conflict about teaching role.

Overall, teachers indicated a moderate level of conflict concerning their day-to-day work experiences. The items with the least positive scores appear to concern conflict related more directly to students regarding issues of instruction and mainstreaming. Half the teachers felt conflict between devoting time to students versus collaborating with teachers. Almost three-fourths felt conflict between meeting students' needs and demands of the mainstream.

Interestingly, role conflict did not explain a high proportion of the variance. We believe this is because many of these conflicts are endemic to the profession of special education teaching. It is only when people do not feel supported by administrators and fellow teachers in grappling with these conflicts that they emerge as serious, all-encompassing problems.

Table 4.4.9 Role Conflict

Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Frequency with which you experience conflict in the following areas:
49%	27%	24%	Time spent working directly with students vs. with their classroom teachers [M=3.42; SD=1.23]
42	30	28	District Spec. Ed. division's expectations vs. building administrators' expectations [3.20 (1.23)]
28	32	40	Matching instruction to mainstream vs. meeting students' needs [2.85 (1.15)]
20	32	48	The way lessons are taught in the mainstream vs. what is effective with my students [2.67 (1.11)]
20	27	53	Attending to students' academic needs vs. their social/behavioral needs [2.60 (1.13)]

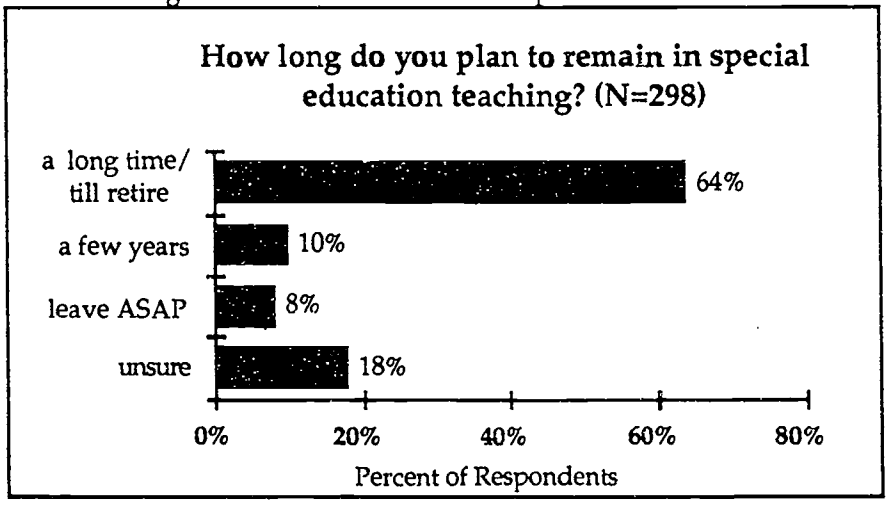
Reliability: α=.78
Percent of variance explained=2.3%

4.5 Characteristics of District One Teachers Who Express An Intent To Leave

In the survey, we asked each special educator how long they planned to stay in *special education teaching*, as one means of gauging teachers' commitment to their work. At the time of completing the questionnaire nearly two thirds of District One respondents planned to stay for a long time or until retirement (Figure 4.5.1).

In contrast, approximately one in five would commit to no more than a few years, and 18 percent were unsure. As such, roughly 18% of the district's special education teaching force might be considered "at risk" for leaving within the next few years, and an additional 18% are unsure of how long they will continue.

Figure 4.5.1 Plans to Remain in Special Education



Intent to Leave as Basis for Comparison on Factors. For our between-group analyses using intent to leave as an independent variable, two groups were defined. The "intend to leave" group included teachers who expressed an intent to leave "ASAP" or "within a few years." The "intend to stay" group included teachers expressing an intent to stay "for a long time" or "until retirement."

Intent to leave is a frequently utilized variable in research on teacher satisfaction/teacher attrition and retention. Our attempt to analyze response patterns of this sample was not terribly productive, however, for one simple reason. Potential leavers differed significantly from those who intended to stay on virtually all factors, indicating that teachers who expressed an intent to leave special education as soon as possible or in a few years were generally less satisfied with and committed to their work than those who expressed an intention to remain for a long time or until retirement.

In fact, there were only two areas of non-significant differences. The first was adequacy of material resources. In this case, both the stayers and potential leavers appeared equally dissatisfied. Second, no difference was found in opportunities for professional growth and advancement. On every other facet of work – relationships

with principals, central office, parents and fellow teachers, perceived stress related to job design, relationships with students – this sample was significantly more dissatisfied.

The correlation between intent to leave and satisfaction with the special education profession was -.38, significant at the .001 level. The correlation between intent to leave and satisfaction with current assignment was -.32, also significant at the .001 level. (This is quite similar to the correlation of -.33 found by Cross and Billingsley [1993].)

Sample Characteristics of Intent to Leave. Table 4.5.2 compares the two groups with respect to age, years in special education teaching, and total years teaching experience. Teachers in the "Intend to Leave" group were younger and less experienced than those in the "Intend to Stay" group. They had been special education teachers for fewer years and had spent a shorter time in the teaching profession, on average, than had teachers in the "Intend to Stay" group.

The two groups also differed substantially on gender. While 15% of the 190 teachers intending to stay were male, 33% of the 49 teachers intending to leave were male. A chi-square test showed this difference to be significant ($\chi^2(1) = 7.71$, $p = .01$). On other variables such as teaching environment, grade level, and percent of students receiving free/reduced lunch at the teachers' home schools, the two groups did not differ significantly. Table 4.5.3 gives the breakdown of these variables by category of Intent.

Table 4.5.2 Significant Characteristics of Potential Leavers and Stayers

	Intend to Stay			Intend to Leave				
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	t	p
Age	188	45.32	8.25	49	41.33	6.71	3.12	.002
Years as a special education teacher	188	12.97	6.04	49	10.39	5.40	2.72	.007
Total years teaching experience	174	16.29	7.13	46	13.13	5.85	2.76	.006

Teachers in low income schools (60% and more free/reduced lunch) appear somewhat more likely to leave (41.3% vs. 27.3% of stayers), but this difference is not significant.

Table 4.5.3 Characteristics of Those Who Intend to Leave (N=49) and Stay (N=190)

	Intend to Stay	Intend to Leave	χ^2	p
Percent Males	15.3	32.7	7.71	.01
Teaching Environment	%	%	4.31	NS
Resource	57.4	55.1		
Self Contained	28.9	36.7		
Special School	10.0	2.0		
Itinerant/Other	3.7	6.1		
Grade Level	%	%	4.15	NS
Preschool	4.2	2.0		
Elementary	42.1	51.0		
Middle	14.7	20.4		
High	24.2	18.4		
Other/combo	14.7	8.2		
Students Receiving Free/Reduced Lunch 1991-92	n=176 %	n=46 %	5.30	NS
0 -20%	14.2	13.0		
21 - 40%	15.9	19.6		
41 - 60%	42.6	26.1		
61 - 80%	16.5	26.1		
81 - 100%	10.8	15.2		

Relationship Between Intent to Leave and Subsequent Employment Status. Table 4.5.4 depicts relationships between expressed intent to leave at the time of survey completion in April 1992 and actual job status fifteen months (two school years) following survey completion. The relationship is significant (χ^2=41.4 (5), p <.00001). The strongest aspects of this relationship are evident for respondents who indicated they intended to leave "as soon as possible" and those who intended to stay either "for a few years" or "until retirement."

Of 23 teachers who indicated they intended to leave "as soon as possible," almost half (44%) actually left within 15 months. Of 31 who expressed an intent to stay "for a few years," 16% had left after two years.

Conversely, only 6% of those who planned to stay "for a long time" left, and only 1% of those younger than 55 who said they planned to stay "until retirement" left. Thus there appears to be a reasonable, if less than perfect, relationship between intended plans and actual subsequent job status.

Another useful way to examine the congruence between intent to leave and actual job status is to look only at the 33 leavers. Of the 33 teachers who actually did leave within two years, 10 (30%) had expressed an intent to leave as soon as possible, 8 (24%) were over age 55 and had expressed an intent to stay until retirement, and 5 (15%) had intended to stay for just a few years more. Overall, of 33 teachers who actually left, a total of 23 (69%) expressed an intent to leave that was consistent with their subsequent job status. Thus, these data suggest that, over a period of 1 to 2 years, the intent-to-leave variable may be a useful indicator of subsequent leaver status.

Table 4.5.4 Relationship Between District One Teachers' Intent to Leave and Job Status Two School Years Later

Expressed Intent in April 1992	Actual Job Status in September 1993: Stayed (N=263) N	%	Left (N=33) N	%	χ^2	p
Leave as soon as possible	13	56%	10	44%	41.37	<.00001
Stay for a few years	26	84%	5	16%		
Stay for a long time	44	94%	3	6%		
Stay until retirement (aged 55 or older)	29	78%	8	22%		
Stay until retirement (under age 55)	105	99%	1	1%		
Unsure (N=52)	46	88%	6	12%		

4.6 Comparison of Leavers and Stayers on Factor Scores

In this analysis, leavers are defined as teachers who left special education wholly or largely for work-related reasons. Of 17 special education teachers who left, 14 fit this definition.

A MANOVA was conducted on all factor scores, comparing leavers to stayers. Due to the relatively small and heterogeneous nature of the work-related leaver sample with complete data available for the analysis (N leavers=10, N stayers=226), statistical power was low. The MANOVA indicated no significant difference between the groups [Wilks $\lambda = .92$, df = (13, 212), $p=.09$]. However, since results border on significance, several exploratory findings will be discussed based on univariate F-ratios.

Comparing factor scores of the two groups, leavers had significantly lower scores on three factors:

- stress related to job design ($p < .01$),
- satisfaction and personal assessment of rewards ($p < .01$), and
- affective issues related to students ($p < .05$).

These results are presented in Tables 4.6.1 to 4.6.3, presenting scores for each item within each of these factors with discussion of key differences.

Stress Related to Job Design (Table 4.6.1). Only a few of the items within this factor reflect greater stress for leavers. Almost eighty percent of leavers indicated that they felt under a great deal of stress on a weekly or daily basis, compared to just over half of stayers. Twice as many stayers as leavers (28% versus 14%) reported only infrequent stress ($p = .01$). Similar discrepancies are evident in the case of stress due to the range of students' needs and abilities ($p=.01$). Leavers also reported much more frequent stress due to bureaucratic requirements ($p=.03$) and conflicting expectations, goals, and directives.

In spite of these results, however, there were several areas in which the two groups were not significantly different, including their perceptions of stress due to student behavior and discipline problems, and stress due to severity of student needs. It is also interesting that in spite of the high relative frequency of the stress experienced by both groups, and the greater degree of stress in a number of areas for leavers, the two groups were not significantly different in the extent to which they felt their workload was manageable. Almost half of leavers and slightly more than half of stayers felt their workload was manageable. Note also that relatively few respondents expressed neutral feelings on this item. It is worth considering that even though teachers in general may indicate they experience frequent stress, they may expect their work to be relatively stressful.

Table 4.6.1 Stress Related to Job Design:
Percentage Responses of Leavers (n=14) vs. Stayers (n=282)

	Mean	SD	p	Frequency Rating	Almost Never/ Several XYr	Once/ Month	Weekly/ Daily
Leavers	1.86	1.10	.01	How often do you feel under a	14%	7%	79%
Stayers	2.59	1.18		great deal of stress?	28	17	56
Leavers	1.64	1.15	.01	Stress: too great a range in the	7	7	86
Stayers	2.54	1.44		needs and abilities of students.	30	14	57
Leavers	1.57	.85	.03	Stress: bureaucratic require-	0	21	79
Stayers	2.17	1.11		ments— rules, regulations, paperwork?	16	16	68
Leavers	2.77	1.24	ns	Stress: conflicting expec-	31	23	46
Stayers	3.28	1.28		tations, goals, directives .	47	25	29
Leavers	2.43	1.56	ns	Stress: the severity of	21	14	64
Stayers	2.61	1.43		students' needs.	33	11	57
Leavers	2.07	1.39	ns	Stress: student behavior and	14	7	79
Stayers	2.44	1.40		discipline problems.	27	13	60
Leavers	1.86	1.29	ns	Stress: too much to do and too	21	7	71
Stayers	2.14	1.26		little time to do it.	18	15	67
				Likert Scale	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**
Leavers	2.93	1.21	ns	My workload is manageable.	50	7	43
Stayers	3.14	1.30			52	10	39

Satisfaction and Personal Assessment of Rewards (Table 4.6.2). This factor reflects greater differences between leavers and stayers than any other factor . Leavers were less satisfied with their choice of profession (p =.001), and were they to start their careers over again, leavers would be much less likely to consider becoming special education teachers (p =.01).

Table 4.6.2 Satisfaction and Personal Assessment of Rewards
Percentage Responses of Leavers (n=14) vs. Stayers (n=282)

					Very/Somewhat Satisfied	Neutral	Very/Somewhat Dissatisfied
Leavers	3.50	1.29	.001	How satisfied are you with	64	7	29
Stayers	4.31	.92		your choice of profession?	88	6	6
	Mean	**SD**	**p**	**Likert Scale**	**Very/Somewhat Likely**	**Chances About Even**	**Very/Somewhat Unlikely**
Leavers	3.14	1.46	.01	If you could go back and do it	43%	29%	29%
Stayers	3.95	1.29		over again, how likely is it that you would become a special education teacher?	70	14	16
					Agree	**Neutral**	**Disagree**
Leavers	3.50	1.46	.03	The disappointments involved	21	21	57
Stayers	4.10	1.10		make special education teaching not really worth it	13	11	76
Leavers	2.85	1.63	.03	There aren't many rewards for	46	15	39
Stayers	3.56	1.37		being a special educator	31	10	60
Leavers	3.50	1.29	.04	One of the things I like about	64	7	29
Stayers	4.02	1.06		this job is that I'm always learning something new.	77	11	12

Three-quarters of stayers disagreed with the statement that special education teaching was not really worth it, given the disappointments involved, while just over half of leavers expressed similar views (p=.03). When asked whether they agreed that their jobs always offered something new to learn, only 12% of stayers disagreed, while over twice that number of leavers disagreed.

Affective Issues Related to Students (Table 4.6.3). Overall mean values for both leavers and stayers were relatively high on this factor, suggesting that all teachers have largely positive feelings toward their students. However, stayers' scores were also consistently higher, strikingly so on some variables, as when asked about their perceived effectiveness in making a significant difference in the lives of their students (p =.007). Seventy-one percent of leavers felt they were making a significant difference, compared to 86% of stayers; and twenty-nine percent of leavers felt they were not, compared to just 4% of stayers.

Table 4.6.3 Affective Issues Related to Students:
Percentage Responses of Leavers (n=14) vs Stayers (n=282)

	Mean	SD	p	Likert Scale	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Leavers	3.64	1.65	.007	I feel that I am making a	71%	0%	29%
Stayers	4.25	.84		significant difference in the lives of my students	86	11	4
Leavers	3.14	1.46	.03	I have as much enthusiasm	43	29	29
Stayers	3.80	1.29		now as I did when I began teaching.	72	7	21
Leavers	4.43	.85	ns	I really enjoy my students	93	0	7
Stayers	4.64	.61			97	2	2
Leavers	3.93	1.20	ns	When all factors are	21	7	71
Stayers	4.19	1.08		considered, spec. ed. teachers are not a powerful influence on students' achievement.	12	5	83
Leavers	4.00	1.36	ns	I find that my relationships	64	21	14
Stayers	4.22	.93		with students have gotten better over my years of teaching	81	14	6
					Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatis
Leavers	3.86	1.10	ns	Satisfaction: sense of	79	0	21
Stayers	4.01	1.03		accomplishments with students	83	4	14
				Frequency Rating	Daily/ Often	Sometimes	Seldom/ Never
Leavers	3.50	1.23	ns	My students show that they	50	21	29
Stayers	3.75	.97		appreciate me	59	32	9

Less than half of stayers indicated they had as much enthusiasm as they did when they began teaching, while almost three-quarters of stayers expressed that opinion (p=.03). Quite high percentages of both groups said that they enjoyed their students. Although not significantly different, leavers tended to feel less appreciated by their students than stayers, 29% versus 9%, respectively.

4.7 Summary of Survey Results

Some of the issues of concern to teachers in this study, such as questions of salary and benefits, are not surprising and their resolution not easily addressed in a time of shrinking budgets. Many others, however, appear to be issues of support and organizational approach. With some concerted effort and serious planning involving special education teachers, some progress may be made in these areas.

The emphasis of this summary is not on comparative results for different subsamples, but on some of the key points that emerged from the survey results for all teachers , including:

- perceptions, by some, of limited support and understanding from the building principal, the district central office, and fellow teachers;
- preparation for teaching and opportunities for professional growth;
- sources of job stress.

Even though many teachers expressed a certain degree of conflict about their role and duties with respect to students and the administration, a pivotal factor in understanding overall job satisfaction is the extent to which teachers feel supported in various ways by the principal, the central office, and by their relationships with other teachers. The factor correlation matrix (Appendix A to this chapter) shows that support from the principal is only somewhat correlated with support from the central office (r=.28), and, as would be expected, it is moderately well aligned with relationships with other teachers (r=.52). Both building level and central office support appear to be especially critical.

Seventy percent of teachers feel backed up by the principal in general, but roughly a quarter do not feel they are assisted in solving problems related to integration or student behavior, and only one-third feel they receive helpful feedback from the principal or vice principal.

Only half of the special education teaching force are satisfied with the quality of support and encouragement they receive. Only 13% feel that other teachers in their building understand well what special education teachers do. These figures suggest the potential for improvements in the ways in which feedback and problem-solving assistance are delivered to teachers and in the extent to which special education teachers feel included in their schools, areas over which districts may exert significant influence at both the building and central office levels.

Overall, teachers appear to feel relatively well-prepared for their work, but there are areas in which a persistent 10-15% indicate they have received minimal or no preparation for their present positions, including collaboration, supervision, paperwork responsibilities, and responding to the diversity of students' needs.

These problems may be due to an increase in diversity of student populations related to changes in organizational approach, such as move more toward inclusion, involving more diverse students assigned to the same teacher. There would most certainly be change related to demographic shifts that have increased cultural and ethnic diversity and raised additional considerations related to the intersection of special education and language minority students. Finally, these results may be due to reassignment decisions in the face of budget-related reductions in work force.

Shifts such as these are likely to be an increasing concern, and could provide useful direction for ongoing professional development needs that may not be currently addressed.

Only half of these teachers agree that their workload is manageable, 68% feel they have too little time to do their work, and almost one-third find conflicting goals, expectations, and directives a frequent source of stress. Once again, the diversity and severity of students' needs also emerges as a source of weekly or daily stress for over half. This may reflect inadequacies of past preparation, although as noted above, most teachers indicated their initial career preparation experiences were at least adequate. It may instead be more indicative of ongoing district professional development needs. It is highly significant that over half of respondents did not feel there were many opportunities to learn new techniques and strategies in their district.

Almost half of the teachers surveyed indicated they were very satisfied both with special education teaching as a profession and with their current assignment, and another third said they were somewhat satisfied. Only 13 percent indicated they were either somewhat or very dissatisfied with their current assignment. On the surface, this would not seem to be a sign of deep problems. However, when queried about specific aspects of their jobs, many teachers are less sanguine. More than half express at least some dissatisfaction with instructional materials and supplies, the prestige of the profession in the community, and salary and benefits. This suggests that, overall, teachers value the vocation of special education teaching as a profession, but have serious discontents concerning some of the conditions of work they experience. It is important to emphasize, however, that in spite of any discontents, teachers' feelings towards their students remain overwhelmingly positive.

In the survey, we asked each special educator how long they planned to stay in special education teaching, as one means of gauging teachers' commitment to their work. At the time of completing the questionnaire, nearly two thirds of the respondents planned to stay for a long time or until retirement. However, almost one in five said they planned to leave special education either as soon as possible or in a few years, and another 18% were unsure of their plans. It is important to note too, that only 30% of those who expressed an intent to leave "as soon as possible" actually left that summer. As has been pointed out by LeCompte and Dworkin (1991), intent to leave is not the same as actual leaving. However, as they also point

out, when individuals who express a preference to leave continue instead to teach, it may reflect a degree of burnout and constitute a special source of concern.

Comparisons conducted between those who actually left for work-related reasons and those who stayed did not result in significant differences. However, this lack of significance may be due to the low power of the statistics tests due to small sample size.

Appendix 4.A

Factor Correlation Matrix

Table A.1 Factor Correlation Matrix

	PRIN	PREP	CENT_OFF	STRESS	TEACHERS	COMMIT	CONFLICT	STUDENTS	WORKLOAD	PARENTS	GROWTH	AUTONOMY	RESOURCE
PRIN		.	.		.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
PREP	.1661**		.		.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
CENT_OFF	.2796**	.0771	.		.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
STRESS	.1603**	.2702**	.3249**		.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
TEACHERS	.5186**	.3171**	.1468*	.1349*		.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
COMMIT	.3668**	.2651**	.2472**	.4018**	.3552**	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
CONFLICT	.2063**	.2087**	.1379*	.4576**	.1980**	.2122**	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
STUDENTS	.2853**	.4262**	.0903	.3656**	.3346**	.5929**	.2685**	.	.	.	.	.	.
WORKLOAD	.0165	.0980	.2027**	.4475**	.0178	.1175*	.2556**	.1139		.	.	.	.
PARENTS	.2892**	.2843**	.2098**	.3313**	.2910**	.3608**	.2677**	.4608**	.1545**			.	.
GROWTH	.4406**	.1752**	.4129**	.2853**	.2855**	.3 3**	.3386**	.1303*	.1459*	.2487**		.	.
AUTONOMY	.4105**	.2462**	.2701**	.3615**	.3045**	.4334**	.2805**	.3513**	.1490*	.2033**	.2932**	.	.
RESOURCE	.2828**	.1689**	.2988**	.3726**	.2567**	.2031**	.2926**	.1579**	.1352*	.3033**	.3411**	.3140**	.

* - Signif. LE .05 ** - Signif. LE .01 (2-tailed)

Appendix 4.B

Additional Factors

Table 4.B.1 Parent Support

Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	
39%	14%	47%	Satisfaction with parent support [M=2.86; SD=1.22]
Well	Somewhat	Very Little	
28%	48%	24%	To what extent do the parents of your students understand what you do? [3.07 (.87)]
			Frequency
Daily/Often	Sometimes	Seldom/Never	
56%	31%	13%	My students' parents support what I am doing. [3.49 (.88)]

Reliability: α = .73
Percent of variance explained=1.8

Table 4.B.2 Opportunities for Growth and Advancement

Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	
46%	11%	43%	Satisfaction with opportunities for professional learning and growth [3.01 (1.28)]
28	26	46	Satisfaction with opportunities for professional advancement and promotion [2.73 (1.15)]
Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
31%	16%	53%	In this district I have many opportunities to learn new techniques and strategies. [M=2.61; SD=1.32]

Reliability: α = .77
Percent of variance explained=1.6

Table 4.B.3 Autonomy

Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
72%	9%	19%	I have control over aspects of my job that I consider most important to getting it done well. [M=3.80; SD=1.22]
83	5	12	I am allowed to use curricula that best meet the needs of my students. [4.17 (1.05)]
90	4	6	I have freedom within limits: I know what is expected of me but I also can be creative. [4.41 (.94)]

Reliability: α = .70
Percent of variance explained=1.6

Table 4.B.4 Adequacy of Material Resources

More Than Adequate	Adequate	Less Than Adequate	
33%	34%	33%	How adequate is the instructional space provided to you [M=2.94; SD=1.15]
16	31	53	How adequate is the instructional materials and supplies provided to you [2.50 (1.00)]

		Frequency	
Almost Never/ Several Times/Year	Once/	Weekly/ Month	Daily
43%	17%	40%	Stress due to inadequate resources to do a good job (materials, aide time, equipment, space) [3.00 (1.28)]

Reliability: α = .69
Percent of variance=1.5