ADDRESSING NOVICE TEACHER RETENTION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHER MENTORING AND TEACHER EFFICACY USING ACTION RESEARCH

by

SUSAN MARIE POTTS-DATEMA

(Under the Direction of Sheneka Williams)

ABSTRACT

Special education teachers leave the field at rates higher than other teachers, with the highest rates demonstrated by beginning special education teachers (Boe, Cook & Sunderland, 2008; Jones, Youngs, & Frank, 2013; White & Mason, 2006). This high turnover rate requires school systems to invest significant amounts of time, energy, and resources into the continual retraining of special education teachers (Thornton et al., 2007). Increasing novice special education teacher self-efficacy may be one way of improving teacher performance, resilience, and willingness to remain in the field (Ruble, Usher & McGrew, 2011).

This mixed-method action research study examined the influence an induction and mentoring program may have on self-efficacy levels of novice special education teachers, which may, in turn, led to higher rates of desired special education teacher retention. The action research team also explored components of mentor support and training that may influence the development of increased teacher self-efficacy in novice special education teachers.

Findings indicated that special education mentor teachers provide a significant amount of support to new special education teachers, including modeling instruction, observing instruction and providing immediate feedback, supporting the implementation of effective instructional strategies, supporting behavior management, and offering encouragement and moral support. As a result of this mentoring support, new special education teachers adjust their classroom practices in the areas of providing instruction, behavior management, teaching district standards, and reflection. While mentoring provides benefits to new special education teachers, many new special education teachers continue to feel overwhelmed.

Special education mentor teachers highly valued ongoing face-to-face training that targeted effective mentoring skills, best instructional practices for students with disabilities, and included dedicated time to collaborate with other special education mentors. Special education mentors require ongoing support to continue successfully navigating the challenges of being a special educator as they support new teachers, especially in the areas of managing job demands, role confusion, and navigating relationships with general education colleagues.

INDEX WORDS: action research case study, special education teacher retention, new special education teachers, teacher mentoring, new teacher induction, teacher efficacy

ADDRESSING NOVICE TEACHER RETENTION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHER MENTORING AND TEACHER EFFICACY USING ACTION RESEARCH

by

SUSAN MARIE POTTS-DATEMA

B.A., Washington University, 1985

M.S., Washington University, 1987

Ed.S., University of West Georgia, 2013

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2019

ADDRESSING NOVICE TEACHER RETENTION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHER MENTORING AND TEACHER EFFICACY USING ACTION RESEARCH

by

SUSAN MARIE POTTS-DATEMA

Major Professor:	Sheneka M. Williams
Committee:	Karen Bryant
	John Dayton

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2019

DEDICATION

To my father, Earle Potts, who taught me how to think deeply, act justly, love kindness, and to fight the good fight. I aspire to be the magnificent human being and scholar you have shown me how to be.

To my mother, Joyce Potts, who taught me about tenacity, and the gentle art of blooming wherever I was planted. You give me strength and courage whenever I need them most.

To my sister, Sharron Potts, who gives me constant love and support. This means more than you will ever know.

To my beautiful daughter, Alexandra Broadstone, who fills my life with joy. You are constantly teaching me how to think about things in new ways and what it means to be brave.

To Ben Datema, who never fails to inspire me with his insightful reflections on life and deep sense of purpose.

To Tim Datema, who can always see the best in everyone and everything.

To Dan Datema, who is truly one of the most genuine and caring people I have ever met.

To Corinne and Bennett Datema, who are our future. Please know how dearly your grandfather and I love you.

And,

With all my heart,

To my husband, Bill Potts-Datema, who encourages me, challenges me, and always makes me smile. You are my happily ever after. Grow old along with me, Sweetheart. The best is yet to be.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my major professor, Dr. Sheneka Williams, for her unfailing support and guidance. I would also like to express my deep appreciation to Dr. Karen Bryant who not only served as my mentor and advisor during the pursuit of my Specialist degree, but also went on to encourage and guide me through every step of my doctoral studies.

It would be impossible to write a dissertation on mentoring without honoring my own mentors who have been so important to me throughout my career. The late Hollis Wyks, a true visionary and kindred spirit, showed me what it meant to lead others with wisdom, wit, and grace. My dear friend, Julie Rubin Goldberg, represents the very best of our field. Her love, generosity of spirit, and sage advice helped me navigate many of the overwhelming challenges I faced in the classroom and in my personal life. I am simply better because of her influence.

As a young teacher, I had the great fortune to be surrounded by those who were masters of their craft and displayed unbridled passion for giving the very best to students. My teaching team including Debbie Towler, Lauren Quattrocchi Gremm, Robin Scott, AnneMarie Fitzgerald, Rachael Lemire Saveriano, and Cindy Jump all gave richly of themselves to our students and to me. They taught me how to teach with purpose and with joy.

As I transitioned from the classroom into the role of district leader, Tom Owen generously and patiently mentored me through those new and sometimes turbulent waters. I continue to rely upon his gentle wit and wisdom daily.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to the Special Education Instructional Coach team, Meredith Barna, Meghan Brannick, Niles Davis, Devin Geyer, Libby Griffith, Catherine Holbrook, Melissa McCullough, Sharon Reason, Chris Shaw, Kate Pabilona, Stefani Wood, and Ashley Worley, who give so much of themselves every day to support all of our teachers be they novice, mentor, or something in between. You are the backbone and the heart of the Special Education Department, and, quite simply, my heroes.

A very special thank you to each member of the action research team, who lent their expertise, passion, and time toward improving support for special education teachers and mentors.

Thank you to Deidra Eubanks for her endless patience, kind listening ear, infallible good humor, and no-nonsense approach to any situation, including writing this dissertation; to Dr. Emily Klein for her relentless enthusiastic and passionate support of my pursuit of doctoral studies and this project; to Wanda Riviere and Trina Henry for working diligently to keep me sane and organized; to Devin Geyer for bringing balance to the action research team with his quiet competence and steady manner, and to Dr. James Appleton, for his thoughtful guidance in designing this action research study.

I would like to honor and thank Cheryl Wilson, who has not only been a valued mentor, role model, and confidant for many years, but also gave hours and hours of her time to this project. And to Meredith Barna, who served as research assistant, benevolent

gadfly, and constant supporter. Whenever I began to lose enthusiasm or to procrastinate, Meredith was right there, keeping me on track. I wouldn't have reached the finish line without her.

Thank you to Patrick Kane, who has been a trusted, valued colleague and friend. As the Executive Director of Special Education, he provided unshakable support for my work and this study.

I am very thankful for my Cohort III colleagues. I would not have grown nearly as much as an educator, leader, or scholar throughout this journey without them there beside me. I will be forever grateful for our weekly discussions during our study group at Starbucks and the continued support of this amazing Cohort.

I would like to express my deep appreciation and love for my parents who have worked so hard throughout their lives and sacrificed so much for my sister and me. They instilled in me a love of learning and taught me the value of education. Their encouragement and support has meant more than they will ever know. Whatever I have accomplished in life, it is because I stand upon their shoulders.

Thank you to my daughter Ali Broadstone who has been head cheerleader, confidant, and sounding board throughout my time in graduate school. Her optimism often kept me going and I relied heavily on her viewpoint and insight.

And finally, I would like to honor my husband, best friend, and love of my life, Dr. Bill Potts-Datema. We embarked on doctoral studies together in our fifties, which was either inspired or crazy. Now that we have both finished, I am so grateful that I went down this path hand-in-hand with you. Thank you for all the laundry you've done, for all the takeout you've brought home, for all the times you've made me laugh through my

tears, for making me rest when I've been too tired to stand up, and for never, ever, letting me quit. I love you with all my heart.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It is extremely challenging to be a special education teacher. Under the federal mandate of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA), instruction for special education students must be individually designed and implemented to support each student's unique needs. While general education teachers follow a set curriculum that is provided to all students in their classrooms, special education teachers must adapt the content, methodology, and delivery of instruction as appropriate for each individual student [34 CFR §300.39(b)(3)].

While maintaining the same accountability as general education teachers to teach academic content and to ensure each student meets grade level standards, special education teachers are also charged with teaching behavioral, social, and functional life skills. Unlike their general education colleagues, special education teachers are likely to serve students in multiple grade levels, many who are already years behind age level expectations for academic and social functioning. Often students exhibit disruptive or aggressive behaviors that special education teachers are tasked with remediating. In addition, special education teachers have a range of duties related to local, state, and federal special education policies and procedures that are not required of general education teachers.

Without adequate support, these challenges can quickly become overwhelming, especially for those who are just beginning as a special education teacher. Many new special education teachers decide to either transfer to general education or to pursue other

career options. This high rate of turnover leaves our neediest students without a skilled and experienced teaching force.

To reverse this trend, school systems are searching for ways to support beginning special education teachers as they develop their instructional skills and learn to effectively manage their many responsibilities. With these supports in place, new special education teachers may have a stronger commitment to their profession and demonstrate improved performance in the classroom.

Overview of the Context

This action research study occurred in Sunnyside School District[1], a large, urban school system in the Southeastern United States. The Superintendent's Office, the Board of Education, and local school administrations continuously underscore the district's belief that all students, including students identified as having disabilities, can learn at high levels.

Overall, the Sunnyside School District serves over 180,000 students housed in 140 schools, including 80 elementary schools, 29 middle schools, 22 high schools, and nine other educational facilities. Thirty-two percent of students identify as Black, 30% as Hispanic, 23% as White, 11% as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 4% percent as Multiracial. 16% of all students are identified as English Learners, 14% as Gifted, and 54% qualify for free or reduced lunch services. It is essential to keep in mind that these demographics vary widely across individual schools. The Fiscal Year 2019 Budget is $2.193 billion with an annual per-pupil expenditure of $9,463.00. The average teacher in the district

[1] All identifying proper nouns are pseudonyms.

holds a master's degree or higher advanced degree, has 13 years of teaching experience, and earns about $62,000 a year.

Over 24,000 students in Sunnyside School District receive special education services provided by over 2,300 special education teachers. Approximately one-third of special education teachers in the district have less than five years' experience in their current role. Graduation rates for students with disabilities vary widely across the district, ranging from 85% in some high schools to less than 40% in others. Twenty-six percent of all students identified as having disabilities are also identified as English Learners.

As the Director of Instructional Services in the Department of Special Education, my role is to support teaching and learning for students with disabilities across the district. The Department of Instructional Services consists of 16 special education Coordinators, 13 special education Instructional Coaches, ten Behavior Specialists, four Assistive Technology Specialists, and five Instructional Specialists. All of these personnel work together with local school administrators to support special education teachers and students with instruction, assessment, and compliance with federal, state, and local regulations and procedures.

One of my primary responsibilities is to oversee the development and facilitation of ongoing professional development for local school administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals. This includes the administration of a teacher induction and mentoring program for novice special education teachers. I lead this program through collaborative planning with special education staff, monitoring the program's implementation, and assessing outcomes. I also work together with the special education

instructional coaches to provide ongoing training and support to our team of 113 mentor teachers.

The Problem

Problem Framing Locally

Hiring and retaining special education teachers has been a significant challenge for Sunnyside School District. Special education teachers represent the greatest area of turnover among all teaching positions in the district (Farner, 2016). For each year since 2012, the district has hired between 400 and 600 new special education teachers. While the majority of these new teachers are replacing teachers who have left, many are also filling new growth positions. Approximately 14% of special education teachers are in their first year of teaching special education. Another 6% of special education teachers have some experience teaching special education in another school system but are new hires to the district. Even though this group is not new to teaching, they require a significant amount of support in learning the local special education policies and practices. They also demonstrate varying degrees of competency in instructional strategies and classroom management, which requires significant support. Almost 40% of new teachers leave their special education position in the district within five years. While some leave the professional entirely, others transfer into general education.

High levels of attrition contribute to variability in instruction and achievement across schools within the district. While some high schools boast graduation rates and average SAT scores well above the state average, other high schools in the district are only graduating a little over half of their students and have average SAT scores well below the state average. Novice teachers with less than five years of teaching experience

make up less than 10% of the teaching faculty in the higher performing schools across the county while over one-quarter of the faculty of lower performing schools is comprised of novice teachers. This disparity points to a much higher rate of turnover among teachers in the lower performing schools resulting in less experienced teachers instructing the most vulnerable learners.

Special education teachers who are new to teaching or new to the district participated in a voluntary Induction Course which includes five online modules and either a two-day face-to-face "boot camp" offered in the weeks prior to the beginning of the school year, or a series of five two-hour face-to-face sessions offered in the evenings during the fall semester. Induction classes are taught by special education Instructional Coaches. Topics include special education policies and procedures, classroom management, specialized instruction, and assessment. An average of 65% of new special education teachers in the district fully participate in this opportunity each year. While a majority of new teachers who participate in the Induction Class report through exit surveys that the induction class was "helpful" or "very helpful" in understanding their responsibilities as special educators, an overwhelming majority also indicate that they still require support in managing special education paperwork, organization, data collection and in implementing appropriate instructional strategies.

In addition to the Induction Class, each new special education teacher is assigned a district level mentor. Mentors are special educators themselves with at least three years of experience teaching in the same school with the same population of students. Mentor candidates are carefully screened before selection, are highly recommended by their local school administration, and are matched as closely as possible to mirror the grade levels

and class make-ups of their mentees. Mentors participate in one six-hour workshop provided in the summer and four face-to-face two-hour training workshops during the school year led by special education Instructional Coaches. Mentors are encouraged to attend the face-to-face induction classes to support their mentees.

Each mentor/mentee pair is provided with up to three days of release time to observe instruction, do lesson planning, review student files, provide support in IEP meetings, or help with case management responsibilities. However, mentor/mentee pairs are free to set their schedules for when they meet and how to use their time and to determine the topics they will discuss. While each mentor keeps a log of time spent with his or her mentee, there are no formal expectations regarding the type or amount of support provided.

Over the past three years, less than one-third of the mentor/mentee pairs took advantage of the offered release time to work together during school hours. This may be due to a lack of clear guidance on how and when to use this release time. Review of mentor logs kept over the past three years indicate that more mentor-mentee interactions revolve around providing assistance on completing paperwork and other components of special education case management. Mentors are not currently taking advantage of opportunities to model effective lessons or to observe novice teachers and then provide feedback.

Problem Framing Nationally

The policies conveyed through the IDEA (2004) compel school districts to recruit and retain qualified special education teachers so that a highly qualified special education teacher is available for every student who receives special education services (Gehrke &

McCoy, 2012; Kamman & Long, 2010; Thornton, Peltier & Medina, 2007; White & Mason, 2006). Since the late 1970's, school systems have been unable to employ enough qualified special education teachers to meet the needs of their special education students (Marshall, Karvonen, Lowry, Drasgow & Seamon, 2013; Sindelar, Brownell, & Bellingsley, 2010; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016; Thornton, et al., 2007). Currently, 48 states are experiencing significant shortages of special education teachers (Dewey, Sindelar, Bettini, Boe, Rosenberg & Leko, 2017). This shortage is present throughout special education and is not limited to any specific disability (Thornton et al., 2007).

While a severe shortage of qualified special education teachers entering the field exists, the steep attrition rate of special educators exacerbates the problem. Significant numbers of special education teachers leave the field or transfer to general education each year (Leko & Smith, 2010; Mehrenberg, 2013; Plash & Piotrowski, 2007; Thornton, et al., 2007; Wasburn-Moses, 2010). Special education teachers leave the field at rates higher than other teachers, with the highest rates demonstrated by beginning special education teachers (Boe, Cook & Sunderland, 2008; Jones, Youngs, & Frank, 2013; White & Mason, 2006). Sweigart and Collins (2017) report that beginning special education teachers are approximately 2.5 times more likely to leave teaching than general education teachers.

This high turnover rate requires school systems to invest significant amounts of time, energy, and resources into the continual retraining of special education teachers (Thornton et al., 2007). Dempsey and Christenson-Foggett (2011) report that the cost to a school system for replacing a teacher may be as much as 25% of the teacher's salary.

Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2013) found that higher teacher turnover resulted in lower scores in both English language arts and math especially in low-performing schools and in schools with high populations of Black students. In addition, high attrition rates for special educators translate into the most vulnerable students losing opportunities to receive instruction from qualified, experienced teachers (Dempsey & Christenson-Foggett, 2011; Dempsey, Arthur-Kelly & Carty, 2009; Johnson, 2015).

While several effective, research-based instructional practices to support students with learning disabilities are documented in the literature, there is evidence to suggest that these evidence-based practices are not widely implemented in the classroom, which has resulted in a "research-to-practice" gap (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003). One of the most significant factors contributing to this research-to-practice gap in special education is the issue of retaining well-qualified special education teachers (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008). This is mainly due to new teachers leaving before they can develop a repertoire of evidence-based instructional strategies. This instability in special education staff makes it difficult for schools to develop innovative, evidence-based programming for special education students (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008).

Theoretical Foundation

Increasing novice special education teacher self-efficacy may be one way of improving teacher performance, resilience, and willingness to remain in the field (Ruble, Usher & McGrew, 2011). The theory of self-efficacy has roots in Rotter's (1954) social learning theory and was further developed by Bandura (1977). Teacher self-efficacy espouses the belief that human beings have the ability to shape their own actions (Viel-Ruma, Houchins, Jolivette and Benson, 2010) and refers to the extent a teacher believes

he or she can affect student motivation and achievement in the classroom. Viel-Ruma, et al., (2010) examined the relationship between teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction among special education teachers. The researchers found a significant relationship between job satisfaction and teacher self-efficacy and that the level of reported job satisfaction was related to the teacher's intent to stay in the field.

Self-efficacy includes both the self-perception of overall teaching competence as well as the teacher's beliefs about the task demands in a given situation (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Hoy, 1998). These beliefs determine the teacher's overall level of effort, goals, persistence when things become challenging and the teacher's resilience when faced with failure (Andrews & Brown 2015; Emery & Vandenberg, 2010; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). High levels of teacher self-efficacy are related to increased self-efficacy in students, greater motivation, and enhanced achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Teachers with higher level of self-efficacy manage their classrooms more effectively, use more effective instructional strategies, expend more effort in lesson planning and delivery, have higher expectations and goals for their students, and engage students at higher levels than teachers with low self-efficacy (Lee, Patterson, & Vega, 2011; Ruble et al., 2011). Self-efficacy beliefs have been found to be lower among novice teachers than among their more experienced colleagues (Tschannen & Hoy, 2007).

A teacher's efficacy beliefs depend on his or her mindset regarding the ability to improve. Teachers who believe his or her abilities are fixed have lower self-efficacy than those who believe additional training and experience will lead to improved performance. On the contrary, teachers who come to understand their deficits and think those deficits

can be improved through additional training or reflection have a more resilient sense of teacher efficacy (Tschannen-Moran, et al., 1998).

There are four sources of self-efficacy information: mastery experiences, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and physiological and emotional arousal (Tschannen-Moran, et al., 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). The impact of each source depends on what the teacher pays attention to, what the teacher remembers, and how the teacher thinks about each experience (Tschannen-Moran, et al., 1998). Mentor teachers have a unique opportunity to influence the development of self-efficacy through each of these four sources.

Mastery experiences are the most powerful influences on a teacher's self-efficacy beliefs (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). These skills come from actual teaching experiences. If the teacher perceives that teaching was successful, then self-efficacy is increased along with expectations that teaching will continue to be successful in the future. If the teacher perceives that teaching was unsuccessful, then self-efficacy beliefs are lowered, unless the failure is seen as a way to develop more effective strategies (Hoy & Spero, 2005).

Vicarious experiences occur when a teacher watches another teach a lesson. These experiences inform self-efficacy by providing the observer knowledge about the teaching task and also allow comparisons with the model. (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Vicarious experiences are powerful for new teachers who may have limited personal experience with actual teaching (Hoy & Miskel, 2013) and who may compare themselves to the model and conclude they can also be successful teachers (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007) found that the amount a vicarious

experience will affect self-efficacy depends on how much the observer identifies with the model.

Verbal persuasion includes general information about teaching, encouragement, suggestions for strategies for overcoming challenges and specific feedback about performance provided by colleagues, administrators, and students (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). For beginning teachers, verbal persuasion from students in the form of engagement and enthusiasm and experienced colleagues in the form of advice and encouragement are powerful influences on self-efficacy (Hoy & Spero, 2005; Ruble et al., 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007).

Information from states of physiological and emotional arousal also informs self-efficacy beliefs. A teacher's level of excitement and enthusiasm in any situation may contribute to feelings of competence while levels of anxiety or stress may contribute to feelings of ineptitude (Hoy & Spero, 2005; Ruble et al., 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). When physiological and affective states are enhanced, teachers improve their overall outlook, reduce their stress, and enhance their physical well-being (Hoy & Miskel, 2013).

By working one-on-one with novice teachers, mentors, who are master special education teachers themselves, have an opportunity to build self-efficacy through modeling, targeted feedback, emotional support and shared reflection (Lee et al., 2011; Sindelar et al., 2010). Mentors can help novices identify successful elements within lessons and frame their unsuccessful lessons as learning experiences. New special education teachers often report that the emotional support provided by their mentors was a vital component in their success during their first year teaching (Bay & Parker-Katz,

2009; Billingsley, Griffin, Smith, Kamman & Israel, 2009; Griffin, 2010; Israel, Kamman, McCray & Sindelar, 2014). Observations by and of mentor teachers coupled with constructive criticism and positive feedback was also rated as an effective component of support (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009; Griffin, 2010; White & Mason, 2006). New special education teachers reported that they appreciated feedback regarding their performance in IEP meetings and during co-teaching (Griffin, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

This action research study examined the effect an induction and mentoring program has on self-efficacy levels of novice special education teachers, which may, in turn, led to higher rates of desired special education teacher retention. The action research team also explored components of mentor support and training that may influence the development increased teacher self-efficacy in novice special education teachers.

The action research team addressed two gaps in the literature. While existing literature suggests that mentoring is a cost-effective way to increase desired retention, teacher satisfaction, and school performance (Billingsley et al., 2009; Thornton et al., 2007), these studies did not examine the type of ongoing professional development required to best prepare and maintain mentor teachers in providing the complex supports required by novice Special Educators. There is also a gap in the literature related to how action research can be used investigate and improve teacher mentoring programs. In order to address these gaps, this study examined three questions:

1. What are mentoring practices or supports for new special education teachers that may promote higher levels of teacher self-efficacy which, in turn, may reduce undesired attrition?

2. What do teacher mentors perceive as important components in their own training as empowering them to improve the self-efficacy of novice special education teachers?
3. What might the action research team learn through this process about promoting higher levels of self-efficacy for new special education teachers?

Significance

This study's findings have implications in two arenas: the district's Special Education Program and for school districts nationwide who are struggling with retaining skilled special education teachers. This study will shape the district's training programs for upcoming school years. Innovations in professional development for novice special education teachers, special education mentor teachers, and local school administrators will be implemented based on the findings of the action research team. Shortages in skilled special education teachers are occurring across the country. I am hopeful that the findings from this action research study will inform school districts nationwide in how to better support novice special education teachers so that they remain in the field. By implementing mentoring practices that better address the unique needs of novice special education teachers and by improving levels of teacher self-efficacy, teacher retention rates may improve as well as teacher performance in the classroom. While the data from this study are not generalizable, the data may be transferable to other districts across the nation. Thus, the results of this study may result in improving student achievement for students with disabilities throughout the country.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Two distinct themes emerge from the literature addressing the issue of desired retention of special education teachers. First, there is a consensus among researchers that novice special education teachers have unique needs and challenges as compared to novice general education teachers and, as a result, may experience role confusion and isolation in the school community. Current induction programs may not be adequately addressing those unique needs (Belnap & Taymans, 2015; Bettini, Jones, Brownell, Conroy, Park, Leite, Crockett, & Benedict, 2017; Collins, Sweigart, Landrum & Cook, 2017; Emery & Vandenberg, 2010; Gehrke & McCoy, 2012, Johnson, 2015; White & Mason, 2006). Secondly, research suggests that well-designed mentoring and induction programs may improve teacher self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and the desire to remain in the field (Belnap & Taymans, 2015; Cancio, Albrecht & Johns, 2014; Griffin, 2010; Madigan & Scroth-Cavataio, 2012; Washburn-Moses, 2010; White & Mason, 2006). There has been a great deal of research examining current induction and mentoring practices for both novice general education and novice special education teachers, identifying critical components of successful mentoring programs and revealing areas where additional research is needed (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009; Billingsley, 2010; Israel, et al., 2014; Mehrenberg, 2013; Washburn-Moses, 2010; White & Mason, 2006).

Unique Needs of Special Education Teachers

Gehrke and McCoy (2012) compared the needs of novice special education teachers with the needs of novice regular education teachers by reviewing 27 studies that focused on identifying what beginning teachers indicated they need during the first few years of teaching. They found significant differences in the areas of procedural information, curriculum and instruction, classroom management and collegial interactions. While novice regular education teachers must learn local school policies and procedures, novice special education teachers must also learn local, state and federal policies and procedures relating to special education and are responsible for meeting considerable legal requirements not required of regular education teachers (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009; Billingsley et al., 2009; Gehrke & McCoy, 2012; White & Mason, 2006). Novice special education teachers report needing urgent support in the areas of completing special education paperwork and IEPs (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009; Billingsley et al., 2009; Gehrke & McCoy, 2012; White & Mason, 2006) which they often find to be overwhelming and confusing (Bettini et al; 2018; Griffin, et al., 2009; Leko & Smith, 2010). Mehrenberg, (2013) found that the novice special education teachers' confusion and lack of clarity surrounding the paperwork was more stressful than the amount that needed to be completed.

Bay and Parker-Katz (2009) noted the wide range of abilities and skills required by special education teachers including expertise with multiple grade level curricular content, understanding various instructional strategies and assessments, as well as understanding how to teach social and self-advocacy skills. Special Educators are charged with providing individualized instruction to students with a wide range of

disabilities in a variety of content areas (Billingsley et al., 2009; Collins et al., 2017; Gehrke & McCoy, 2012; Griffin, et al., 2009) while ensuring all students with IEPs meet state standards (Gehrke & McCoy, 2012; Thornton et al., 2007). They need to select and adapt appropriate materials to meet individual student needs (Griffin, 2010) and must also frequently develop and coordinate behavior management plans to support severe student behavior (Billingsley, 2010; Billingsley et al., 2009; Gehrke & McCoy, 2012; Griffin et al., 2009; White & Mason, 2006).

Role confusion is also frequently cited as a major concern of new special education teachers (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009; Belnap & Taymans, 2015; Bettini et al., 2017; Billingsley, 2010; Billingsley et al., 2009, Mehrenberg, 2013). New special education teachers are often confused and overwhelmed by the variety of roles they are expected to perform in the school setting with expectations from school leaders and colleagues being perceived as vague, hidden, and sometimes conflicting (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009). Researchers also report that new special education teachers are often confused by the expectation to collaborate and co-teach with general education colleagues while also providing individualized, specialized instruction to students with IEPs (Bettini et al, 2017; Collins et al., 2017; Griffin et al., 2009).

Beginning special education teachers often convey feelings of isolation and feelings that they are not part of the school community (Billingsley, 2010; Billingsley et al., 2009; Gehrke & McCoy, 2012; White & Mason, 2006). They report feeling that their administrators don't understand or seem interested in special education (Griffin et al., 2009) and sometimes believe their administrators put a higher priority on legal compliance and paperwork than on providing good instruction (Mehrenberg, 2013). Lack

of communication and agreement between district and local school administrators regarding procedures and policy can leave new special education teachers feeling as if they are caught in the middle and unsure of how to proceed (Billingsley et al., 2009).

Positively and productively interacting with other adults within the school setting is an important skill for any effective teacher. While these interactions can be helpful, they can also be challenging (Billingsley et al., 2009). New special education teachers often report problems in collaborating with general education colleagues (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009; Billingsley, 2010; Billingsley et al., 2009; Gehrke & McCoy, 2012; White & Mason, 2006). Issues include difficulty collaborating in co-taught settings, general education teachers being reluctant to take responsibility for special education students, and general education teachers being reluctant to provide special education students accommodations as specified in their IEPs (Billingsley et al., 2009).

Induction and Mentoring Programs

States and local districts implement formal induction programs for new teachers with the hope that these supports will both improve the quality of teaching and encourage higher level of retention (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009; Billingsley, 2010; Billingsley, et al., 2009; Israel, et al., 2014; Mehrenberg, 2013; Washburn-Moses, 2010; White & Mason, 2006). There are large differences in state induction policies including differences in stated purpose, type of support offered, targeted audience, mentor qualifications, funding, length of time one is mentored, and evaluation procedures (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009; Dempsey & Christenson-Foggett, 2011). Induction takes on many forms and can be as limited as attendance at a one-day workshop in some districts while other districts provide a wide variety of formal supports including frequent face-to-face interactions

with mentors, scheduled whole group meetings, phone follow-up, online forums, and in-class modeling (Bartlett & Johnson, 2010; Dempsey & Christenson-Foggett, 2011).

The terms “mentoring” and “induction” are sometimes used interchangeably to describe the supports provided to new teachers (Israel et al., 2014). Other sources consider mentoring as a key feature within a larger formal induction program (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009). Mentoring is usually defined as a formal relationship between a beginning and an experienced teacher with the intention of providing a variety of supports to the new teacher (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez & Tomlinson, 2009). These supports can include observations, co-planning, and discussions (Washburn-Moses, 2010). Again, there is great variability in how mentoring programs are implemented ranging from informal buddy systems to well-developed communities of highly trained mentors that provide formative feedback designed to improve learning (Bartlett & Johnson, 2010).

Formal induction programs can include other elements in addition to mentoring such as careful hiring practices, protected assignments, efforts for teacher socialization within the local school environment, and an improved evaluation system to help new teachers (Billingsley et al., 2009). Formal components can include structured professional development opportunities along with scheduled meetings and observations with mentors, (Billingsley et al., 2009; Griffin, 2010) while informal supports can include unannounced visits or discussions with mentors, handwritten notes, and sharing of teaching materials between mentors and mentees (Griffin, 2010).

Sebald and Rude (2015) examined one school district’s induction and mentoring program for 40 new special education teachers over a three-year period. The program

included authentic field experiences and embedded case studies and simulations to provide more authentic experiences. The district saw improvement in new teachers' skills in collecting and analyzing student performance data, increases in new special education teachers' perceptions of how well the district supported them, and greater alignment between IEP goals and Common Core State Standards than in the previous years. Additionally, teachers' feelings of efficacy in teaching improved (Sebald & Rude, 2015).

Many districts provide formal induction programs for their special education teachers with the hope that these supports will improve the quality of teaching and encourage higher levels of desired retention (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009; Billingsley, 2010; Billingsley, et, al., 2009; Cancio, et al., 2014; Israel, et al., 2014; Mehrenberg, 2013; Washburn-Moses, 2010; White & Mason, 2006). However, very few of these programs are designed to meet the unique needs of new special education teachers (Bettini, Jones, Brownell, Conroy & Leite, 2018; Billingsley et al., 2009; Sebald & Rude, 2015). Gehrke and McCoy (2012) concluded that only induction activities addressing the specific needs of beginning special educators have the potential to improve the retention and teaching practice of this group.

Some findings in the literature suggest that providing mentoring and induction supports may influence beginning special education teachers' intent to remain in the field, their ability to navigate difficult situations, and their ability to teach and manage classrooms (Belnap & Taymans, 2015; Cancio, et al., 2014; Griffin, 2010; Madigan & Scroth-Cavataio, 2012; Washburn-Moses, 2010; White & Mason, 2006). Effective mentors may guide special education teachers to move past their own biases and focus on student achievement, improve self-efficacy, and enhance resiliency by modeling effective

instruction and providing non-evaluative feedback (Lee et al., 2013; Madigan and Scroth-Cavataio, 2012).

New special education teachers' needs are best met when provided with systematic, sustained support by a qualified mentor (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009). Mentoring programs vary widely in their design and implementation but most mentors engage in a variety of activities with their mentees including role playing, co-teaching lessons, observations, and discussions (Dempsey & Christenson-Foggett, 2011; Madigan & Scroth-Cavataio, 2012).

In order for mentoring to be effective, mentors for beginning special education teachers must be carefully chosen and provided with training (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009; Billingsley et al., 2009; Cancio, et al., 2014; Israel et al., 2014; Washburn-Moses, 2010). The most effective mentors are special educators themselves with at least three to five years classroom experience in the same district where they currently teach and are considered master teachers by both peers and administrators (Bay and Parker-Katz, 2009; Billingsley et al., 2009; Israel et al., 2014; White & Mason, 2006). Mentors should be matched carefully with mentees on both personal and professional variables including teaching philosophy (Billingsley et al., 2009; Griffin, 2010; Irinaga-Bistolas, Schalock, Marvin, & Beck, 2007; Madigan & Scroth-Cavataio, 2012; Washburn-Moses, 2010). It is optimal for mentors to teach students with similar disabilities and to teach the same grade level (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009; Billingsley et al., 2009; Gehrke & McCoy, 2010; Griffin, 2010; Griffin et al., 2009; White & Mason, 2006). White & Mason (2006) found that new teachers do not ask for help in interpreting and using assessment data or

preparing lesson plans if their mentors do not teach the same grade level or same type of disability.

Personal characteristics of the mentor are a critical factor in successful mentoring relationships (Billingsley et al., 2009; Irinaga-Bistolas et al., 2007; Israel et al., 2014). Mentors who were perceived as approachable, available, supportive, patient, and possessing strong communication skills were rated as the most effective (Billingsley et al., 2009).

Frequent contact between mentor and mentee, preferably at least once a week, was found to be an important component of a successful induction program (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009; Billingsley et al., 2009; Griffin, 2010, Irinaga-Bistolas, et al., 2007; Mrstik, Vasquez & Pearl, 2018; White & Mason, 2006).

Several researchers found that new special education teachers benefit from having their mentor in the same school (Billingsley et al., 2009; Griffin, 2010; Irinaga-Bistolas et al., 2007), although Carrea & Wagner (2011) reported that having a fellow special education teacher as a mentor was more important than having the mentor working in the same school. On the other hand, other researchers point out that there may be benefits in having a mentor outside of one's own school. These benefits may include the mentor having a more objective viewpoint not influenced by the school's internal culture, improved confidentiality, and less risk the mentor will be evaluative. The pool of available mentors with needed expertise may also be limited at any one school (Dempsey & Christenson-Foggett, 2011; Griffin, 2010). Dempsey et al. (2009) found that mentors with expertise in special education teaching in a different school than the mentee, and

who offered online support offered some important advantages over school-based mentoring support, including reducing any possible conflicts of interest.

New special education teachers often report that the emotional support provided by their mentors was a vital component in their success during their first year of teaching (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009; Billingsley, et al., 2009; Collins, et al., 2017; Griffin, 2010; Israel, et al., 2014). Observations by and of mentor teachers coupled with constructive criticism and positive feedback was also rated as an effective component of support (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009; Griffin, 2010; Lee, et al., 2011; White & Mason, 2006). New special education teachers reported that they appreciated feedback regarding their performance in IEP meetings and during co-teaching (Griffin, 2010).

In addition to supporting new teachers' instructional practices, Israel, et al., (2014) examined the impact of mentor practices on teachers' emotional needs by studying the relationship between career supports and psychosocial supports. They found that emotional supports were embedded within the professional supports provided by the mentors. The authors postulated that because special education teachers must assume full teaching responsibilities on their first day, they are often anxious and require professional assistance immediately. Providing rapid professional support may simultaneously serve as emotional support as it eases the anxiety over fulfilling new job responsibilities (Collins et al., 2017; Israel et al., 2014).

While novice special education teachers rated formal, scheduled meetings with their mentors as helpful (Billingsley et al., 2009; Gehrke & McCoy, 2012; Griffin, 2010; Mehrenberg, 2013), they found frequent, informal meetings with their mentors to be most effective (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009; Griffin, 2010, White & Mason, 2006). New teachers

reported discussions with mentors were most helpful when they provided emotional support and encouragement as well as information about special education procedures, information about the school, support in obtaining materials and resources, and guidance related to classroom management specific to their teaching assignments (Gehrke & McCoy; Griffin, 2010).

Many researchers reported that mentors serving in non-evaluative roles were more effective as they were able to provide genuine emotional support in a safe setting and give formative, non-evaluative feedback (Billingsley et al., 2009; Gehrke & McCoy, 2012; Griffin, 2010; Madigan & Scroth-Cavataio, 2012; White & Mason, 2006). However, Israel et al. (2014) found that new special education teachers did not indicate mentors serving in evaluative roles hindered the mentoring experience for them.

Empirical Findings

Empirical studies have examined the experiences of beginning special education teachers, how those experiences differ from beginning general education teachers, and how mentoring and other supports may provide support to improve self-efficacy and desired retention rates. The challenges facing novice special educators are well documented in the literature. Griffin et al. (2009) noted that new special education teachers face significant challenges. These challenges include lacking appropriate teaching materials, struggling with delivering content to students with a wide range of grade levels and abilities, and difficulty communicating and collaborating with other professionals such as general education teachers, paraprofessionals, speech pathologists, etc. Bettini et al. (2017) found that novice special education teachers perceived their workloads to be significantly less manageable than their novice general education

counterparts. This perception predicted emotional exhaustion and an intention to leave the field.

Mehrenberg (2013) observed that the amount of paperwork along with accompanying uncertainly surrounding the purpose and correct procedures was quite stressful for new special education teachers. Belknap and Taymans (2015) also found beginning special education teachers to be overwhelmed with case management responsibilities, frustrated with role conflict and ambiguity, and at risk for feelings of isolation.

The literature shows that having a mentor or supportive colleagues increased beginning special education teachers' resiliency and positive overall experiences (Belnap & Taymans, 2015). Mehrenberg (2013) noted that mentors can be quite beneficial in helping new teachers understand expectations and learn how to successfully meet case management responsibilities. Sebald and Rude (2015) found that mentoring may improve new special education teachers' feelings of efficacy in teaching. Improved self-efficacy is related to higher levels of job satisfaction and higher retention rates (Viel-Ruma et al., 2010).

Table 1 provides a summary of key empirical research regarding the challenges faced by novice special education teachers, and how mentoring may support teachers and influence self-efficacy.

Table 1

Summary of Empirical Research on Mentoring for New Special Education Teachers

Author(s), Date	Key Findings
Belknap & Taymans (2015)	• Novice special education teachers felt overwhelmed, frustrated with role conflict and ambiguity, and risked feelings of isolation. • When novice special education teachers felt supported and believed they were making a difference, they demonstrated more resilience.
Bettini, Jones, Brownell, Conroy, Park, Leite, Crockett, & Benedict (2017)	• Novice special education teachers perceive workloads to be significantly less manageable than novice general education teachers. • The perception of difficult workloads predicted emotional exhaustion and an intent to leave the field.
Griffin, Kilgore, Winn, Otis-Wilborn, Hou & Garvan (2009)	• Novice special education teachers face significant challenges. • A mentor can be helpful in supporting new special education teachers but all school personnel should be included in induction.
Jones, Youngs & Frank (2013)	• There are significant differences in the quality of relationships novice special education and novice general education teachers have with their colleagues. • New teachers benefit from informal relationships that provide both emotional and professional support.
Mehrenberg, (2013)	• Novice special education teachers perceived a lack of clarity in paperwork purpose and procedure. Uncertainty surrounding the paperwork was more stressful than the amount. • Mentors can be beneficial in helping new teachers.
Sebald & Rude (2015)	• After one year of an induction and mentoring program, new special education teachers felt prepared to collaborate with colleagues and to manage behavior but still felt unprepared to provide instruction, collect and analyze date and develop IEPs. • After three years of participating in an induction and mentoring program, teachers reported feeling prepared for all aspects of their job.
Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Hoy (1998)	• Teacher efficacy is determined by the individual's judgement of whether his or her current abilities and strategies are adequate for the teaching situation at hand. • How teachers feel about their ability to be effective in a specific situation will influence how they function in that situation.
Viel-Ruma, Houchins, Jolivette & Benson, 2010	• There was a significant relationship between job satisfaction and teacher self-efficacy.

Conceptual Framework

The foundation for this action research study is Self-Efficacy Theory. Self-Efficacy Theory holds that a teacher's self-perception of overall teaching competence determines the teacher's overall level of motivation, effort, and persistence, leading to enhanced student achievement and the desire to remain in the field (Andrews & Brown 2015; Belnap and Taymens, 2015; Emery & Vandenberg, 2010; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007; Viel-Ruma, et al., 2010). Even though novice special education teachers face significant challenges in their new roles, a carefully designed mentoring and induction program may provide an opportunity to build teacher self-efficacy through modeling, targeted feedback, emotional support, and shared reflection (Lee et al., 2011; Sindelar et al., 2010). Increased teacher self-efficacy levels may, in turn, lead to higher levels of desired special education teacher retention and achievement for students with disabilities.

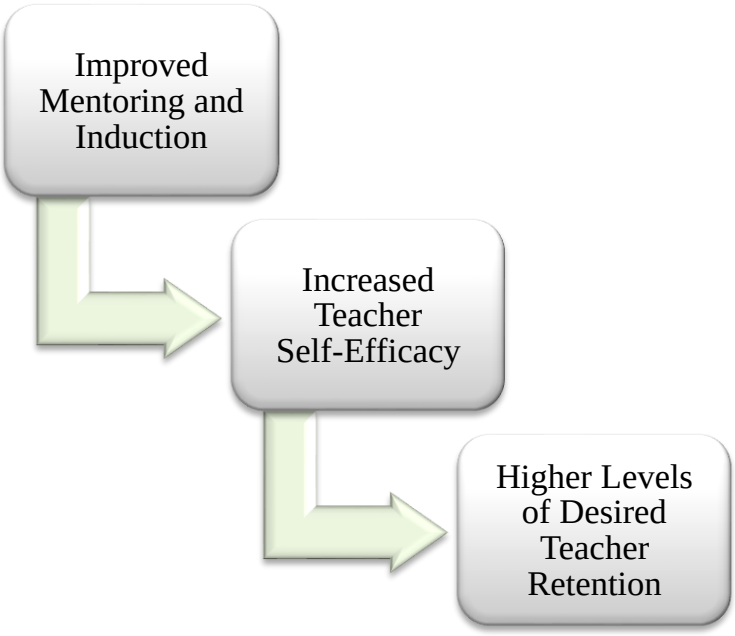

Figure 1: Relationship Between Mentoring, Self-Efficacy, and Teacher Retention

The conceptual framework shown in Figure 2 depicts how the Action Research Team examined the district's current mentoring and induction practices, reviewed the literature, and analyzed feedback from focus groups and surveys. Based on this information, new components of induction and mentoring supports were implemented. Innovations to mentor training were also introduced, with the aim to improve support for novice special education teachers and increase rates of desired teacher retention.

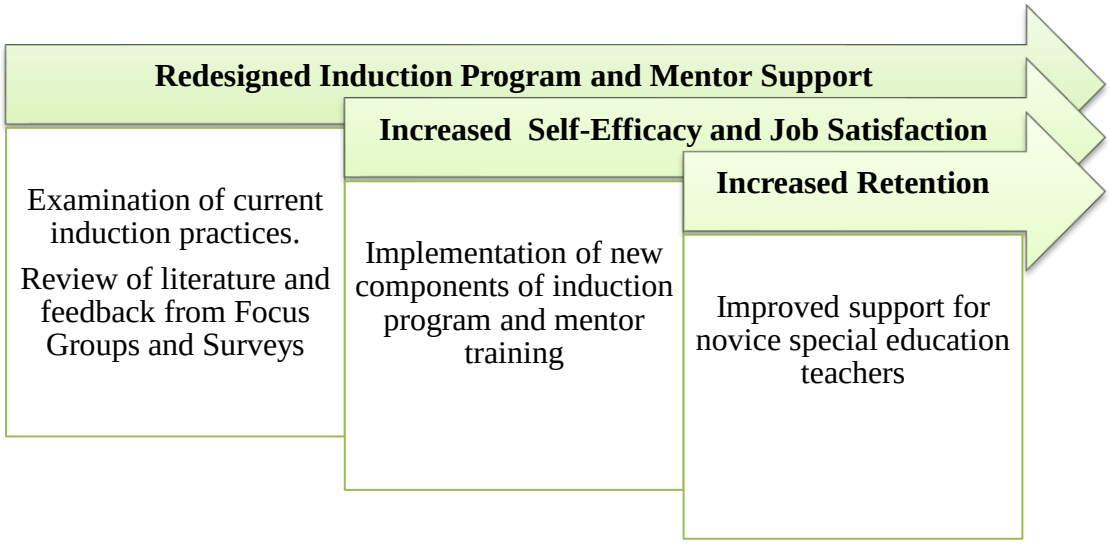

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework for Action Research Study

Conclusion

Hiring and retaining special education teachers has been a significant challenge for Sunnyside School District and for school systems across the country. Novice special education teachers face unique challenges as compared to novice general education teachers and may experience role confusion and isolation in the school community. Current induction programs may not be adequately addressing those unique needs (Belnap & Taymans, 2015; Bettini, Jones, Brownell, Conroy, Park, Leite, Crockett, &

Benedict, 2017; Collins, Sweigart, Landrum & Cook, 2017; Emery & Vandenberg, 2010; Gehrke & McCoy, 2012, Johnson, 2015; White & Mason, 2006). While research suggests that mentoring and induction programs may improve self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and reduce undesired teacher attrition for beginning special education teachers (Belnap & Taymans, 2015; Cancio, Albrecht & Johns, 2014; Griffin, 2010; Madigan & Scroth-Cavataio, 2012; Thornton et al., 2007; Washburn-Moses, 2010; White & Mason, 2006), there is a gap in the literature in the identification of effective components of ongoing professional development required to best prepare and maintain mentor teachers in providing the complex supports required by novice special educators.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

A mixed methods approach was used to triangulate findings for the action research team. The action research team identified ways to improve the current special education new teacher induction program, designed and revised interventions to address the unique needs of novice special education teachers and their mentors, implemented a mentor training program and provided multi-layered support to novice special education teachers. The action research team then compared teacher efficacy levels in the fall and spring of the 2018-2019 school year. For the purposes of this study, "new" or "novice" special education teachers are defined as teachers who are in their first year of teaching special education. "Mentors" are defined as veteran special education teachers with at least five years of teaching experience who have been selected to serve as mentors in the district special education mentoring program.

Action Research

Action research provided an ideal way to collect and analyze feedback and insights from both novice special education teachers and their mentors in order to address three research questions:

1. What are mentoring practices or supports for new special education teachers that may promote higher levels of teacher self-efficacy which, in turn, may reduce undesired attrition?

2. What do teacher mentors perceive as important components in their own training as empowering them to improve the self-efficacy of novice special education teachers?
3. What might the Action Research team learn through this process about promoting higher levels of self-efficacy for new special education teachers?

While experimental research might provide some information regarding an identified intervention, the experimental research model does not allow for ongoing reflection while interventions are being implemented, and does not allow for modification or adjustment of interventions in real time. Action research, on the other hand, while systematic in its approach, also allows the action research team to explore solutions to problems in the context where they occur (Stringer, 2014). Action research permitted the action research team to engage in a continuous cycle of examination, planning, action, and evaluation of what had been implemented. An action research framework also provided flexibility and a higher probably of discovering effective mentoring and induction practices that led to increased levels of teacher self-efficacy and ultimately, increased teacher retention.

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) outline an action research cycle as constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action. The cycle then may begin again.

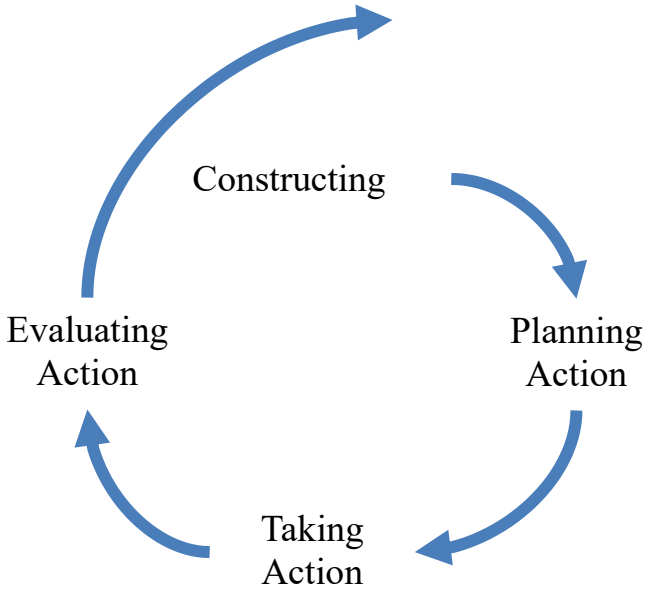

Figure 3: Action Research Cycle adapted from Coghlan & Brannick (2014).

This study followed the action research cycle as depicted in Figure 3. There were three phases to this study, which are illustrated in Figure 4. In summer 2018, the action research team reviewed the teacher mentoring and induction practices that were in place for new special education teachers in Sunnyside School District. Based on this review and on feedback from novice special education teachers who had completed the induction program the previous school year, the action research team developed an intervention plan for the coming school year. Participants for the study were recruited. In fall 2018, the action research team monitored the implementation of the interventions while collecting and analyzing ongoing feedback through surveys, focus groups, and informal anecdotal data. In January and February 2019, the action research team reviewed and analyzed feedback from teacher surveys and focus groups to determine if teacher efficacy

for novice special education teachers was influenced by the induction and mentoring program, how mentor teacher viewed their own training, and support, and what the action research team learned throughout this study. Based on these findings, the action research team made recommendations for how to support novice special education teachers in the coming school year.

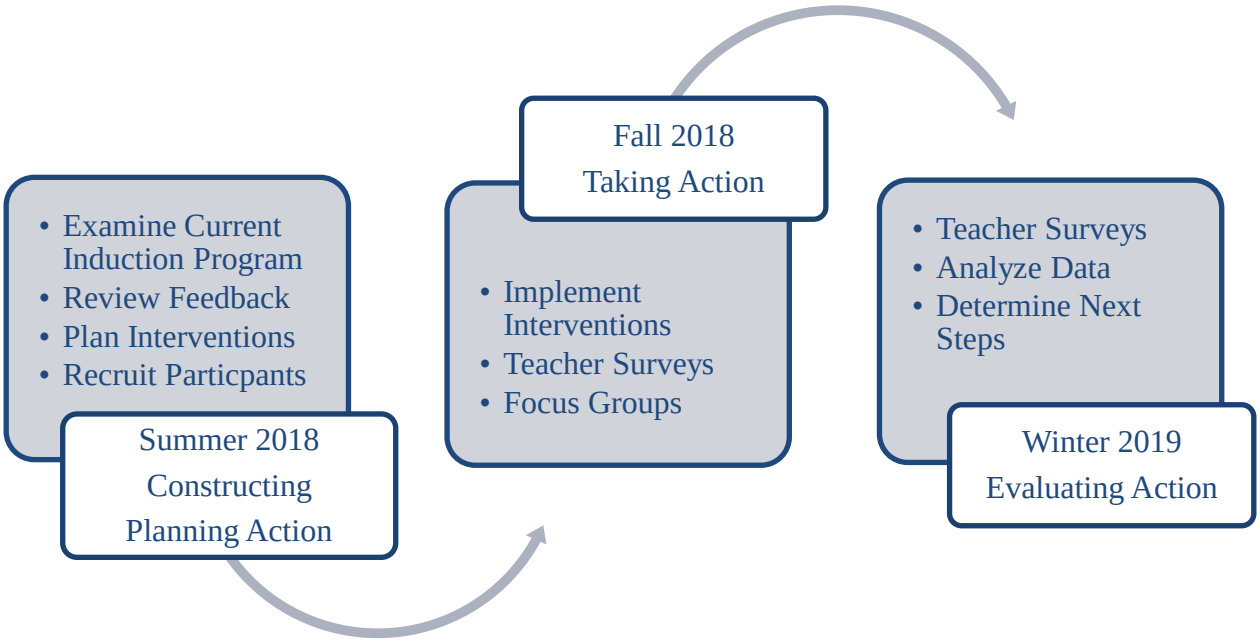

Figure 4. Phases of the Action Research Study

Case Study

A case study approach using mixed methods, including both qualitative and quantitative data, was used for this study. Creswell (2014) postulates using a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches may result in a better understanding of a problem than by using either approach in isolation. Simons (2009) defines a case study as "an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of

a particular…system in a 'real life' context" (p. 21) with a primary purpose of generating in-depth understanding and informing professional practice. Simons (2009) found that teachers are more apt to adopt findings from research if two conditions are met. First, if the teachers could recognize a connection between their own situation and the situation in which the improved practice occurred, and second, if the shared research experience resulted in a climate of trust and confidence. Conducting a case study in the context of action research will allowed for teachers and school administrators to recognize connections between the complexities of their own practice and those explored by the action research team. By developing a shared understanding of the underlying issues explored by the action research team and by sharing the experience of conducting the action research itself, teachers and school leaders may be more apt to adopt the finding of this project into their own professional practice (Simons, 2009).

Case Type and Boundaries

This action research case study examined several components of Sunnyside District's novice special education teacher induction program, including mentor training, identification of new teacher needs, perceptions of how those needs are met by mentors, and the development of teacher self-efficacy. In order to address these multiple components, the study was designed as an instrumental single case study bounded by a single school district. Embedded within this single case study are both the novice special education teachers with a focus on identifying their unique needs and the mentor teachers with a focus on their professional development and improving their ability to effectively support the development of self-efficacy in the novice teachers. Because the purpose of this study was to assess how the interventions provided through a redesigned induction

and mentoring program may affect teacher self-efficacy, the study was "instrumental" in nature (Stake, 2006).

Although this study is unique in that it focuses on one school district (Simons, 2009), the findings may inform other school districts in designing induction and mentoring programs that support the retention of qualified special education teachers.

Research Samples

This study included three groups of participants: action research team members, special education mentor teachers, and novice special education teachers. All research participants were employees of the Sunnyside School District. Data collection in this study included both quantitative and qualitative measures. All data collection methods were approved through the university Institutional Review Board in February 2018 (Appendix B) and through the Sunnyside School District's Institutional Review Board in June 2018 (Appendix C). Following these research approvals, research participants were recruited and informed consent was obtained (Appendix D & E).

The action research team consisted of six members: a director of special education, two special education coordinators, two special education instructional coaches, and a special education instructional specialist. One of the primary responsibilities of the director is to oversee the development and facilitation of ongoing professional development for local school administrators, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals, including the administration of a teacher induction and mentoring program for novice special education teachers. The coordinator for special education staff development had recently stepped into this newly created role and was specifically charged with supporting efforts to improve desired special education teacher retention

across the district. The second special education coordinator worked closely with eight elementary schools, three middle schools, and two high schools that were experiencing the highest level of special education teacher turnover in the district. One special education instructional coach was assigned to support teachers serving students identified with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders. The second special education instructional coach was assigned to support teachers of elementary level interrelated resource students, the majority of whom are identified with learning disabilities, expressive and receptive language impairments, and/or other health impairments such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The special education instructional specialist had recently stepped into another newly created role with the specific charge to support new special education elementary teachers. She is a retired Sunnyside School District principal and is now working part time in the department of special education.

An invitation to participate in this study was extended to all 113 special education mentors currently serving in Sunnyside School District's mentor program. From this group, 13 members agreed to participate in a focus group and signed informed consent. This self-identified group included teachers of students with autism, teachers of students with significant cognitive impairments, teachers of students with learning disabilities, teachers of students with behavior disorders, and early childhood teachers (preschool). Eight of the mentors taught in elementary schools, two in middle schools, and three in high schools. All had at least 10 years of teaching experience. Over 30 other mentor teachers expressed interest in joining a focus group, but cited scheduling conflicts or lack of time as a reason for not participating.

A similar invitation was extended to newly hired special education teachers in the district. Six novice teachers agreed to participate in a focus group and signed informed consent. Four of these novice teachers were brand new to teaching and two had some experience teaching in other states but were new to the district and new to special education. As with the mentor teachers, over 40 novice teachers expressed interest in joining a focus group, but cited scheduling conflicts or lack of available time as a reason for not participating.

Data Collection

This study employed a mixed methods design. This approach integrates findings from both quantitative and qualitative forms of research, which may result in a better understanding of a problem than by using either approach in isolation. (Creswell, 2014).

Quantitative Data

The Teacher Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES) was developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) as a measure of teacher self-efficacy. The authors tested the TSES in three separate empirical, quantitative studies and determined that that TSES was "reasonably valid and reliable" (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001, p. 801). The TSES contains 24 questions that are answered using a nine-point scale ranging from (1) "nothing" to (9) "a great deal" (Appendix F). When interpreting data from the TSES, it is important to examine how participants responded to questions correlated to three factors: efficacy for student engagement, efficacy for instructional strategies, and efficacy of classroom management (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2001). Forty-three novice special education teachers completed the TSES in August 2018 and again in February 2019.

The Teacher Perception Survey (TPS) (Appendix G), was developed by Roberts (2011) to capture to how teacher mentors and mentees spend their time together as well as the type of supports provided by the mentors to their mentees. The TPS contains 34 questions that are answered using a four-point scale ranging from “a lot” to “none” and 10 questions that are answered by indicating “yes” or “no”. Roberts (2011) tested for reliability and validity. Forty-five novice special education teachers completed the TPS in February 2019. All surveys were identified by a code number to protect the identity of each individual teacher.

Qualitative Data

This action research study utilized focus groups to inform the action research team as they answered all research questions. Morgan (1997) postulates that focus groups provide an advantage over individual interviews because they allow for exploration of similarities and differences in the opinions of the participants and produce an equivalent amount of data in a much shorter amount of time.

Focus group participants were qualified volunteers who have given informed consent for participation. All focus groups had between four and six participants and met for one hour. Two focus groups were comprised of mentor teachers who are currently supporting novice special education teachers. A third focus group was comprised of first year novice teachers who are currently being supported by mentors.

The focus groups employed a semi-structured interview process with a prepared set of open-ended questions that ensured consistency in the topics discussed. The protocol allowed for follow-up questions and elaboration as needed (Appendix H & I). Focus group discussions were audio recorded and transcribed. Participants in the focus

group were coded by number in the transcriptions so that individuals could not be identified. References to any identifying information such as names of schools, administrators, etc., were removed from the transcript. Audio and transcripts from the focus groups were stored in a digital format on a password protected computer.

The action research team meetings were audio recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were reviewed to examine insights and findings of the action research time. Members of the action research team participated in interviews to share their thoughts about the action research study as a whole, insight into the three research questions, and what they perceived to be next steps moving forward. The interview protocol employed a semi-structured format and was facilitated by the principal investigator (Appendix J).

Creswell (2014) observed that reviewing documents including public or private artifacts that are relevant to a study is a form of qualitative data. Document reviews are less intrusive than other forms of data collection as they are "most typically a natural part of the research setting and do not intrude upon or alter the setting…" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.162). During implementation of interventions throughout the study, artifacts such as mentor support logs, participant feedback from specific professional learning opportunities, informal needs assessments conducted by individual instructional coaches, and reports from Human Resources were generated. After ensuring all personal identifying information had been removed, the action research team reviewed these documents to consider the level of implementation of the recommended interventions and to determine if adjustments to the interventions were warranted. The action research team's reaction to these document reviews was documented in the transcripts from the action research team meetings.

An outline of the research methods and timeline is provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Research Methods and Timeline

Research Question	Data Collection	Analysis Approach	Timeline
What are mentoring practices or supports for new special education teachers that may promote higher levels of teacher self-efficacy which, in turn, may reduce undesired attrition?	Teacher Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale New Teacher Perception Survey Focus Groups New Teachers Mentor Teachers	Mean Score Analysis Mean Score Analysis Coding for Themes	August 2018 February 2019 February 2019 October 2018 – January 2019
What do teacher mentors perceive as important components in their own training as empowering them to improve the self-efficacy of novice special education teachers?	Focus Groups Mentor Teachers Action Research Team Meeting Transcripts	Coding for Themes Coding for Themes	October 2018 – January 2019 July 2018 – January 2019
What might the Action Research team learn through this process about promoting higher levels of self-efficacy for new special education teachers?	Action Research Team Meeting Transcripts Action Research Team Interviews Researcher Journal	Coding for Themes Coding for Themes Reflection	July 2018 – January 2019 February 2019 Ongoing

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

Data were analyzed following the completion of each administration of the TSES. The mean score for each question and each novice teacher was calculated. Mean scores on the questions correlating with teacher efficacy for student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management were also calculated. Mean scores obtained in August 2018 were then compared with mean scores obtained in February 2019 to determine if the intervention influenced teacher efficacy.

Data were analyzed following the completion of the administration of the TPS in February 2019. The mean score for each question and each novice teacher was calculated. Results informed the action research team of how mentors where spending time with their mentees and the types of support they were providing.

Qualitative Data

Data from focus groups, action research team member interviews, and action research team meetings were analyzed using a descriptive coding approach. The coding process organizes data by segments of text and then assigns a word to represent the general sense of the text segment (Creswell, 2014). In vivo coding uses the participants' own words as codes to ensure that concepts remain as close to the original intent of the participant as possible (Saldana, 2016). Transcripts of focus group discussions, action research team meetings, and action research team member interviews were coded by the principal investigator. Codes were then combined into major categories, which were then developed into themes to determine findings for the research questions.

Validity and Trustworthiness of the Data

Multiple data sets from multiple sources were used in this study. Triangulation of the data collected in the research study including information from focus groups, surveys, and interviews will support the check of qualitative validity (Coghlan & Brannick, 2015; Creswell, 2014). Focus groups from two different participant populations (mentor teachers and first year teachers currently served in the mentoring program) allowed for a variety of perspectives on the interventions being provided. Data from surveys provided the action research team with information about how new teachers perceive the support being provided by mentor teachers and how levels of new teacher self-efficacy changed following the implementation of a comprehensive induction and mentoring program. Individual interviews provided insight into the perspectives of individual action research team members on each of the three research questions.

Member checking gives participants access to the final themes or descriptions to determine if the participants feel they were accurate. This process can increase the validity of the research (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the principal investigator brought the final themes to the action research team and to the mentors who participated in the focus groups for validation, increasing the trustworthiness of this study.

Limitations of the Study

All participants in this study were volunteers who self-selected themselves after receiving an open invitation for participation in focus groups and in completing surveys. Approximately 10% of all district special education mentor teachers and approximately 9% of all new special education teachers contributed to the findings of this research.

These small samples may not be a true representation of the experiences of these groups as a whole.

In this study, new special education teachers were not differentiated by the type or severity of the disability or disability areas they served, the age or grade level of their students, or if they primarily taught students in self-contained or integrated settings. As a result, the findings of this study are unable to address if these variables influence the types of supports that may be beneficial for novice special education teachers to increase their self-efficacy.

This study was time limited to between July 2018 and February 2019. Additional research is needed to determine if self-efficacy levels of new special education teachers change through the end of the school year and beyond. The study ended prior to new special education teachers declaring their intentions to remain or leave the field at the end of the school year. Additional cycles of action research carried out over several years would be beneficial in determining how improved support through induction and mentoring may influence teacher efficacy over several years and would be able to examine actual teacher retention rates.

Researcher Subjectivity

As a former special education teacher, mentor, and special education coordinator, I have first-hand knowledge of the unique needs faced by novice special education teachers. My own experiences, both successful and frustrating, have the potential to inform this research in useful ways but also to bias my perceptions. I am aware that I have strong opinions about what novice special education teachers need from their

mentors, their colleagues, their local school administrators, and from district leaders in order to be successful.

Early in my career, I had school administrators and veteran teachers who served as influential mentors who helped shaped my philosophy of education as well as my value system as an educator. However, I also had experiences with others who were unsupportive and even obstructive. Later on, as a mentor teacher myself, I had mixed experiences both in working directly with new teachers, and in the level of support or lack of support from local school administrators. As a result, I brought many preconceived ideas about what may be best practice in effective training and support for mentor teachers into my role as principal investigator. I knew that I needed to remain vigilantly aware of any tendencies I might have to color the experiences of the participants in this study through my own lens. Using the in vivo coding process supported me in this endeavor by guiding me to use the participants own literal words in determining the codes. This allowed me to analyze the data much more objectively.

Throughout this research, I kept a personal journal as an aid in reflecting upon my own reactions to what emerged from the action research team and to help keep my objectivity. I also relied on my action research team to "keep me honest" as we worked together to develop an objective understanding of the experiences of our districts' new special education teachers, their mentors, and the effectiveness of the interventions put in place through this action research.

CHAPTER FOUR

CASE STUDY

Description of the Context

Sunnyside School District is a large, urban, school system in the Southeastern United States serving over 180,000 students, over 23,000 of whom receive special education services. As the Director of Instructional Services in the Department of Special Education, my role is to support teaching and learning for students with disabilities across the district. One of my primary responsibilities is to oversee the development and facilitation of ongoing professional development including the administration of an induction and mentoring program for novice special education teachers.

The high level of novice Special Education teacher attrition in Sunnyside School District is of deep concern at both the local school and district level. Large numbers of novice special education teachers leave the field or transfer to general education each year. In addition, several dozen special education teachers annually request to leave the district prior to fulfillment of their contracts and prior to the completion of the school year. Filling these vacancies, especially in the middle of the school year, can be quite challenging for local schools, resulting in fragmented instruction for the district's most needy students. As a result, retention of qualified special education teachers has become a top priority for district leaders and local school administrators.

To address this priority, the district created six new positions within the department of special education just prior to the onset of this action research study. A

special education coordinator of staff development was hired and tasked with addressing the high rate of undesired teacher attrition through the provision of improved staff development, the development of high-quality special education teacher resources, and the improvement of the induction and mentoring program. Five part-time educational specialists were hired to provide intense one-on-one coaching and support for struggling new special education teachers.

In addition to the creation of these new positions, two additional innovations were put in place. Additional funding was allocated to allow for each mentor to receive a $400 stipend at the end of the school year. Previously, mentor teachers only received professional development credit for their mentoring work. Funding was also allocated to increase the number of the mentor teachers who could participate in the special education mentoring program. As director of instructional services within the department of special education, I supervise all of these new employees and monitor these new initiatives.

In April and May 2018, prior to the onset of this study, a team of mentor teachers were recruited for the 2018-2019 school year. In order to be accepted as a district level special education mentor teacher, applicants must have at least three years teaching experience in the same program area within the same grade band. They must complete a written application with several essay questions, and must be highly recommended by their principal or assistant principal. Finally, their special education paperwork is reviewed to ensure they demonstrate high levels of compliance with all federal, state, and local regulations and procedures. This application process is required for both new and returning mentor teachers. One hundred thirteen mentor teachers were selected to support an anticipated cohort of over 550 novice special education teachers.

Mentor teacher teams are organized into ten program areas which align with the disability areas the mentor teachers support. These areas are: the interrelated resource programs at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, the autism programs for high functioning and lower functioning students, the intellectual disability programs at the mild and the moderate/severe/profound level, the program for students with emotional and behavioral difficulties, the early childhood (preschool) program, and speech/language pathologists. Each program area has one or two dedicated instructional coaches to support the team of mentors and to provide training for their mentors throughout the year. The breakdown for each program area is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Special Education Mentor Team for 2018-2019

Program Area	Number of Instructional Coaches	Number of Special Education Mentors	Number of New Special Education Teachers*
Autism (Low Functioning)	2	11	53
Autism (High Functioning)	2	8	53
Emotional/Behavioral Disorder	1	3	29
Early Childhood (Preschool)	2	17	36
Intellectual Disability (Mild)	1	5	20
Intellectual Disability (Moderate/Severe/Profound)	2	13	32
Interrelated Resource/ Specific Learning Disabilities Elementary Level	2	36	131
Interrelated Resource/ Specific Learning Disabilities Middle School Level	1	10	82
Interrelated Resource High School Level	1	4	94
Speech/Language Pathologists	1	6	51
TOTAL	**15**	**113**	**581**

**number of new special education teachers as of February 2019*

The Action Research Team

As director of instructional services in the department of special education, I served as primary researcher for this action research study. Following IRB approval from both the university and Sunnyside School District, I began recruiting the action research team. Once formed, the action research team consisted of six members: a director of special education, two special education coordinators, two special education instructional coaches, and a special educational instructional specialist. Each team member brought a wealth of experience in working with special education teachers to the team, in addition to his or her own unique perspective.

Dr. Gross is a special education coordinator whose background is educating significantly intellectually disabled students with Autism. She currently works closely with eight elementary schools, three middle schools, and two high schools that are experiencing the highest level of special education teacher turnover in the district. Dr. Gross is deeply concerned about the toll this is taking on the schools she supports. She is also concerned about the loss of highly trained educators who have the skills to support the specialized needs of lower functioning students with multiple disabilities. Dr. Gross brought her past experience of leading action research to this action research study. In addition, she provided a needed perspective in developing self-efficacy in teachers working with students with severe disabilities.

Ms. Rodgers is a special education coordinator with over eight years of experience as a district leader. Her background includes many years of teaching students with learning disabilities and mild intellectual disabilities at the middle school level. She has a wealth of experience supporting new and mentor teachers and did her own graduate

level work exploring ways to improve teacher retention. Just prior to the beginning of this action research study, Ms. Rodgers stepped into a new role as coordinator of staff development for special education. This role was created specifically to support efforts to improve desired special education teacher retention rates across the district. She also serves as a liaison between the special education department and staff development department, bringing expertise on best practices for professional development and adult learning to the team. Working hand-in-hand with the special education director, Ms. Rodgers coordinates the new teacher induction and mentoring program.

Mr. Tower is a special education instructional coach who supports teachers serving students identified with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD). Recruiting and retaining teachers to serve this population has been increasingly challenging for the district. Mr. Tower has over ten years' experience teaching students with emotional and behavioral difficulties and another five years' experience serving as a behavior specialist for Sunnyside School District. He has implemented several innovations in ways to support teachers over the past few years, including offering open "drop in" sessions for teachers to meet with him after school. He is deeply committed to providing quality professional development as a way of fostering capacity for teachers.

Ms. Levy is a special education instructional coach who support teachers of elementary level interrelated resource students, the majority of whom are identified with learning disabilities, expressive and receptive language impairments, and/or other health impairments such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The majority of these students are served in general education settings for at least half of the school day with many receiving instruction in co-taught settings (one general education and one

special education teacher providing joint instruction in a general education classroom). Ms. Levy has a passionate interest in supporting reading instruction for students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities. She is also a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), and works closely with teachers struggling with behavior management issues in their classrooms. In partnership with one other instructional coach, Ms. Levy supports the districts' largest mentor teacher team and well over 100 new teachers each year. She brought a vital perspective of understanding the needs of new teachers who are navigating co-teaching with a general education colleague for the first time while supporting high-functioning students with deficits in reading and attention. As instructional coaches, both Mr. Tower and Ms. Levy meet regularly one-on-one with new and struggling teachers in a confidential setting, allowing deep insight into the needs of novice teachers.

Ms. Meyer had just stepped into the newly created role of special education instructional specialist at the beginning of this action research project. For many years, Ms. Meyer served as principal at an elementary school in Sunnyside School District. Following her retirement, she returned to the district office part-time as a special education coordinator supporting the program for students identified with Significant Developmental Delays. She then transitioned into the instructional specialist position which allows her to focus on providing one-on-one support to new special education elementary teachers. Ms. Meyer's experience as a local school principal and district level leader brought an invaluable perspective to the research team.

Action Research Timeline

Members of the action research team initially met twice in summer 2018 and then held regular monthly meetings between September 2018 and February 2019. Agendas were developed for each meeting. The action research team focus on learning about effective mentoring strategies from the literature, reviewing and analyzing information from data collection measures and other documents and artifacts, monitoring implementation of the interventions, and planning for next steps moving forward. Meetings were audio recorded and transcribed. The team completed one cycle of action research as outlined by Coghlan & Brannick (2014). Constructing and planning action occurred in summer 2018, interventions were implemented throughout fall 2018 and winter 2019, and then the team analyzed results and planned for next steps during late January and early February of 2019.

Table 4

Timeline of Interventions, June 2018 – February 2019

Interventions	Action Research Team Activities	Intended Outcomes	Timeline	Data Collection
Action Research	Action Research Team Meetings	Continual learning about the effective supports for new special education teachers	June 2018 – February 2019	Meeting Transcripts
Full Day Mentor Training w/ Make-up opportunity	Supported development of the training Collected feedback from participants	Improve mentor teachers' knowledge of effective mentoring practices	September 2018	Review of artifacts, feedback from participants, mentor teacher focus groups
Two Day Induction Course for New Teachers; Repeated make-up opportunities	Supported development of the training based on current literature, coach and participant feedback from the prior year.	Prepare new special education teachers with knowledge and skills necessary to begin effective case management, classroom	July 2018	Review of artifacts, feedback from participants, new teacher focus group, Teacher Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale

	Collected feedback from participants	management and instruction		
Ongoing Trainings for Mentor Teams	Supported development of the training Collected Feedback from participants	Just in time training to support effective mentoring practices	August 2018 – February 2019	Mentor focus group
Intentional Instructional Coach Support for Mentor Teachers	Monitored implementation	Improved support for effective mentoring practices	August 2018 – February 2019	Mentor focus group
One-on-one mentoring **Encouraged intentional use of 3 Day Release time for mentor-mentee pairs to work together outside of class time**	Monitoring implementation	Improved mentoring experience for new special education teacher	August 2018 – February 2019	Review of artifacts, mentor and new teacher focus groups New Teacher Perception Surveys Teacher Sense of Self-efficacy Scale
Improved on-line platform for Special Education Resources	Development and implementation on on-line platform including collaborative communities	Improved access to resources for instruction, behavior management, and legal compliance	August 2018 – January 2019	New Teacher and Mentor focus groups

Phase One: Constructing and Planning Action (Summer 2018)

Members of the action research team met twice in the summer of 2018. As all members of the action research team, with the exception of Dr. Gross and the primary investigator, were unfamiliar with action research, the first meeting opened with a discussion of how an action research study might differ from a more traditional empirical study and a review of Coghlan & Brannick's (2014) action research cycle. Members reviewed the role of the action research team, the purpose of the study, the proposed research questions, and the recruiting process for participants. The methods of collecting both the qualitative and quantitative data were discussed and the team familiarized

themselves with the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale and the New Teacher Perception Survey. A summary literature review was presented to the team for discussion. Members expressed surprise at the number of studies that had been conducted examining the questions surrounding supports for new special education teachers and reversing the high levels of special education teacher attrition. Several team members remarked on how the findings in the literature closely reflected our own shared experiences in Sunnyside School District.

During the second meeting, the action research team examined existing information related to previous school years' induction and mentoring program for new special education teachers. This information included mentor logs and feedback surveys from previous school years, budget reports showing the use of district-provided mentor release days, and feedback from special education instructional coaches who had facilitated induction classes and provided training and support for special education mentor teachers. Any identifying information was removed prior to examination. Based on these examinations, the action team made several observations.

The action research team noted that the district currently offers a wide variety of supports to new special education teachers, including an assigned mentor, induction classes, online resources, and ongoing professional development. However, only a fraction of new special education teachers actually accesses these supports. One contributing factor could be that use of district supports for new teachers is completely voluntary. Although new teachers are "strongly encouraged" to take advantage of professional learning, engagement with a mentor, and use of online resources, none of this is required. Another factor is that the district tends to schedule professional

development sessions after school hours when teachers are off contract. In addition, these sessions are offered only once, without a make-up opportunity. Because the district covers such a wide geographic area, new teachers often have to travel a distance, after school hours, to attend professional learning. Finally, new teachers often report that they are so overwhelmed with their day-to-day workload that they do not possess the time or energy to engage in anything they perceive to be "extra."

Feedback from the previous school year's novice and mentor teachers indicated frustration around difficulty accessing special education resources and information quickly. While the district provided a wealth of resources and information, access to these resources was fragmented, difficult, and often confusing. The special education department had an online communication center that was available to all staff, but it had not been updated in several years so information provided was incomplete and out of date. Some program areas had begun to explore building online communities where teachers could share resources, but these were unevenly developed and were not universally available to all special education teachers.

The action research team also observed that once a mentor had been assigned to a new teacher, the mentor/mentee pair was free to set their schedules for meeting, determine how to use their time, and the topics they will discuss. While mentors were asked to keep a log of time spent with each mentee, there were no formal expectations regarding the amount or type of support provided. For the past six years, the district offered each mentor/mentee pair three days of release time to observe/model instruction, provide feedback, do lesson planning, review IEP paperwork and files, prepare and/or

provide support in IEP meetings, address questions/concerns, and help with case management responsibilities.

The action research team discovered that, over the last several years, while mentors and mentees often met together after school or on weekends, less than one-third of the mentor/mentee pairs took advantage of any of the offered release time to work together during school hours. Only about 15% of all mentor/mentee pairs used all three available release days each year. Very few mentors used the release time to model instruction for their new teachers or to observe their mentee teaching and then provide feedback. The majority of topics discussed between mentors and mentees were about completing paperwork, case management responsibilities, conducting IEP meetings, classroom management, and data collection. Only a small percentage of time was devoted to discussing instructional strategies.

Mentor training consisted of a one-day face-to-face training for all special education mentor teachers offered during the summer break. Over the past three years, approximately one-third of mentors attended this training, with no opportunity to make up this session. Four additional two-hour face-to-face training sessions were offered through the school year. For these trainings, each program area mentor team attended their own training facilitated by that program area's instructional coach(es). Feedback from previous mentor trainings indicated that sessions may have been somewhat superficial and did not effectively address best mentoring practices. Concerns over the high number of new teachers each mentor must support were also discussed.

Special education teachers who are new to teaching or new to the district participated in a voluntary induction course which includes five online modules and

either a two-day face-to-face “boot camp” offered just prior to the beginning of the school year, or a series of five two-hour face-to-face sessions offered in the evenings during the fall semester. Induction classes are taught by special education Instructional Coaches. Topics include special education policies and procedures, classroom management, specialized instruction, and assessment. An average of 65% of new special education teachers in the district fully participate in this opportunity each year. While a majority of new teachers who participate in the induction class reported through exit surveys that the class was “helpful” or “very helpful” in understanding their responsibilities as special educators, an overwhelming majority also indicate that they still require support in managing special education paperwork, organization, and data collection, and in implementing appropriate instructional strategies.

Based on these observations, the action research team developed a series of interventions implemented during the 2018-2019 school year. The full-day onboarding training session for mentor teachers was redeveloped. In order to increase participation, this training session was offered once in the summer and once again in the early fall. Mentors continued to attend four additional training sessions throughout the school year led by their specific program area instructional coaches. In addition to these training sessions, coaches provided regular one-on-one “check-ins” and maintained regular contact with their mentors through classroom visits, face-to-face meetings, phone calls and email.

The new teacher induction course was redeveloped. The two-day “boot camp” specifically focused on knowledge and skills that new special education teachers would need to successfully start the school year. The online modules were updated, and a new

special education teacher handbook was created. This handbook was individualized for each special education program area, and was provided in both hard copy and electronic format.

In order to ensure more new special education teachers had access to the induction course, the course was repeated in both the fall and spring of the school year. This allowed teachers who were hired during the school year or missed the summer session to participate in this important training. Ongoing professional opportunities for new special education teachers were offered throughout the school year by individual program areas.

Mentor teachers were encouraged to use their offered release time. Intentional use of this time to both model instruction and to observe their mentees teaching and provide feedback was also strongly encouraged. While mentors had been asked to keep logs of their mentoring activities in the past, logs were informal, varied in format from program area to program area, and were turned in on a voluntary basis. This year, a standard log format was developed to be used by all mentors, and its completion and submission is now a requirement to earn the stipend.

The online platform that stored resources for special education teachers was reformatted, updated, and expanded to provide a "one-stop shop" for accessing important information and resources. Online communities that had been developed individually by program area instructional coaches, and provided a wealth of instructional and assessment materials, were linked to provide more universal access. Resources previously available to only general education teachers were now also made available to special education teachers and were linked through the online platform.

Phase Two: Taking Action (August 2018 – Early January 2019)

The action research team met five times between August 2018 and January 2019. This phase of the study focused on implementing the interventions outlined by the action research team, monitoring data and feedback, and making adjustments as needed.

The action research team reviewed data showing the turnover rates for general and special education teachers across the district over the past three years. Results from these data showed very high levels of turnover overall but especially in the autism programs and in the self-contained program for students with specific learning disabilities. The action research team also noted that the lowest performing schools in the district had the highest turnover each year. Action research team members noted that teachers in schools with low socio-economic levels often take care of their students' physical needs in addition to teaching. One team member shared:

> *One of our brand-new teachers buys food and puts it in her students' bookbags every single day. That's not happening at other schools. This teacher has to deal with real life things, gathering food, talking to the social worker, and doing all of these things. These kids are absent more. They're sick more. These are real factors.*

The action research team noted that these challenges may have an impact on self-efficacy levels. As one member reflected:

> *The whole idea of self-efficacy is that you believe you have the ability to make a difference for your students. But when you're teaching kids who are hungry, live somewhere unsafe, or have no one at home who's actually taking care of them, it's a whole different situation. You can feel great about your math lesson, but*

then you go home and worry about your students' well-being. How can you feel you are really making a real difference in your students' lives when your students need so much more than you can possibly give them? I understand why people get so discouraged. These kids need their teachers to be there. To stay. We need to find ways to really support these teachers and remind them how important they are in the lives of their students."

During this phase of the study, the action research team also monitored the implementation of training for both mentors and new teachers. The full-day onboarding workshop for special education mentor teachers that had previously been offered once each summer was redeveloped to include more targeted training on effective mentoring skills such as providing feedback, active listening, and navigating difficult conversations. The training was also designed to provide a clearer understanding of the mentoring role and the expectations of district level special education mentors. The last two hours of the day included time for mentors to meet directly with their individual instructional coaches to receive training specific to their program area. Through informal feedback surveys collected over the week following this training, 95% of participating mentors reported that they either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the statement, "I have a better understanding of my role as a special education mentor and the accompanying responsibilities." Ninety-four percent of participating mentors reported that they either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the statement, "I have a better understanding of how to use communication and feedback strategies to support effective mentoring." This training was offered once in the summer. and once again in the early fall. Of the 113 mentors, 66 completed the summer session, and 43 completed the early fall session,

resulting in a 96% participation rate. This was up from an approximately 33% participation rate over the past several years.

A two-day induction "boot camp" was developed that specifically focused on knowledge and skills that new special education teachers would need to successfully start the school year. In addition to the two-day face-to-face session, participants completed five online modules addressing drafting legally compliant IEPs, following special education policies and procedures, and facilitating IEP meetings. Each new teacher received a newly-created "New Special Education Teacher Handbook," which contained important guidance and resources. The handbooks were provided in both hardcopy and electronic formats. New teachers were divided into special education program areas and instruction was provided by the program area instructional coaches. Make up sessions in both the fall and the early spring were offered to ensure teachers hired after the beginning of the school year or those who were unable to attend the summer training were given an opportunity to receive this training. Four hundred eighty-seven new teachers participated in the induction classes over the course of the school year. Informal feedback surveys from participants indicated that 86% of participating new teachers either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the statement, "After completing this induction course, I feel better prepared to teach my students." The handbooks were also perceived as a valuable resource.

Ms. Levy commented on how new teachers reacted to the handbook:

I think the binders have been very successful. Just having the information right at their fingertips. It's huge. They like the paper copy. I really try to get them to go online to get stuff. No, no, no. They won't go online but they'll pick up their

binder. It's the weirdest thing that in 2018, these kids who are on their phones for everything, they want their binders.

Feedback from the mentor teacher focus groups indicated that mentors would benefit from the addition of more "concrete" tools such as checklists and handbooks. The action research team considered these requests. Based on these recommendations, Ms. Rodgers took the initiative to begin to developing these materials. Copies of the new teacher handbooks were shared with the mentors. Ms. Rodgers began drafting monthly checklists and worked together with the team of instructional coaches to fine-tune the checklists to suit each individual program area. Checklists were then shared with mentor teachers for feedback. The checklists will continue to be refined over the remainder of this school year and will be issued to all mentors for the 2019-2020 school year.

During this phase of the study, mentors received regular one-on-one check-ins from their instructional coaches via classroom visits, face-to-face meetings, phone calls, and emails. Instructional coaches also established "open communication" channels through emails and texts so that mentors felt they could reach out to the coaches with questions or concerns and receive a response very quickly. All mentors were strongly encouraged to use the offered release time to work with their mentees during school hours.

One innovation for expanding the use of release time was to offer a mentor/mentee "work session" where mentors and mentees could meet together as a group and work on whatever was needed. These sessions were well attended (20 – 25 teachers per sessions) and received very positive feedback. Ms. Levy shared:

The teachers loved the mentor/mentee working sessions. They felt like they've never had anything like that in the past. Just being able to have the time to work on stuff that they need to and have mentors there to give them guidance during that time. And the new teachers could learn from each other as well. They have just been very appreciative of that."

Forty-three novice teachers completed the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran, 2001) in August 2018. Teachers rated themselves on 24 statements such as "How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?" and "How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?" on a scale of 1 (None at all) to 9 (A great deal).

Table 5 displays the results of the initial administration of the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale in order of descending overall mean self-efficacy rating.

Table 5

Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale August 2018 Results

Teacher #	***Mean (1-9)***	***Student Engagement (1-9)***	***Instructional Strategies (1-9)***	***Classroom Management (1-9)***
1	8.7	8.6	8.4	8.8
2	8.6	8.5	8.8	8.8
3	8.5	8.5	8.5	8.6
4	8.3	8.3	8.8	7.6
5	8.3	8.3	8.4	8.4
6	8.3	8.3	8.0	8.1
7	8.3	8.3	8.4	8.6
8	8.2	8.1	8.8	7.5
9	8.2	8.3	7.9	8.1
10	8.1	8.1	7.9	8.4
11	8.0	8.0	8.9	7.6
12	8.0	8.1	7.6	7.6
13	8.0	7.9	8.5	7.8
14	7.9	7.9	7.8	8.0
15	7.8	7.7	8.5	7.1
16	7.8	7.7	7.9	7.8
17	7.6	7.6	7.6	8.0

18	7.5	7.4	7.5	7.3
19	7.5	7.4	7.5	7.6
20	7.5	7.6	6.9	7.6
21	7.4	7.3	7.3	8.1
22	7.4	7.5	7.6	7.9
23	7.3	7.2	7.5	7.8
24	7.3	7.3	7.4	7.4
25	7.3	7.3	6.5	7.3
26	7.2	7.1	7.3	7.1
27	7.2	7.1	7.3	7.1
28	7.1	7.1	7.0	7.3
29	7.1	7.1	7.0	7.3
30	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0
31	7.0	7.0	7.3	7.4
32	7.0	7.1	6.4	7.5
33	6.9	6.9	7.5	7.3
34	6.9	6.9	7.0	6.9
35	6.8	6.8	6.8	6.4
36	6.8	6.9	6.1	7.0
37	6.8	6.8	6.0	7.0
38	6.6	6.6	6.3	8.0
39	6.1	6.1	6.3	5.3
40	5.9	5.9	5.6	6.3
41	5.7	5.7	6.1	5.1
42	5.3	5.4	5.3	5.6
43	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
Average	**7.4**	**7.3**	**7.3**	**7.4**

Results indicated a fairly high sense of self-efficacy for these novice special education teachers with an overall mean of 7.4 on a scale of 1 to 9. Individual mean self-efficacy ratings ranged from 5.0 to 8.7, with 74% of respondents showing a mean self-efficacy score of 7.0 or higher. A factor analysis for *Efficacy in Student Engagement*, *Efficacy in Instructional Practices,* and *Efficacy in Classroom Management* was conducted as recommended by Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2001). Overall, very little variability between these factors was shown with mean scores of 7.3 for *Efficacy in Student Engagement*, 7.3 for *Efficacy in Instructional Practices,* and 7.4 for *Efficacy in Classroom Management*. The action research team reflected that because the new teachers responded to the TSES surveys very early in the school year, they may have

based their ratings upon idealistic expectations rather than on actual classroom experience.

Phase Three: Evaluating Action (Late January 2019 – February 2019)

The action research team met twice during the last phase of this study. Both the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Survey (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy,2001) and the New Teacher Perception Survey (Roberts, 2011) were distributed, completed, collected, and analyzed. The action research team also reviewed data from focus group interviews and other feedback from the interventions put in place throughout this study. Individual action team members were interviewed to gain an understanding of their perspectives on the action research study.

The action research team noted that redesigned professional learning for both mentors and new special education teachers was successful. Participation rates were significantly improved for both groups and participant feedback indicated that the trainings provided support for effective practice. A hardcopy "handbook" with information and resources was perceived to be a valuable tool for both new teachers and their mentors.

Feedback from an informal survey of mentor teachers showed that 95% of mentors agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "The support and training provided by the Special Education Department has allowed me to be an effective Special Education Mentor Teacher." Mentor support logs revealed that more mentor/mentee pairs took advantage of release time so that they could meet during the school day. Forty-one percent of mentors used release time to model instruction, and 38% of mentors used release time to observe their mentee teaching and then provide feedback.

Moving forward, the action research team made several recommendations to carry this work into the coming school year. The team agreed that self-efficacy rates should continue to be monitored. Data on self-efficacy will be collected in April 2019 to see if rates improve over the spring of the school year. Next year, the initial self-efficacy ratings will be taken after the third or fourth week of school to see if self-efficacy rates lower during the first few weeks of school. In addition, a rating scale that measures self-efficacy on items specific to special education such as "I can develop a Behavior Intervention Plan when needed" and "I can support an IEP team in drafting appropriate goals for my students" will be added. Information from these surveys will help inform the action research team in designing more effective supports for new special education teachers.

The addition of "make-up" sessions for professional learning opportunities resulted in a much higher participation rate. Make-up sessions will continue to be offered for all large trainings for mentors and new teachers.

Professional training for mentors will continue to be refined. In addition to providing four training sessions for their mentor teams each school year, instructional coaches will continue to conduct regular one-on-one check-ins with each mentor, with at least one check-in per year consisting of a face-to-face visit.

The district will continue to provide three days of release time for each mentor/mentee pair. Mentors will continue to be strongly encouraged to use release time to model instruction and observe their mentees teaching so they can provide real-time feedback. All program areas will offer multiple mentor/mentee working sessions during

the school day where new teachers may bring whatever they need help with to a group of mentors to receive support.

Based on feedback from the mentor focus groups, mentors will also be given release time to observe other mentors' classroom and observe instruction. This will allow mentors to learn from each other as they continue to develop their own high level of skills.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

This action research study examined the types of mentoring practices and supports for new special education teachers that may promote higher levels of teacher self-efficacy. Viel-Ruma, et al. (2010) found a significant relationship between job satisfaction and teacher self-efficacy among special education teachers, and that the level of reported job satisfaction was related to the teacher's intent to stay in the field.

The action research team also explored components of mentor support and training that may ultimately influence the development of increased teacher self-efficacy in novice special education teachers.

The action research team addressed a gap in the literature surrounding an understanding of the types of ongoing professional development that will best prepare and maintain mentor teachers to provide the complex supports required by novice special educators. This action research study sought to answer the following three questions:

1. What are mentoring practices or supports for new special education teachers that may promote higher levels of teacher self-efficacy which, in turn, may reduce undesired attrition?
2. What do teacher mentors perceive as important components in their own training as empowering them to improve the self-efficacy of novice special education teachers?

3. What might the Action Research team learn through this process about promoting higher levels of self-efficacy for new special education teachers?

Findings were compiled from both quantitative and qualitive data collected through the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), the New Teacher Perception Survey (Roberts, 2011), special education teacher and mentor focus groups, document reviews, action research team meeting transcripts, and action research team member interviews. A summary of the findings is shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Summary of Research Findings

Research Question	Findings
What are mentoring practices or supports for new special education teachers that may promote higher levels of teacher self-efficacy which, in turn, may reduce undesired attrition?	Theme 1: Special education mentors provide significant support to new special education teachers, especially in the areas of instructional strategies and behavior management. Theme 2: New special education teachers significantly adjusted their classroom practices in response to mentoring support, especially in the areas of motivating students, reflecting upon instructional practices, and differentiating instruction. Theme 3: Although mentoring was perceived to be beneficial, many novice special education teachers continue to feel overwhelmed.
What do teacher mentors perceive as important components in their own training as empowering them to improve the self-efficacy of novice special education teachers?	Theme 1: Mentor teachers highly value face-to-face training with their specific program area instructional coaches and each other as effective staff development. Theme 2: Mentor teachers could benefit from additional structure, and concrete resources, such as handbooks and checklists, built into the overall mentoring program.

	Theme 3: Mentor teachers themselves require ongoing support to continue successfully navigating the challenges of being a special education educator as they support new teachers.
What might the Action Research team learn through this process about promoting higher levels of self-efficacy for new special education teachers?	Theme 1: The action research approach was an effective way to learn about how to promote higher levels of self-efficacy for new special education teachers. Theme 2: Providing supports for new special education teachers may be more complex than the action research team may have originally believed. Theme 3: A multi-layered approach to supporting new special education teachers may be needed in addition to the provision of mentoring and induction classes.

Research Question 1: Mentoring Practices that Support Teacher Self-Efficacy

To determine what types of mentoring supports may promote higher levels of self-efficacy for new special education teachers, qualitative data captured from focus groups with mentors and new special education teachers were analyzed along with observations and reflections made by the action research team. These data were compared with quantitative data obtained from two surveys, the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) and the New Teacher Perception Survey (Roberts, 2011). Forty-three new special education teachers completed the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) in August 2018 and again in February 2019. Forty-five novice special education teachers completed the New Teacher Perception Survey (Roberts, 2011) in February 2019. Through analysis of these data, three themes emerged:

1. Special education mentors provide significant support to new special education teachers, especially in the areas of instructional strategies and behavior management.
2. New special education teachers significantly adjusted their classroom practices in response to mentoring support, especially in the areas of motivating students, reflecting upon instructional practices, and differentiating instruction.
3. Although mentoring was perceived to be beneficial, many novice special education teachers continue to feel overwhelmed.

Theme 1 – Special education mentors provide significant support to new special education teachers, especially in the areas of instructional strategies and behavior management.

The New Teacher Perception Survey (Roberts, 2011) was administered to 45 novice special education teachers in February 2019. Respondents were asked to answer "yes" or "no" to 10 questions about the type of support they have received from their mentor during the most recent month of teaching. Results are displayed in Table 7 by descending order of percentages of teachers who indicated "yes" to receiving the type of support indicated.

Table 7

Type of Mentoring Support Received in the Most Recent Month of Teaching

During the most recent month of teaching, did your mentor…	**% "Yes"**
Act on something you requested in the previous weeks?	92%
Give you encouragement or moral support?	92%
Give you suggestions to improve your practice?	92%

Provide guidance on teaching to meet district standards?	92%
Discuss your instructional goals and ways to achieve them?	88%
Provide an opportunity for you to raise issues and/or discuss your individual concerns?	88%
Provide guidance information on administrative and logistical issues?	83%
Work with you to identify teaching challenges and possible solutions?	83%
Share lesson plans, assessments, or other instructional activities?	79%
Provide guidance on how to assess your students?	67%

The highest levels of support provided during the most recent month of teaching were encouragement and moral support, suggestions to improve practices, guidance on teaching to meet district standards, and responses to something the novice had recently requested. Qualitative feedback from new teacher focus groups indicates that this support is well received and perceived to be beneficial. A novice teacher of students with autism shared:

"When I meet with my mentor, I'm very inspired. It's a good feeling. I mean getting mentoring means you're not on an island by yourself."

A novice high school teacher working with students with significant cognitive disabilities added:

"It was my 4th day on the job. I was just trying to keep my hair on my head, and to keep my glasses from fogging up so I could see in front of me. And there she was.

My mentor showed up saying, 'if you need anything, let me know.' That kept me coming back, knowing somebody was there who was making an effort to reach out to me."

A novice elementary teacher working with students with high functioning autism observed:

"My mentor has been extremely supportive and helpful with any and every question or concern I may have. If she doesn't know the answer, she will contact someone and get me the answer."

The New Teacher Perception Survey (Roberts, 2011) asked respondents to rate the extent of support they have received in a variety of areas from their mentors over the course of the entire school year. For each area specified, the respondent rates the extent of support as "a lot", "a moderate amount", "very little", or "none." Results from this section of the New Teacher Perception Survey are shown in Figure 5.

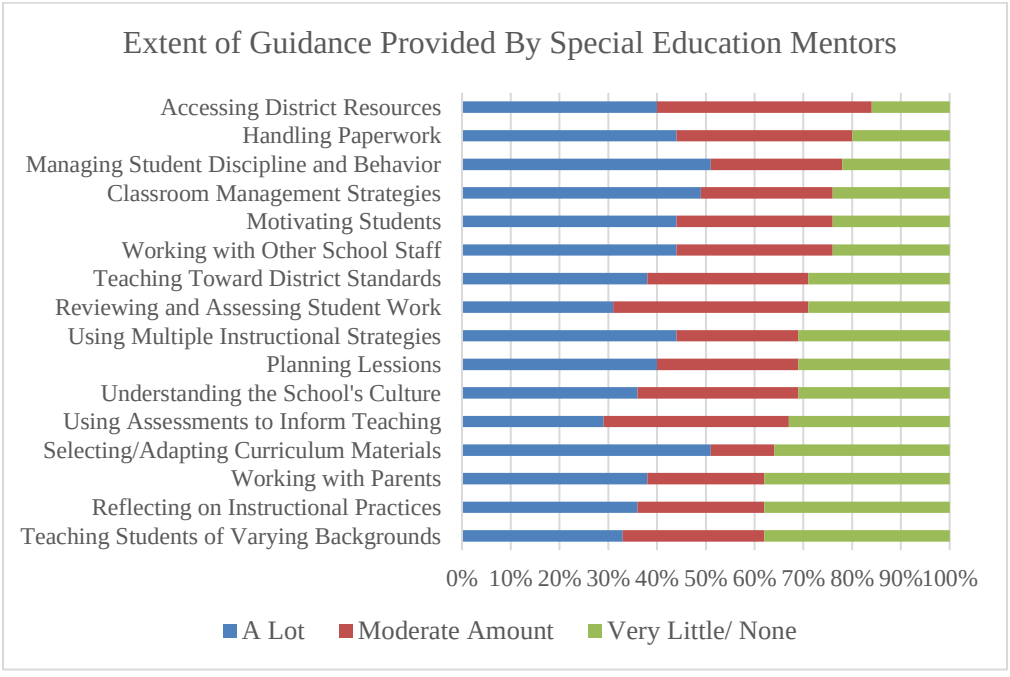

Figure 5: Extent of Guidance Provided by Special Education Mentors by Topic

A majority of teachers reported that mentor teachers provided at least a "moderate amount" of guidance for all areas surveyed. Forty percent or more of new teachers indicated that their mentors provided "a lot" of guidance in the areas of managing behavior, using multiple instructional strategies, motivating students, accessing district resources, selecting/adapting curriculum materials, working with other school staff, and handling paperwork.

A change in practice for mentors that was noted through mentoring logs and focus group interviews was that mentors spent more time this school year modeling instruction. They also spent more time observing their mentees teaching in the classroom and then providing immediate feedback. In previous year, mentors spent the vast majority of their time talking with mentors about concerns and answering questions. Both mentors and novice teachers reported in focus group interviews that using their district-provided release time from the classroom to observe the mentor model effective instruction was exceptionally valuable. One mentor offered:

> *"I think for me the most successful times are when they come to observe me and see everything in action…when they come observe me and how I do things, they're able to see it more clearly than me going to their school and just telling them what to do."*

Another mentor added:

> *"When I've gone to my mentee's classroom after school to talk, it will end up just being a vent session or they'll tell me about a lesson that went all wrong, and they can't figure out what to do. When they come to see me, I can show them how to do certain things."*

A novice middle school teacher working with students with learning disabilities in co-taught settings shared this with his focus group:

> *"My mentor is great. I learned so much when I went to observe her classroom and then when she came to visit mine."*

Theme 2 – New special education teachers significantly adjusted their classroom practices in response to mentoring support.

The final section of the New Teacher Perception Survey (Roberts, 2011), asks teachers to rate the extent they have adjusted their classroom practice in response to support they've received from their mentor. Respondents rates themselves as adjusting their practice, "a lot", a "moderate amount", "very little", or "none." Results from this section of the New Teacher Perception Survey (Roberts, 2011) are shown in Figure 6.

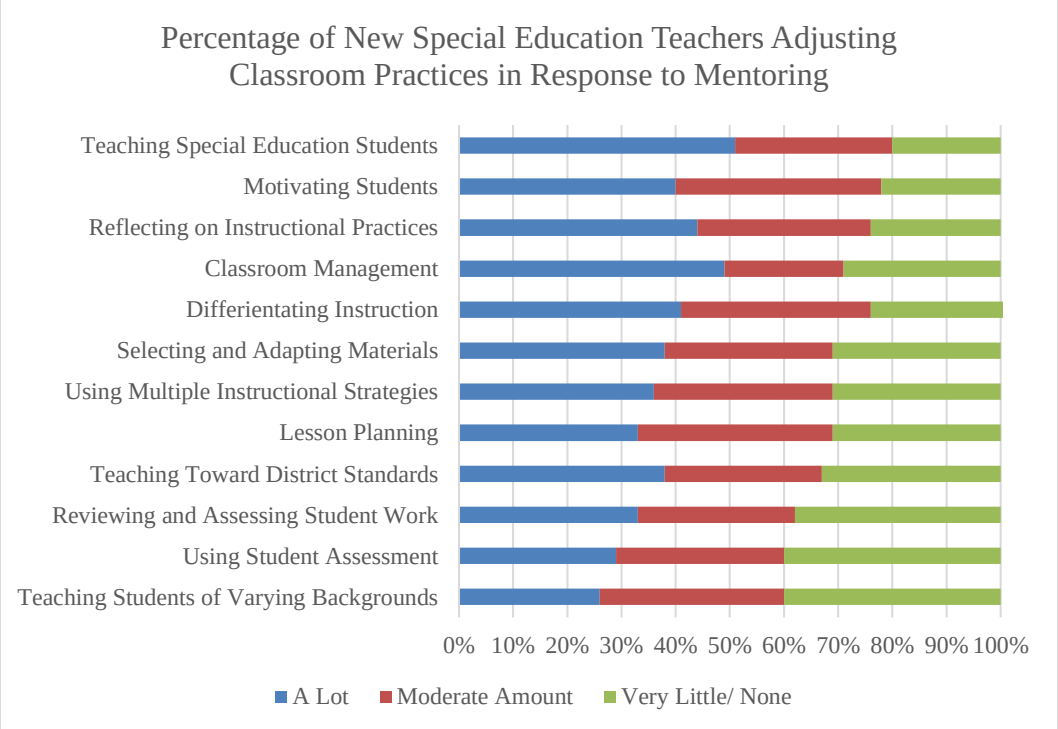

Figure 6: Adjustments to Classroom Practice in Response to Mentoring

A majority of teachers reported that they adjusted their classroom practices at least a "moderate amount" for all areas surveyed. At least 40% of new teachers reported that they adjusted their practices "a lot" in the areas of teaching special education students, motivating students, reflecting on instructional practices, classroom management, and differentiating instruction.

Theme 3 – Although mentoring was perceived to be beneficial, many novice special education teachers continue to feel overwhelmed.

Forty-three new special education teachers completed the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) in August 2018 and again in February 2019. To complete this scale, teachers rated themselves on 24 statements such as "How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?" on a scale of 1 (None at all) to 9 (A great deal). A factor analysis for *Efficacy in Student Engagement*, *Efficacy in Instructional Practices*, and *Efficacy in Classroom Management* was conducted as recommended by Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2001), by computing unweighted means of the items specified by the authors that load on each factor. Table 8 shows the mean efficacy ratings for each factor and overall mean for the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale administered in August 2018 and again in February 2019.

Table 8

Overall Results from the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale

	August 2018 (1-9)	***February 2019 (1-9)***	***Difference***
Efficacy in Student Engagement	7.3	7.0	-0.3
Efficacy in Instructional Practices	7.4	7.2	-0.2

Efficacy in Classroom Management	7.4	7.2	-0.2
Overall Mean	*7.4*	7.1	-0.3

Overall, perceived levels of efficacy went down slightly between August 2018 and February 2019. In order to better understand these results, the Action Research Team also examined each respondent's ratings individually. Table 9 shows the mean self-efficacy ratings for each respondent of the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale administered in August 2018 and again in February 2019 in descending order for mean self-efficacy ratings collected in August 2018.

Table 9

Mean Efficacy Ratings on the TSES By Individual Respondents

Teacher #	***Mean TSES August 2018 (1-9)***	***Mean TSES February 2019 (1-9)***	***Difference***
1	*8.7*	8.8	0.1
2	*8.6*	8.4	-0.2
3	*8.5*	6.3	-2.2
4	*8.3*	8.0	-0.3
5	*8.3*	9.0	0.7
6	*8.3*	5.9	-2.4
7	*8.3*	5.5	-2.8
8	*8.2*	8.3	0.1
9	*8.2*	7.8	-0.4
10	*8.1*	7.7	-0.4
11	*8.0*	7.8	-0.2
12	*8.0*	7.4	-0.6
13	*8.0*	7.3	-0.7
14	*7.9*	7.8	-0.1
15	*7.8*	6.1	-1.7
16	*7.8*	7.8	0.0
17	*7.6*	7.2	-0.4
18	*7.5*	8.4	0.9
19	*7.5*	7.1	-0.4
20	*7.5*	6.8	-0.7
21	*7.4*	6.8	-0.6
22	*7.4*	7.3	-0.1

23	*7.3*	8.0	0.7
24	*7.3*	6.9	-0.4
25	*7.3*	5.8	-1.5
26	*7.2*	6.5	-0.7
27	*7.2*	7.5	0.3
28	*7.1*	5.6	-1.5
29	*7.1*	9.0	1.9
30	*7.0*	5.1	-1.9
31	*7.0*	5.6	-1.4
32	*7.0*	7.0	0.0
33	*6.9*	8.0	1.1
34	*6.9*	7.2	0.3
35	*6.8*	7.0	0.2
36	*6.8*	7.4	0.6
37	*6.8*	6.5	-0.3
38	*6.6*	6.5	-0.1
39	*6.1*	5.3	-0.8
40	*5.9*	7.1	1.2
41	*5.7*	7.0	1.3
42	*5.3*	5.5	0.2
43	*5.0*	8.3	3.3
Average	***7.4***	**7.1**	**-0.3**

When examining individual mean rating scores, 35% of the respondents showed an increase in overall efficacy levels. Changes in efficacy levels ranged from a decrease of 2.8 points to an increase of 3.3 points.

Ratings obtained in August 2018 indicated a fairly high sense of self-efficacy for these novice special education teachers with an overall mean of 7.4 on a scale of 1 to 9. The action research team observed that these results were obtained when new teachers had less than one week's teaching time in the classroom. At the time respondents completed the first survey, higher levels of enthusiasm and optimism may have been based more upon idealistic expectations than upon the actual classroom experience. It is interesting to note that of the respondents who had an initial overall rating of less than 7.0 in the August 2018 administration of the TSES, 82% demonstrated increases in efficacy levels overall.

Conversely, ratings obtained in February 2019 were taken at the point in the school year when new special education teachers are in the midst of preparing for and facilitating multiple IEP meetings, in addition to their regular teaching duties. One novice teacher noted:

> *"I feel like I'm flipping IEPs like pancakes. And that's on top of everything else I need to do for my kids*."

A novice teacher working in a self-contained classroom for students identified with Emotional and Behavior Disorders shared:

> *"You can imagine the work it takes to teach 14 kids with emotional and behavioral issues. I keep my class running smoothly. It's a beautiful thing. But I can say if you can do all that and still keep up with the IEPs, I think it makes you either super crazy or super woman. I don't know which one I am."*

A novice teacher working with students with learning disabilities said:

> *"It is a great but overwhelming experience. I love the challenge, but it is exhausting. I have no time to prepare for IEP meetings during the school day because of daily grade level meetings, keeping track of every students' goal/objectives weekly for statistics, and completing academic testing. I also have to prepare files for eligibility meetings, all while teaching the standards to proficiency, and working with students one-on-one with guided reading and guided math, which is the part I love. Overall, I love the job, but it's very difficult to be effective when juggling everything with little time to do all the aspects of the job."*

Individual ratings for the factors of *Efficacy in Student Achievement*, *Efficacy in Instructional Practices*, and *Efficacy in Classroom Management* on the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale are shown in Tables 10, 11, and 12, respectively.

Table 10

Ratings for Efficacy in Student Engagement

Teacher #	***Student Engagement August 2018 (1-9)***	***Student Engagement February 2019 (1-9)***	***Difference***
1	8.6	9.0	0.4
2	8.5	7.9	-0.6
3	8.5	6.5	-2.0
4	8.3	8.3	0.0
5	8.3	9.0	0.7
6	8.3	5.6	-2.7
7	8.3	5.4	-2.9
8	8.1	8.1	0.0
9	8.3	7.0	-1.3
10	8.1	7.3	-0.8
11	8.0	7.8	-0.2
12	8.1	6.8	-1.3
13	7.9	6.9	-1.0
14	7.9	8.0	0.1
15	7.7	6.1	-1.6
16	7.7	7.1	-0.6
17	7.6	7.0	-0.6
18	7.4	8.5	1.1
19	7.4	7.0	-0.4
20	7.6	6.9	-0.7
21	7.3	5.8	-1.5
22	7.5	6.5	-1.0
23	7.2	7.6	0.4
24	7.3	6.4	-0.9
25	7.3	6.0	-1.3
26	7.1	6.1	-1.0
27	7.1	7.5	0.4
28	7.1	5.8	-1.3
29	7.1	9.0	1.9
30	7.0	4.9	-2.1
31	7.0	5.8	-1.2
32	7.1	6.5	-0.6
33	6.9	7.6	0.7
34	6.9	7.0	0.1
35	6.8	7.3	0.5
36	6.9	7.4	0.5

37	6.8	7.0	0.2
38	6.6	6.8	0.2
39	6.1	4.9	-1.2
40	5.9	7.0	1.1
41	5.7	6.8	1.1
42	5.4	4.6	-0.8
43	5.0	8.6	3.6
Average	**7.3**	**7.0**	**-0.3**

Thirty-seven percent of respondents reported an improvement in Efficacy in Student Engagement between August 2018 and February 2019. Changes in scores ranged from a decrease of 2.9 points to an increase of 3.6 points.

Table 11

Ratings for Efficacy in Instructional Practices

Teacher #	***Instructional Practices August 2018 (1-9)***	***Instructional Practices February 2019 (1-9)***	***Difference***
1	8.4	8.8	0.4
2	8.8	9.0	0.2
3	8.5	6.9	-1.6
4	8.8	8.1	-0.7
5	8.4	9.0	0.6
6	8.0	5.9	-2.1
7	8.4	5.5	-2.9
8	8.8	8.6	-0.2
9	7.9	8.0	0.1
10	7.9	7.3	-0.6
11	8.9	8.1	-0.8
12	7.6	7.1	-0.5
13	8.5	7.5	-1.0
14	7.8	7.6	-0.2
15	8.5	6.5	-2.0
16	7.9	7.1	-0.8
17	7.6	7.8	0.2
18	7.5	8.8	1.3
19	7.5	7.3	-0.2
20	6.9	6.8	-0.1
21	7.3	7.6	0.3
22	7.6	7.8	0.2
23	7.5	8.4	0.9

24	7.4	6.8	-0.6
25	6.5	6.3	-0.2
26	7.3	6.8	-0.5
27	7.3	7.8	0.5
28	7.0	5.5	-1.5
29	7.0	9.0	2.0
30	7.0	5.1	-1.9
31	7.3	5.4	-1.9
32	6.4	7.0	0.6
33	7.5	7.9	0.4
34	7.0	7.4	0.4
35	6.8	6.6	-0.2
36	6.1	7.1	1.0
37	6.0	5.6	-0.4
38	6.3	7.0	0.7
39	6.3	5.4	-0.9
40	5.6	6.6	1.0
41	6.1	7.1	1.0
42	5.3	6.3	1.0
43	5.0	7.3	2.3
Average	**7.4**	**7.2**	**-0.2**

Forty-seven percent of respondents reported an improvement in Efficacy in Instructional Practices between August 2018 and February 2019. Changes in scores ranged from a decrease of 2.9 points to an increase of 2.3 points.

Table 12

Ratings for Efficacy in Classroom Management

Teacher #	***Classroom Management August 2018 (1-9)***	***Classroom Management February 2019 (1-9)***	***Difference***
1	8.8	8.8	0.0
2	8.8	8.4	-0.4
3	8.6	5.4	-3.2
4	7.6	7.6	0.0
5	8.4	9.0	0.6
6	8.1	6.1	-2.0
7	8.6	5.5	-3.1
8	7.5	8.3	0.8
9	8.1	8.3	0.2
10	8.4	8.6	0.2
11	7.6	7.5	-0.1

12	7.6	8.3	0.7
13	7.8	7.6	-0.2
14	8.0	7.9	-0.1
15	7.1	5.6	-1.5
16	7.8	9.0	1.2
17	8.0	6.8	-1.2
18	7.3	8.0	0.7
19	7.6	7.1	-0.5
20	7.6	6.6	-1.0
21	8.1	7.0	-1.1
22	7.9	7.5	-0.4
23	7.8	8.0	0.2
24	7.4	7.5	0.1
25	7.3	5.3	-2.0
26	7.1	6.6	-0.5
27	7.1	7.3	0.2
28	7.3	5.5	-1.8
29	7.3	9.0	1.7
30	7.0	5.3	-1.7
31	7.4	5.8	-1.6
32	7.5	7.6	0.1
33	7.3	8.6	1.3
34	6.9	7.3	0.4
35	6.4	7.3	0.9
36	7.0	7.8	0.8
37	7.0	6.8	-0.2
38	8.0	5.6	-2.4
39	5.3	5.8	0.5
40	6.3	7.6	1.3
41	5.1	7.1	2.0
42	5.6	5.5	-0.1
43	5.0	9.0	4.0
Average	**7.4**	**7.2**	**-0.2**

Forty-seven percent of respondents reported an improvement in Efficacy in Classroom Management between August 2018 and February 2019. Changes in scores ranged from a decrease of 3.2 points to an increase of 4.0 points.

While support from special education mentors is perceived to be helpful, for some teachers, the demands of the job continue to be overwhelming. In the words of a novice middle school special education teacher working with students with autism:

> *"From July to the middle of December, I had to work 80 to 90 hours a week and was still not able to be proactive instead of reactive. The IEPs, re-evals, grading, testing, meetings, conferences, lesson planning for two grade levels, differentiating for 13 students, and all the other responsibilities have been overwhelming and too much to handle in an organized, productive manner. My assistant principal, my instructional coach, and my mentor have given me such great guidance and wisdom, and my classroom is running smoothly now. However, I'm still working 70 hours a week and still not feeling in control of the paperwork."*

These feelings were echoed by many novice special educators who indicated the level of support provided was excellent, but they remained exhausted and overwhelmed by the job demands.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 1

This action research study examined the types of mentoring practices and supports for new special education teachers that may promote higher levels of teacher self-efficacy. Viel-Ruma, et al., (2010) found a significant relationship between job satisfaction and teacher self-efficacy among special education teachers, and that the level of reported job satisfaction was related to the teacher's intent to stay in the field.

Analysis from both qualitative and quantitative data sources indicate that special education mentors provide significant support to new special education teachers. Ninety-two percent of new special education teachers reported that, in the most recent month of teaching, their mentors provided suggestions to improve classroom practices, gave guidance on how to teach to district standards, and provided encouragement and

emotional support. A majority of new special education teachers reported that, over the course of the school year, their mentors provided a "moderate amount" to "a lot" of guidance in the areas of managing behavior, using multiple instructional strategies, motivating students, accessing district resources, selecting/adapting curriculum materials, working with other school staff, and handling paperwork. Mentor teachers also spent significant time modeling instruction, observing their mentees providing instruction, and providing immediate feedback.

As a result of this mentoring support, new special education teachers significantly adjusted their classroom practices. New special education teachers reported significant changes in the areas of teaching special education students, motivating students, reflecting on instructional practices, classroom management, and differentiating instruction.

Self-efficacy levels for new teachers decreased slightly overall between August 2018 and February 2019. When examining individual mean rating scores, 35% of new special education teachers showed increases in self-efficacy levels. Factor analysis revealed that 37% of new special education teachers improved in efficacy for student engagement, 47% of new teachers improved in efficacy for instructional practices, and 47% of new special education teachers improved in efficacy for classroom management.

Initial efficacy ratings obtained from new teachers in August 2018 were fairly high with a mean rating of 7.4 out of 9. The administration of the survey very early in the school year may have been a factor. Initial ratings may have based upon expectations instead of classroom experience. It is interesting to note that 82% of respondents who had

an initial overall mean efficacy rating of less than 7.0 in the August 2018 demonstrated increases in efficacy levels.

While data suggest that new special education teachers find the support provided by their special education teachers to be quite beneficial, for some teachers, the demands of the job continue to be overwhelming. Additional support for these teachers may be needed to in order to address unwanted attrition.

Research Question 2: Mentors' Perceptions of Their Own Training

To determine what mentors might perceive as important components in their own training that empower them to improve the self-efficacy of novice special education teachers, the action research team conducted focus group interviews with mentor teachers. Qualitative results from these interviews along with observations and reflections made by the action research team were triangulated with results from the New Teacher Perception Study (Roberts, 2011) and the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). From this analysis three themes emerged:

1. Mentor teachers highly value face-to-face training with their specific program area instructional coaches and each other as effective professional development.
2. Mentor teachers could benefit from additional structure, and concrete resources such as handbooks and checklists, built into the overall mentoring program.
3. Mentor teachers themselves require ongoing support to continue successfully navigating the challenges of being a special educator as they support new teachers.

Theme 1 – Mentor teachers highly value face-to-face training with their specific program area instructional coaches and interaction with each other as effective professional development.

When asked about the preparation provided by the special education department, 95% of mentors reported they either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that they had sufficient training to effectively support new teachers. One mentor shared:

"*I have been happy with the changes that have taken place this year. I feel as though the Instructional Coaches are listening to feedback and making changes."*

Another mentor told her focus group:

"I really like the training they've put into place, it seems like it's gotten better each year."

Analysis of feedback from mentor focus groups revealed that the face-to-face training with specific program area instructional coaches is a highly valued component of mentor support. Mentors reported that the Instructional Coaches function as "mentors to the mentors" and provided high-level professional learning. A middle school mentor teacher who supports students with intellectual disabilities observed:

"I've grown a lot through mentoring. It's not only learning from mentoring a particular teacher, but also learning from the instructional coaches. I'm constantly learning the newest information. I know the best practices because I'm trying to listen out for them and pass them on. I've learned a tremendous amount through this."

An elementary level mentor added:

> *"My Assistant Principal knows I come to these trainings, and now she is coming to me for information."*

Finally, another elementary level mentor, shared:

> *"This is some of the best staff development I've gotten, ever."*

In addition to providing training in skills necessary for effective mentoring, and sharing information about best practices for students in each specific program area, the face-to-face training sessions include dedicated time for mentors to meet together with an open agenda. This time is perceived to be beneficial. In focus groups, mentors discussed how they see each other as "resources" in sharing ideas and solutions to common issues. One mentor shared:

> *"I like it when we're together, just the mentors. We bounce ideas off each other. Hearing what others are doing is helpful. If I'm struggling with something, maybe someone has an idea of how to get through it, and make it a better situation."*

A suggestion that came out of this discussion was to provide time for mentors to visit each other's classrooms so they can learn from each other providing instruction and participate in discussions together.

Theme 2 – Special education mentor teachers could benefit from additional structure, and concrete resources such as handbooks and checklists, built into the overall mentoring program.

Mentor focus groups discussed ways to improve the training and support provided from the district office for the mentoring program. Analysis of these conversations revealed that more structure in the program, especially at the beginning of the school

year, might be beneficial. One suggestion was to plan a structured, "mandatory" meeting where mentees would be introduced to their mentors. As one mentor explained:

> *"Maybe we could have a meeting before the first day of school so we could have some time to get to know each other before the craziness begins. The way it works now is they get an email saying who their mentor is, and then they get an email from someone they never met before. And school has started so maybe they're already stressed out. Maybe they're thinking, 'I don't have time to do anything, let along respond to this stranger who's trying to help me.'"*

Providing more structure to what mentors address at different times during the school year may also be beneficial. Mentors often mentioned that they didn't always know how to prioritize what to work on with mentees. They also reported feeling worried they might "forget" to tell a mentee something important. Developing "checklists" or "tip sheets" might help both mentors and new teachers.

Feedback from mentor focus groups also indicated that a "mentor handbook" may be a helpful resource. New special education teachers receive a "new teacher handbook" and several mentors requested their own copies. One mentor offered:

> *"A survival guide would be great. We could have checklists for every month, information on our program areas, tip sheets, just the little things you don't think about until you need them. Sample IEPs, everything. To have everything in one place so I could just grab it and go would be wonderful."*

Theme 3 -- Mentor teachers themselves require ongoing support to continue successfully navigating the challenges of being a special educator as they support new teachers.

Although the focus of this action research project was on the addressing the needs of new special education teachers, analysis of feedback from special education mentor focus groups revealed that veteran teachers continue to struggle with many of the same challenges as their mentees. As one mentor shared:

> *"I think it's a balance and it continues. I don't think it's just the new teachers. The balance of being Special Ed and being a case manager with all the paperwork involved. And also teaching and the lesson plans and keeping up with the general ed curriculum and expectations. So that's challenging. It's challenging for them, and it's challenging for me."*

Another mentor added,

> *"It think it's hard since most of us don't just work with one grade level. We're expected to know the content of multiple grade levels, as well as working on IEP goals with our kids. Teaching that content. Giving grades. It's a lot. The new teachers need help with that, but somedays I still need help too."*

Difficulties new special education teachers often face in collaborating with general education colleagues is well documented in the literature (Bay & Parker-Katz, 2009; Billingsley, 2010; Billingsley et al., 2009; Gehrke & McCoy, 2012; White & Mason, 2006). Issues include difficulty collaborating in co-taught settings, general education teachers being reluctant to take responsibility for special education students,

and general education teachers being reluctant to provide special education students accommodations as specified in their IEPs (Billingsley et al., 2009).

During focus group discussions, mentors echoed these challenges and shared their concern that new teachers require a great deal of training and support to know how to successfully navigate relationships with other professionals in the school building to support students with disabilities. Successfully working together with general education colleagues allows special education teachers to more effectively advocate for special education students and ensure students with disabilities are being provided all necessary accommodations and instructional strategies throughout the school day.

Mentors also revealed that they, themselves, continue to struggle at times with building these vital relationships. One mentor shared:

> *"We have to help the new teachers learn how to work with the general ed teachers. I'm better than I used to be, but it can be hard. Some general education teachers are so wonderful to work with. They listen, they include me in planning, they're invested in giving the kids what they need. But others have a hard time understanding that the kids I work with are still their kids too. They still need to teach them. I had a teacher tell me she was tired of having "my" kids in her classroom because they were pulling down her class average. I mean, how discouraging is that?"*

The finding that veteran special education teachers continue to struggle with the additional job demands not required of general education teachers, role confusion, and navigating relationships with general education colleagues has important implications for

the special education department in terms of designing effective staff development for all special education teachers.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 2

The action research team used data from focus group and action research team discussions as well as data from surveys to determine what mentors might perceive as important components in their own training.

Analysis of feedback from mentor focus groups revealed that the face-to-face training with specific program area instructional coaches is a highly valued component of district support for special education mentor teachers. Special education mentors reported that their Instructional Coaches function as "mentors to the mentors" and provided high-level professional learning. In addition to training in effective mentoring skills and learning about the latest research in best practices for students with disabilities, mentors value time to meet together as a team. Mentors see themselves as resources for each other and value dedicated time to work together to share ideas, brainstorm solutions, and offer mutual moral support.

Mentor teachers offered feedback that additional structure to the mentoring program along with concrete resources such as handbooks and checklists would be beneficial.

Mentor teachers themselves require ongoing support to continue successfully navigating the challenges of being a special educator as they support new teachers. Focus group interviews revealed that veteran special education teachers continue to struggle with the additional job demands not required of general education teachers, role confusion, and navigating relationships with general education colleagues.

Research Question 3: What the Action Research Team Learned

To determine what the Action Research team learned through this process about promoting higher levels of self-efficacy for new special education teachers, data was analyzed from focus groups with mentors and new special education teachers along with observations and reflections made by the action research team. These data were compared with quantitative data obtained from two surveys administered to new special education teachers; The Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) and the New Teacher Perception Survey (Roberts, 2011).

Through analysis of these data, three themes emerged:

1. An action research approach was an effective way to explore promoting higher levels of self-efficacy for new special education teachers.
2. Providing effective supports for new special education teachers may be more complex than the action research team originally believed.
3. A multi-layered approach to supporting new special education teachers may be needed in addition to the provision of mentoring and induction classes.

Themes 1 and 2 – An action research approach was effective and revealed additional complexities surrounding providing supports for new teachers.

The action research process provided a structure to explore an important problem of practice facing Sunnyside School District, design and implement interventions, and then adjust actions as needed. It also allowed the action research team to develop a plan of action moving forward.

Through examining data from both qualitative and quantitative sources, exchanging experiences and observations with other team members, and reflecting deeply

upon the research questions, the action research team gained insight that might not have been possible otherwise. The action research process provided an avenue for direct feedback to learn how implementations were working in real time. This allowed the action research team to adjust their actions and try new innovations throughout the school year.

One important realization from the action research team is that the process of understanding what new special education teachers need and then providing effective supports to address those needs may be more complex than members of the action research team originally believed.

One example of these complexities the action research team discovered is that many new special education teachers report fairly high levels of self-efficacy prior to, or right at the beginning of, the school year. If these high levels are based upon an idealistic expectation instead of actual classroom experience, the new teacher may need extra support as the realities of the job become apparent. As one mentor explained:

> *"I usually have a mentee who tells me right at the beginning of the year that they don't need me. The problem is, at the beginning, they just don't know what they don't know. They think they don't need me. When they figure out that they could use my help, they either call and we have to make up for lost time, or they never call because they're embarrassed that they told me they were fine without me."*

While the action research team knew that several new teachers do decline mentor support each year, understanding this dynamic as a possible cause may help the action research team design supports to more effectively help new teachers as they begin to grasp the expectations of their new job. In response to this finding, meetings will be scheduled

where mentees can meet their mentors. Mentors will be trained to continue to reach out to new teachers, even if they initially decline support. Needs assessment surveys that have traditionally been administered at the beginning of the school year will now be administered later in the year when new teachers may have a more realistic understanding of what they truly require to be successful.

Another layer of complexity involves local school administrators who provide day-to-day support for special education teachers. In Sunnyside School District, each school has an assistant principal who is assigned to support special education. Many of these special education assistant principals may not have any special education experience prior to taking on this role. Turnover rates for assistant principals serving in this capacity is high. Each year up to a third of the special education assistant principals across the district may be new to this role. As one mentor shared:

> *"One of my mentees this year has a brand-new special education assistant principal. So, the assistant principal is just learning everything about special education at the same time as my mentee. And in my own school, we've had four different special education assistant principals in four years. I know it's a hard job, but I wish someone would just stay with us."*

Although the action research team was aware of the high levels of turnover in special education assistant principals, examining this type of feedback allowed the team to appreciate the impact this may have on the experience of a new special education teachers. While the district office does provide monthly training to new special education assistant principals, these trainings could be improved and additional supports could be developed. The action research team concluded that more effective assistance for local

school administrators who support special education teachers may be necessary to truly strengthen performance and increase desired retention levels of special education teachers.

Theme 3 – A multi-layered approach to supporting new special education teachers may be needed in addition to the provision of mentoring and induction classes.

In addressing Research Question 1, the research action team discovered that while new teachers benefited greatly from mentoring support, many novice special education teachers continue to feel overwhelmed. In addressing Research Question 2, the action research team learned that veteran teachers continue to require support in addressing challenges with job demands, teaching multiple grade levels, and navigating relationships with general education colleagues. Through analysis of focus group discussions, the action research team learned that turnover in local school administrators assigned to support special education teachers may have an adverse effect on a new special education teacher's experiences within that school. Finally, analysis of focus group discussions showed that role confusion is extremely challenging for new special education teachers and may continue be challenging even for veteran teachers. Researchers report that new special education teachers are often confused by the expectation to collaborate and co-teach with general education colleagues while also providing individualized, specialized instruction to students with IEPs (Bettini et al, 2017; Collins et al., 2017; Griffin et al., 2009). Mentor teachers shared these concerns for both their mentees and themselves. One mentor teacher shared:

> *"It's not necessarily the special ed part of the job that's hard. I mean the IEPs, the paperwork, I'm OK with all of that. It's being responsible for teaching on*

grade level when they're learning three years below grade level. Trying to balance giving them the prerequisite skills they need while teaching grade level curriculum."

Based on all of these findings, the action research team considered if a new multilayered approach to teacher support may be necessary. This approach would include additional collaboration with other district level and local school leaders, redesigned training and support for special education assistant principals, and the continuation of the work of the action research team.

Additional collaboration with other district leaders may introduce new ways to provide instructional support for both general and special education teachers who support students with disabilities in their classrooms. Engaging other district leaders may also provide opportunities to develop cultures of shared ownership of students with disabilities between general education and special education teachers.

Providing redesigned training and support for new special education assistant principals, including potentially their own mentoring program, could provide increased capacity within each building for supporting students with disabilities and their teachers. These trainings should include ways to support special education teachers and their unique needs. Improved assistance for local school administrators who support special education may also result in lower turnover rates for those leaders.

Based on all of the findings of this action research study, it is clear that much more work is needed. All members of the action research team are committed to continue this project into the next school year.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 3

The action research team used data from focus group and action research team discussions as well as data from surveys to determine what the action research team might learn about promoting self-efficacy levels for new special education teachers.

The action research process was an effective way to learn about promoting self-efficacy levels for new special education teachers and providing effective training and support for special education mentor teachers. The action research process allowed the action research team to examine data from both qualitative and quantitative sources, exchange experiences and observations with other team members, and reflect deeply upon the research questions. As a result, the action research team gained insight that might not have been possible otherwise.

As a result of following this action research process, the action research team discovered that supporting new special education teachers may involve more complexities that the research team originally believed. New special education teachers may be unaware of the high demands of the job as they begin their first school year and may need time and encouragement to accept help. New school administrators may have limited understanding of special education and the unique needs of special education teachers. Redesigned training and support for these local school leaders may result in higher levels of support for new special education teachers.

While mentoring provides benefits to new special education teachers and results in changes to classroom practices, many new special education teachers continue to feel overwhelmed. Even veteran special education teachers continue to struggle with the high demands of the job, teaching multiple grade levels, role confusion, and navigating

relationships with general education peers. Additional assistance may be necessary to support all special education teachers. Working together with other district and local school leaders may open doors to improving instructional support for both general education and special education teachers supporting students with disabilities, leading to improved achievement for all students.

Summary

This action research study employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative data to examine the types of mentoring practices and supports for new special education teachers that may promote higher levels of teacher self-efficacy. The action research team also explored components of mentor support and training that may ultimately influence the development of increased teacher self-efficacy in novice special education teachers.

Special education mentor teachers provide a significant amount of support to new special education teachers, including modeling instruction, observing instruction and providing immediate feedback, supporting the implementation of effective instructional strategies, supporting behavior management, and offering encouragement and moral support. As a result of this mentoring support, new special education teachers adjust their classroom practices in the areas of providing instruction, behavior management, teaching district standards, and reflection. While mentoring provides benefits to new special education teachers, many new special education teachers continue to feel overwhelmed.

Analysis of feedback from mentor focus groups revealed that the face-to-face training with specific program area instructional coaches is a highly valued component of district support for special education mentor teachers. Special education mentors reported that their instructional coaches functioned as “mentors to the mentors” and provided high

level professional learning. Mentor teachers offered feedback that additional structure to the mentoring program along with concrete resources such as handbooks and checklists would be beneficial. Mentor teachers themselves require ongoing support to continue successfully navigating the challenges of being a special educator as they support new teachers, especially in the areas of managing job demands, role confusion, and navigating relationships with general education colleagues.

The action research process was an effective way to learn about promoting self-efficacy levels for new special education teachers and about providing effective training and support for special education mentor teachers. As a result of following this action research process, the action research team discovered that new special education teachers may be unaware of the high demands of the job as they begin their first school year and may need time and encouragement to accept help. New school administrators may have limited understanding of special education and the unique needs of special education teachers. Veteran special education teachers continue to struggle with the high demands of the job, teaching multiple grade levels, role confusion, and navigating relationships with general education peers. Working together with other district and local school leaders provides additional layers of support to new special education teachers, leading to higher desired retention rates, improved classroom performance, and high levels of student achievement.

CHAPTER SIX

ANALYSIS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Special education teachers leave the field at rates higher than other teachers, with the highest rates demonstrated by beginning special education teachers (Boe, Cook & Sunderland, 2008; Jones, Youngs, & Frank, 2013; White & Mason, 2006), requiring school systems to invest significant amounts of time, energy, and resources into retraining of special education teachers (Thornton et al., 2007). High attrition rates for special educators translate into the most vulnerable students losing opportunities to receive instruction from qualified, experienced teachers (Dempsey & Christenson-Foggett, 2011; Dempsey, Arthur-Kelly & Carty, 2009; Johnson, 2015). Research suggests that levels of teacher self-efficacy among special education teachers are related to job satisfaction and the teacher's intent to stay in the field (Viel-Ruma, et al., 2010).

This action research study examined the effect an induction and mentoring program may have on self-efficacy levels of novice special education teachers and explored components of mentor support and training that may influence the development of increased teacher self-efficacy in novice special education teachers. Three research questions guided this study:

1. What are mentoring practices or supports for new special education teachers that may promote higher levels of teacher self-efficacy which, in turn, may reduce undesired attrition?

2. What do teacher mentors perceive as important components in their own training as empowering them to improve the self-efficacy of novice special education teachers?
3. What might the Action Research team learn through this process about promoting higher levels of self-efficacy for new special education teachers?

Analysis and Conclusions

Analysis of transcripts from focus groups for special education mentors and special education novice teachers confirm findings in the literature that new special education teachers have unique needs and challenges as compared to novice general education teachers (Belnap & Taymans, 2015; Bettini, Jones, Brownell, Conroy, Park, Leite, Crockett, & Benedict, 2017; Collins, Sweigart, Landrum & Cook, 2017; Emery & Vandenberg, 2010; Gehrke & McCoy, 2012, Johnson, 2015; White & Mason, 2006).

This action research team investigated how the implementation of a mentoring program targeted to the specific needs of special education teachers might improve self-efficacy levels and what components of special education mentor training might be valuable in allowing mentors to support new special education teachers. The following conclusions emerged:

Conclusion 1 – New special education teachers receive benefit from special education mentor support.

The action research team examined data from focus groups and surveys to learn about the types of support special education mentor teachers were providing to new special education teachers and to learn how these mentoring supports were influencing their mentees.

A team of 113 special education mentors provided support to over 500 new special education teachers during the 2018-2019 school year. Special education mentors and mentees were matched according to grade band and disability program area. As much as possible, special education mentors were assigned to new special education teachers within the same school or to schools that were close geographically. For each mentor/mentee pair, the district provided substitute teacher coverage so that mentors and mentees could work together during school hours.

Results from the New Teacher Perception Survey (Roberts, 2011) administered in February 2019 and focus group discussions revealed that mentor teachers provide significant support in the areas of instructional support, managing behavior, and providing encouragement and emotional support. Mentor teachers spent significantly more time this school year modeling effective instruction, observing their mentees providing instruction, and then providing immediate feedback than was done in previous years.

New special education teachers reported that this level of support was quite beneficial. Results from the New Teacher Perception Survey (Roberts, 2011) showed that a majority of new special education teachers adjusted their classroom practices in response to special education mentor support in the areas of teaching special education students, motivating students, reflecting on instructional practices, classroom management, and differentiating instruction.

Conclusion 2 – While new special education teachers perceive mentor support to be beneficial, some special education teachers continue to feel overwhelmed.

Although new special education teachers reported that they felt the mentoring support they received was helpful, self-efficacy levels for new teachers decreased slightly overall between August 2018 and February 2019. When examining individual mean rating scores on the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale, approximately one-third of new special education teachers showed increases in overall mean self-efficacy ratings. Factor analysis revealed that a little over of one-third of new special education teachers improved in efficacy for student engagement, and a little less than one-half of new special education teachers improved in efficacy for instructional practices and in efficacy for classroom management.

Through focus group discussions, new special education teachers shared that even though they received significant benefit from working with their special education mentors, the job demands remained overwhelming. Many new special education teachers described their jobs as "exhausting". Reasons cited for continuing to feel overwhelmed aligned with many challenges noted in the literature, including being responsible for lesson planning for multi-grade level classes, balancing instruction on IEP goals with grade level academic content, completing large amounts of paperwork, planning for and facilitating IEP meetings, and being charged with supporting severe student behavior (Billingsley et al., 2009; Collins et al., 2017; Gehrke & McCoy, 2012; Griffin, et al., 2009 ;Thornton et al., 2007; White and Mason, 2006).

Focus group discussion revealed that even veteran special education teachers continue to struggle with the additional job demands not required of general education teachers, role confusion, and navigating relationships with general education colleagues. As one mentor teacher explained:

> *"The thing to remember is that it gets better. If you can just get through the first year, two, three years, you learn how to manage most of the time. But it never gets easy. You're always going to have a new challenge arise, you will always have to plan for three grade levels, and do all the paperwork, and figure out how to get a kid to stop kicking people while you're trying to teach him math. It gets better, but it's always going to be a really hard job"*

Conclusion 3 – Mentor special education teachers highly value ongoing face-to-face training that focuses on the development of mentoring skills, best practices in supporting students with disabilities, and includes time with other mentors.

The action research team used data from focus group and action research team discussions, as well as data from surveys, to determine what mentors might perceive as important components in their own training.

Analysis of feedback from mentor focus groups revealed that face-to-face training with specific program area instructional coaches is a highly valued component of district support for special education mentor teachers. Special education mentors reported that their instructional coaches provided high-level professional learning. Special education mentors found the training sessions that addressed effective mentoring skills and learning about the latest research on best practices for students with disabilities to be extremely valuable. Having multiple opportunities for mentor training throughout the school year

was also found to be beneficial. Special Education mentors value time to meet together as a team. Mentors see themselves as resources for each other and value dedicated time to work together to share ideas, brainstorm solutions, and offer mutual moral support.

The emotional support provided by these intense, ongoing trainings for special education mentor teachers may be a vital component in mentor training and support. Special education instructional coaches have a deep level of expertise in both their individual program areas (autism, learning disabilities, etc.), and in how to support teachers in the classroom. This year, they began to see their role as "mentors to the mentors". In addition to providing trainings for special education mentors, instructional coaches checked in on members of their mentoring teams regularly through classroom visits, one-on-one meetings, emails, and phone calls. During these check-ins, instructional coaches provided feedback and resources to improve mentoring skills and helped problem solve and support mentor teachers in honing implementation of research-based instructional practices. Special education mentor teachers reported feeling supported through this "personal touch" and "direct pipeline" to receiving information directly from the district's experts in their program area.

Conclusion 4 – An action research approach was effective in exploring possible ways to promote self-efficacy levels in new special education teachers.

The action research process provided a useful structure to explore how a mentoring and induction program may influence self-efficacy levels for beginning special education teachers. The action research cycle allowed the action research team to design and implement interventions, and then adjust those interventions as needed. It also allowed the action research team to develop a plan of action moving forward.

Through examining data from both qualitative and quantitative sources, exchanging experiences and observations with other team members, and reflecting deeply upon the research questions, the action research team gained insight that might not have been possible otherwise. The action research process provided an avenue for direct feedback to learn how implementations were working in real time. This allowed the action research team to adjust their actions and try new innovations throughout the school year.

One important realization from the action research team is that the process of understanding what new special education teachers need, and then providing effective supports to address those needs, may be more complex that members of the action research team originally believed. This improved understanding of the challenges facing new special education teachers, and the many factors influencing their success in the classroom came through this open and ongoing process.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to learn about how mentoring support may promote higher levels of self-efficacy in beginning special education teachers. This study was conducted within the specific context of the Sunnyside School District. Findings from this study have implications for the special education mentoring program, the special education department, and local schools.

Recommendations for Practice

School systems across the country are looking for effective ways to support new special education teachers and reduce undesired attrition rates. The results and conclusions of this study suggest that providing a mentoring program that targets the

unique needs of new special education teachers may result in adjustment of classroom practices in the areas of instruction and behavior management.

Recommendations for the Special Education Mentoring Program

Based upon the findings of this action research study, it is clear that more work is needed in order to fully understand how to best support new special education teachers and improve self-efficacy levels. All members of the action research team are committed to continue this project into the next school year. It is recommended that the action research team expand its membership to include one or two local school administrators who support special education, a special education mentor, and a novice special education teacher.

As the examination of the data from the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale raised many questions for the action research team, it will be helpful to continue monitoring self-efficacy levels of new special education teachers. Obtaining information on self-efficacy levels for new special education teachers at the end of the school year will provide the action research team with more complete information regarding the effectiveness of mentoring supports. Timing of the initial administration of the TSES during the 2019-2020 school year may be adjusted later, to after teachers have spent a few weeks in the classroom, to determine if this has any effect upon new teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy levels.

The addition of "make-up" sessions for professional learning opportunities resulted in significantly higher participation rates for both new special education teachers and special education mentors. Based on this finding, it is recommended that professional development sessions should be offered on multiple days and, if possible, in multiple

locations. Make-up sessions should continue to be offered for all large trainings for mentors and new teachers.

It is recommended that the content and delivery of all professional development for both new special education teachers and special education teachers continue to be refined. Continued collaboration between the special education department and the staff development department will allow professional learning opportunities to be as engaging and effective as possible.

The face-to-face trainings provided by the special education instructional coaches for the special education mentors were perceived to be very valuable professional learning. These sessions should continue. The regular check-ins between instructional coaches and special education mentors should also continue, with the recommendation that at least one check-in per year consist of a face-to-face classroom visit. It is also recommended that the action research team explore how instructional coaches can be supported in their role as "mentors to the mentors".

Based on the finding that special education mentor teachers increased their use of "release time" to work with their mentors during school hours, and used more of this time to model effective instruction, it is recommended that the district continue to provide at least three days of release time for each mentor/mentee pair. It is recommended that mentors continue to be strongly encouraged to use release time to model instruction and observe their mentees teaching so they can provide real-time feedback. Based on the success of the mentor/mentee working sessions provided during the school day, it is recommended that this practice be expanded to all program areas. During these working

sessions, new special education teachers may bring whatever they require help with to receive support from a group of mentors.

Based on feedback that mentors learn a great deal from each other, it is recommended that each mentor be given two days of release time for the purpose of observing in other mentors' classrooms. This will allow mentors to learn from each other as they continue to develop their own high level of skills.

Recommendations for the Special Education Department

One finding that surprised the action research team was the suggestion that more "concrete" resources such as checklists, tip sheets, and handbooks be produced. It is recommended that the special education department develop these materials to support special education mentors and special education teachers. The action research team may provide consultation and feedback as these materials are developed.

Based on the finding that veteran special education teachers continue to struggle with the additional job demands not required of general education teachers, role confusion, and navigating relationships with general education colleagues, it is recommended that the special education department consider developing supports that may be beneficial to all special education teachers. The finding that mentor special education teachers found high value in learning about best practices in instruction and behavior management, while receiving important updates on special education procedures directly from their instructional coaches, may provide insight into the types of training and support all special education teachers may find beneficial.

One finding that resulted from focus group feedback was that high turnover rates in local school administrators who are tasked with supporting special education may

negatively affect the experience of new special education teachers. Redesigned training for these local school administrators may be beneficial. The special education department may also consider developing a mentoring program for assistant principals who directly support special education within their buildings.

While Sunnyside School District offers an excellent leadership development program for aspiring assistant principals and principals, very little time in these programs is devoted to understanding special education. Collaboration between the special education department and the leadership development department to provide new district leaders with information and resources about how to best support special education students and special education teachers, and how to remain in compliance with special education regulations, policies, and procedures may be an important step in helping local school leaders support desired retention of special education teachers. The special education department should also consider developing ongoing training materials that can be shared with district and local school leaders throughout the year.

Recommendations for Local Schools

Based on the finding that all special education teachers may struggle with developing and maintaining healthy working relationships with their general education colleagues around serving students with disabilities, local school leaders may consider ways to foster a culture that promotes shared ownership for all students. A school culture of collective responsibility for students of disabilities may help mitigate new special education teacher burnout and attrition (Bettini, et al., 2017). In addition to improving collaboration among staff, a school culture that promotes social and emotional support may help facilitate resilience among special education teachers (Belknap, B., & Taymans,

J., 2012; Jones, et al., 2013). A raised awareness of the effect difficulties in staff relationships may have on teaching performance may be beneficial to local school administrators as they find new ways to support all members of their teaching staff.

Future Research

This action research study began in June 2018 and concluded in February 2019. Continued collaborative inquiry through the action research team will be beneficial in addressing many questions that remain following the conclusion of this study.

This study concluded prior to the end of the 2018-2019 school year. It may be beneficial for Sunnyside School District to explore if special education mentor support and self-efficacy levels of new special education teachers are related to actual numbers of special education teachers who decide to leave their positions at the conclusion of the school year. Continuing these observations over the next several school years may provide important longitudinal data that district leaders can use to effectively lower undesired attrition levels.

Similar action research studies conducted in other large, urban school districts experiencing high rates of undesired attrition levels for special education teachers may be beneficial. Findings from these studies may expand the body of research that helps inform school districts about ways to effectively support their new and veteran special education teachers to ultimately improve student achievement for students with disabilities.

Researcher Reflection

As a director in the special education department, one of my responsibilities is to oversee the mentoring and induction program that supports special education teachers

who are new to Sunnyside School District. I also served as direct supervisor for all other members of the action research team. This placed me in the dual role of both manager and researcher throughout the study (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). I learned that maintaining a balance between these two roles was not always as straightforward as I had first anticipated. Fortunately, the members of the action research team took their responsibilities as researchers very seriously, and they worked diligently to "keep everyone honest" in maintaining the fidelity of the study. This often helped me to remember which "hat" I was wearing and to keep both roles in perspective.

During the same timeframe as this action research study, I was leading other projects within the special education department that held promise to support increased learning for students with disabilities. These projects were negatively affected by high turnover rates of special education teachers in schools that were running pilots and implementing innovations in instructional practices. Experiencing first-hand the devastating impact of a teaching team that is perpetually transitioning underscored the importance of the work of the action research team.

I thoroughly enjoyed the action research process. Bringing a group of dedicated and passionate educators together to share observations, review data from a variety of sources, and reflect deeply upon the research questions, was a positive experience that provided me with many "a-ha" moments. Many of the insights I gained through conducting this action research process have implications for other areas of my work. I feel I have grown tremendously as an educator and as a leader through this study.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the types of mentoring practices and supports for new special education teachers that may promote higher levels of teacher self-efficacy and to explore components of mentor support and training that may ultimately influence the development of increased teacher self-efficacy in novice special education teachers. This study is unique to Sunnyside School District and it offered insight into how the district can continue to support new special education teachers to reduce undesired attrition in the future. Initial findings support the conceptual framework (Fig.1), however the study also illuminated that while mentoring was highly beneficial, additional supports may be needed to significantly raise efficacy levels for new special education teachers. Findings from this study led to four conclusions:

1. New special education teachers receive significant benefit from special education mentor support.
2. While new special education teachers perceive mentor support to be beneficial, some special education teachers continue to feel overwhelmed.
3. Mentor special education teachers highly value ongoing face-to-face training that focuses on the development of mentoring skills, best practices in supporting students with disabilities, and includes time to network with other mentors.
4. An action research approach was effective in exploring possible ways to promote self-efficacy levels in new special education teachers.

Based on these conclusions, the following implications were revealed for the special education mentoring program, the special education department, and local school leaders.

When considering next steps for the special education mentoring program, the following recommendations should be considered:

1. Continuation of the action research team to design and implement a comprehensive program to support new special education teachers that addresses their unique needs.
2. Expanding the membership of the action research team to include one or two local school administrators who support special education, a special education mentor, and a novice special education teacher.
3. Continue to monitor self-efficacy levels of new special education teachers.
4. Offer professional learning opportunities on multiple days and, if possible, in multiple locations to encourage as much participation as possible.
5. Continue to refine the content and delivery methods for all professional development for both new special education teachers and special education mentors.
6. Continue collaboration between the special education department and the staff development department to ensure best practices for adult learning are incorporated into all professional learning opportunities.
7. Continue to offer face-to-face trainings for special education mentors provided by the special education instructional coaches throughout the school year.
8. Provide regular "check-ins" with each special education mentor from instructional coaches that targets the development of mentoring skills and best instructional practices for students with disabilities.
9. Explore ways to further support special education coaches in their "mentor to the mentors" role.

10. Continue to encourage mentors to use time with their mentees to model instruction, observe their mentees teaching, and then to provide immediate feedback.
11. Offer mentor/mentee working sessions where new special education teachers may bring whatever they require help with in order to receive support from a group of mentors.
12. Provide time during the school day for mentors to observe each other in their classrooms.

The following recommendations should be considered for the special education department:

1. Develop “concrete” resources such as checklists, tip sheets, and handbooks.
2. Expand supports provided to new special education teachers to include veteran special education teachers who may be continuing to struggle with high job demands.
3. Redesign training for local school administrators who support special education teachers.
4. Collaborate with the leadership development department to provide new district leaders with information and training on best practices in supporting special education students and teachers.

Findings from this study suggest the following recommendations for local school leaders:

1. Foster a culture of collective responsibility for students with disabilities.
2. Provide formal and informal social supports to new special education teachers.

Ongoing and future research may explore the relationship between raising efficacy levels for new special education teachers and actual rates of desired teacher

retention. Replicating this study in other contexts may continue to provide important information about what district leaders can do to effectively lower undesired attrition levels to ultimately improve student achievement for students with disabilities.

REFERENCES

Andrews, A. & Brown, J. L. (2015). Discrepancies in the ideal perceptions and the current experiences of special education teachers. *Journal of Education and Training Studies, 3*(6), 126-131.

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review, 84*(2) p. 191-215.

Bartlett, L. & Johnson, L.S. (2010). The evolution of new teacher induction policy: Support, specificity, and autonomy. *Educational Policy, 24*(6), 847-871.

Bay, M., & Parker-Katz, M. (2009). Perspectives on induction of beginning special educators: Research summary, key program features, and the state of state-level policies. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 32*(1), 17-32.

Bettini, E., Jones, N., Brownell, M., Conroy, M., Park, Y., Leite, W., Crockett, J. & Benedict, A. (2017). Workload manageability among novice special and general educators: Relationships with emotional exhaustion and career intentions. *Remedial and Special Education 38*(4) 246-256.

Bettini, E., Jones, H., Brownell, M., Conroy, M., & Leite, W. (2018). Relationships between novice teachers' social resources and workload manageability. *The Journal of Special Education, 52*(2), 113-126.

Belnap, B., & Taymans, J. (2015). Risk and Resilience in Beginning Special Education Teachers. *Journal of Special Education Apprenticeship, 4* (1), 1-19.

Billingsley, B. S. (2010). Work contexts matter: Practical considerations for improving New special educators' experiences in schools. *Journal of Special Education Leadership, 23*(1), 41-49.

Billingsley, B. S., Griffin, C. C., Smith, S. J., Kamman, M., & Israel, M. (2009). *A review of teacher induction in special education: Research, practice, and technology solutions. NCIIP document number RS-1*. National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development.

Boe, E., Cook, L., & Sunderland, R. (2008) Teacher turnover: Examining exit attrition, teaching area transfer, and school migration. *Exceptional Children,75(*1), 7-31

Brunsting, N. C., Sreckovic, M. A., & Lane, K. L. (2014). Special education teacher burnout: A synthesis of research from 1979 to 2013. *Education and Treatment of Children, 37*(4), 681-712.

Cancio, E. J., Albrecht, S. F., & Johns, B. H. (2014). Combating the attrition of teachers Of students with EBD: What can administrators do? *Intervention in School and Clinic, 49*(5), 306-312.

Carrea, V. I., & Wagner, J. Y. (2011). Principals' roles in supporting the induction of special education teachers. *Journal of Special Education Leadership, 24*(1), 17-25.

Coghlan, D., & Brannick, T. (2014). *Doing action research in your own organization*. London: Sage Publications.

Collins, L. W., Sweigart, C. A., Landrum, T. J. & Cook, B. G. (2017). Navigating Common challenges and pitfalls in the first years of special education: Solutions for success. *Teaching Exceptional Children, (49)*4, 213-222.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (4th ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE.

Dempsey, I., Arthur-Kelly, M., & Carty, B. (2009). Mentoring early career special education teachers. *Australian Journal of Education, 53*(3), 294-305.

Dempsey, I. & Chirstenson-Foggett, J. (2011). External mentoring support for early career special education teachers. *Australasian Journal of Special Education, 35*(1), 61-71.

Dewey, J., Sindelar, P., Bettini, E., Boe, E., Rosenberg, M., & Leko, C. (2017). Explaining the decline in special education teacher employment from 2005 – 2012. *Exceptional Children, 83*(3), 315-329.

Emery, D. W., & Vandenberg, B. (2010). Special education teacher burnout and ACT. *International Journal of Special Education, 25*(3), 119-131.

Farner, K. (2016, July 23) GCPS looking to hire new teachers, bus drivers for upcoming school year. *Gwinnett Daily Post.* Retrieved from: http://www.gwinnettdailypost.com/local/gcps- looking-to-hire-several-teachers-bus-drivers-for-upcoming/article_e9d17845-35d7-5190-9a27-53bdd3b19abf.html

Gehrke, R. S., & McCoy, K. (2012). Designing effective induction for beginning special educators: Recommendations from a review of the literature. *New Educator, 8*(2), 139-159.

Griffin, C. C. (2010). A summary of research for educational leaders on the induction of beginning special educators. *Journal of Special Education Leadership, 23*(1), 14-20.

Griffin, C. C., Kilgore, K. L., Winn, J. A., Otis-Wilborn, A., Hou, W., & Garvan, C. W. (2009). First-year special educators: The influence of school and classroom context factors on their accomplishments and problems. *Teacher Education & Special Education, 32*(1), 45-63.

Hobson, A. J., Ashby, P., Malderez, A., & Tomlinson, P. D. (2009). Mentoring beginning teachers: What we know and what we don't. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 25*, 207-216.

Hoy, A. W., & Spero, R. B., (2005). Changes in teacher efficacy during the early years of teaching: A comparison of four measures. Teaching and Teacher Education, 21, p. 343-356.

Hoy, W. K. & Miskel, C. G. (2013*). Educational administration: theory, research and practice* (9th edition). New York: McGraw Hill.

Irinaga-Bistolas, C., Schalock, M., Marvin, R., & Beck, L. (2007). Bridges to success: A developmental induction model for rural early career special educators. *Rural Special Education Quarterly, 26*(1), 13-22.

Israel, M., Kamman, M. L., McCray, E. D., & Sindelar, P. T. (2014). Mentoring in action: The interplay among professional assistance, emotional support, and evaluation. *Exceptional Children, 81*(1), 45-63.

Johnson, E. S. (2015). Increasing rural special education teacher candidates' ability to implement evidence-based practices: A program description of the Boise State University TATERS Program. *Rural Special Education Quarterly, 34*(1), 5-9.

Jones, N. D., Youngs, P., & Frank, K. A. (2013). The role of school-based colleagues in shaping the commitment of novice special and general education teachers. *Council for Exceptional Children, 79*(3), 365 -383.

Kamman, M. L., & Long, S. K. (2010). One district's approach to the induction of special education teachers. *Journal of Special Education Leadership, 23*(1), 21-29.

Lee, Y., Patterson, P. P., Vega, L. A. (2011). Perils to self-efficacy perceptions and teacher-preparation quality among special education intern teachers. *Teacher Education Quarterly* 61-76.

Leko, M. M., & Smith, S. W. (2010). Retaining beginning special educators: What should administrators know and do? *Intervention in School and Clinic, 45*(5), 321-325.

Madigan, J. B., & Scroth-Cavataio, G. (2012). Support for the beginning special education teacher through high quality mentoring. *National Teacher Education Journal, 5*(1), 107-112.

Marshall, K., Karvonen, M., Yell, M., Lowrey, A., Drasgow, E. Seaman, M. (2013). Project ReSpecT: Toward an evidence-based mentoring model for induction teachers. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies 24*(3), 127-136.

McLeskey, J., & Billingsley, B.S. (2008). How does the quality and stability of the teaching force influence the research-to-practice gap? *Remedial and Special Education, 29*(5), 293-305.

Merriam, S.B. & Tisdell, E.J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. (4th ed.). San Francisco, DA: Jossey Bass.

Mehrenberg, R. L. (2013). Red tape and green teachers: The impact of paperwork on novice special education teachers. *International Journal of Special Education, 28*(1), 80-87.

Mrstick, S., Vasquez, E., & Pearl, C. The effects of mentor instruction on teaching visual supports to novice, special education teachers. *International Journal of Instruction, 11*(1), 411-424.

Plash, S. & Piotrowski, C. (2006). Retention Issues: A study of Alabama special education teachers. *Education. 127***(**1), 125-128.

Ronfeldt, M., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2013). How teacher turnover harms student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal, 50*(1), 4 – 36.

Rotter, J. B. (1954). *Social learning and clinical psychology*. New York: Prentice-Hall.

Ruble, L. A., Usher, E. L., McGrew, J. H. (2011). Preliminary investigation of the sources of self-efficacy among teachers of students with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 26*(2), 67-74.

Saldana, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* London: SAGE Publications.

Sebald, A. M., & Rude, H. A. (2015). Results of an evaluation study of induction and mentoring for beginning special education teachers: What do they need? *Social Welfare Interdisciplinary Approach, 5*(1), 58-72.

Sindelar, P. T., Brownell, M. T., Billingsley, B. (2010). Special education teacher education research: Current status and future directions. *Teacher Education and Special Education 33*(1), 8-24.

Sutcher, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D., (2016). *A coming crisis in teaching? Teacher supply, demand, and shortages in the U.S.* Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

Stringer, E. T. (2014). *Action research* (4th ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE.

Sweigart, C. A., & Collins, L. W. (2017). Supporting the needs of beginning special education teachers and their students. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 49*(4) 209-212.

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, A. W. (2007). The differential antecedents of self-efficacy beliefs of novice and experienced teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 23*, 944-956.

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, A. W. (2001). Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 17*, 783 – 805.

Tschannen-Moran, M., Hoy, A. W., & Hoy, W. K. (1998). Teacher efficacy: Its meaning and measure. *Review of Educational Research, 68*(2). 202-248.

Thornton, B., Peltier, G., & Medina, R. (2007). *Reducing the special education teacher shortage.* Heldref Publications.

Vaughn, S., & Linan-Thompson, S. (2003). What is special about special education for students with learning disabilities? *The Journal of Special Education, 37*(3), 140-147.

Viel-Ruma, K., Houchins, D., Jolivette, K., & Benson, G. (2010). Efficacy beliefs of special educators: The relationship among collective efficacy, teacher efficacy, and job satisfaction. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 33*(3), 225-233.

Washburn – Moses, L. (2006). A practical proposal for special education teacher induction. *Mid-Western Educational Researcher, 19*(4), 20 – 23.

Washburn-Moses, L. (2010). Rethinking mentoring: Comparing policy and practice in special and general education. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 18*(32)

White, M., & Mason, C. Y. (2006). Components of a successful mentoring program for beginning special education teachers: Perspectives from new teachers and mentors. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 29*(3), 191-20

APPENDIX A

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS TABLE

Author, Date & Title	Purpose of the Study	Methodology	Key Findings	Implications
Belknap, B., & Taymans, J. (2012) Risk and Resilience in Beginning Special Education Teachers	To provide an in-depth analysis of risk and resilience among beginning special education teachers.	9 first year special education teachers participated in semi-structured interviews that explored how new special education teachers feel about and make meaning of their experiences across multiple teaching environments.	Novice special education teachers felt overwhelmed, frustrated with role conflict and ambiguity, and risked feelings of isolation. When novice special education teachers felt supported and believed they were making a difference, they demonstrated more resilience.	Special education teachers need to feel supported either through formal or informal structures. Schools should offer induction support through formal mentoring, informal coaching, or network groups. Resilient teachers may find support on their own. School systems can facilitate resilience by offering formal support.

Author, Date & Title	Purpose of the Study	Methodology	Key Findings	Implications
Bettini, E., Jones, N., Brownell, M., Conroy, M., Park, Y., Leite, W., Crockett, J., & Benedict, A. (2017). Workload Manageability Among Novice Special and General Educators: Relationships with Emotional Exhaustion and Career Intentions	To determine if novice special education teachers perceive their workloads to be less manageable than novice general education teachers. To determine if perceptions of workload manageability predict career intentions and emotional exhaustion in the spring of the school year.	This study conducted a secondary analysis of existing data. Data on work manageability collected in the fall and data on exhaustion and career intentions collecting in the spring were analyzed.	Novice special education teachers perceive workloads to be significantly less manageable than novice general education teachers The perception of difficult workloads predicted emotional exhaustion and an intent to leave the field.	Providing more manageable workloads for new special education teachers may improve retention. Social support my reduce effects of high demands on new teachers' levels of burnout and attrition. School leaders fostering a culture of collective responsibility for students with disabilities may help new special education teachers.

Author, Date & Title	Purpose of the Study	Methodology	Key Findings	Implications
Gehrke, R. S., & McCoy, K. (2012) Designing effective induction for beginning special educators: recommendations from a review of the literature.	To differentiate the needs of beginning special education teachers from those of other beginning teachers based on a methodical review of the literature.	Literature Review of 27 studies. Reported findings for each study were listed and sorted into categories. Responses were sorted by beginning general education and special education teachers.	Differences between general and special education teachers centered around 1) accessing materials, 2) acquiring information related to special education procedures and policies 3) building curriculum 4) individualizing instruction in a variety of content areas for students with a wide range of disabilities 5) managing support personnel 6) addressing extreme student behaviors 7) experiencing difficulties when interacting with general educators.	Highlighted the need to design mentoring programs that understand and address novice special education teachers' unique needs. Outlined process for determining if mentoring program is effective by disaggregating program evaluation and retention data and stressed the importance of using feedback from the new teachers themselves. Leaders can use this process to make adjustments to the program accordingly.

Author , Date & Title	Purpose of the Study	Methodology	Key Findings	Implications
Griffin, Kilgore, Winn, Otis-Wilborn, Hou & Garvan (2009) The influence of school and context factors on their accomplishments and problems.	To more fully describe novice special education teacher's experiences by exploring problems and accomplishments and the context factors within the school/classroom that impact professional development.	595 first year special education teachers in Florida and Wisconsin were surveyed. Descriptive statistics, chi-squares and Wilcoxon's rank sum teats were used to analyze data.	Content of instruction to be delivered to SWD is a challenging aspect of new SPED teacher's 1st year of teaching. Lack of teaching materials is significant. Communication and collaboration was a pressing problem. School factors including interactions with general and sped educators and relationships with other adults in the building were significantly related to problems and accomplishments.	Researchers concluded that school leaders need to find better ways to enhance collaboration between beginning SPED teachers and their colleagues. Although a mentor can be one element in supporting new special education teachers, all school personnel should be involved in induction.

Author, Date & Title	Purpose of the Study	Methodology	Key Findings	Implications
Jones, Youngs & Frank (2013) The role of school-based colleagues in shaping the commitment of novice special and general education teachers.	The study compared novice general and special education teachers access to school-based support from colleagues and how that support influenced teachers' decisions to remain in the profession. It also examined the degree perceptions of school collective responsibility impacted the teachers' commitment to the school.	185 beginning teachers (Kindergarten through grade 8) were surveyed in the fall and again in the spring. 47 of these new teachers were special education teachers. Responses on the survey ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). A series of models including hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) were run separately for the general education and special education data analysis.	There are significant differences in the quality of relationships novice special education and novice general education teachers have with their colleagues. New teachers who feel they fit in and are a part of the school community are more likely to be committed to the job assignment. For new special education teachers, there was a strong positive correlation between collective responsibility and commitment to the school.	Although this study focused on the impact of informal relationships with colleagues for new special education teachers, it does inform the design of effective mentoring programs. New teachers benefit from informal relationships that provide both emotional and professional support. This study informs local school leaders in the importance of fostering a supportive school culture.

Author, Date & Title	Purpose of the Study	Methodology	Key Findings	Implications
Mehrenberg, (2013) Red tape and green teachers: The impact of paperwork on novice special education teachers.	To examine if professional paperwork is problematic for novice Special Education Teachers	Semi-structured interviews with 18 novice special education teachers. Participants included teachers of nine distinct disabilities and ranged from preschool to high school in teaching level. Transcripts of interviews were evaluated and assessed using an issues-focused analysis. Data were coded and then sorted according to similar themes and recurring elements. Data were then integrated into a cohesive narrative form.	Participants have mixed views on the value of professional paperwork, however mostly negative. Perceived lack of clarity in paperwork purpose and procedure. Uncertainty surrounding the paperwork was more stressful than amount. On the job training for paperwork seen as most beneficial. Mentors can be beneficial in learning paperwork. New teachers need to understand expectations.	Although this study provided no summary data, it is useful in understanding the impact the large paperwork demands have on novice special education teachers. Because the researchers found that the uncertainty surrounding the paperwork was more stressful than the amount, this is an area where mentor teachers can positively impact new teachers' anxiety levels.

Author, Date & Title	Purpose of the Study	Methodology	Key Findings	Implications
Sebald & Rude (2015) Results of an evaluation study of induction and mentoring for beginning special education teachers: What do they need?	To determine how one school district's induction and mentoring program worked to support beginning special education teachers and to determine what can be learned from evaluating this work.	New special education teachers were surveyed using a 6-point Likert scale following their first, second and third year of teaching. They were interviewed following their second year of teaching. During year three, new interventions were put in place, based on feedback from the interviews following year two. Data were analyzed using a computer program and results for all three years were compared by running a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).	After Year One - new special education teachers reported they felt prepared for collaborating with general education teachers & parents and for managing behavior. They felt least prepared to provide appropriate instruction, collect/ analyze data and to develop IEP's. There was little change in results from year one to year two. Year Three - teachers reported higher levels of feeling prepared for all aspects of their job and felt more supported by the district.	The mentoring program evaluated in this study used a process of knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation for new teachers. This framework supports the development of connections between theory and practice in the field and has implications for designing effective mentoring programs.

Author, Date & Title	Purpose of the Study	Methodology	Key Findings	Implications
Tschannen-Moran, M., Hoy, A. W., & Hoy K. W. (1998) Teacher Efficacy: Its Meaning and Measure	To examine the conceptual foundations of teacher efficacy and the tools used to measure it. To clarify the construct of teacher efficacy and to improve its measurement.	Literature review of studies that used a wide variety of measures of teacher efficacy.	Teacher efficacy is determined by the individual's judgment of whether his or her current abilities and strategies are adequate for the teaching situation at hand. How teachers feel about their ability to be effective in a specific situation will influence how they function in that situation Novice teachers who have a high sense of self-efficacy found greater satisfaction in teaching, and experienced less stress.	Efficacious novice teachers express greater optimism that they will remain in the field. Providing verbal feedback and professional development may boost efficacy levels but teachers must also develop new skills that results in increased student learning in order for improved efficacy levels to remain high. When teachers attempt new practices, efficacy levels may first be lowered but then rebound after success.

Author, Date & Title	Purpose of the Study	Methodology	Key Findings	Implications
Viel-Ruma, Houchins, Jolivette & Benson, 2010. Efficacy beliefs of special educators: The relationships among collective efficacy, teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction.	To determine the relationship between reported levels of job satisfaction, teacher self-efficacy, and collective efficacy for special education teachers.	104 special education teachers were surveyed to measure job satisfaction, teacher self-efficacy, and collective efficacy. A multiple regression analysis was calculated to predict respondents' levels of job satisfaction based on their levels of teacher and collective efficacy.	There was a significant relationship between job satisfaction and teacher self-efficacy. A significant relationship between collective efficacy and job satisfaction was not found.	Improving levels of self-efficacy could improve levels of job satisfaction and higher retention rates for special education teachers. Strong induction programs may improve self-efficacy for special education teachers.

APPENDIX B

UNIVERSITY INSTITUTUION REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Tucker Hall, Room 212
310 E. Campus Rd.
Athens, Georgia 30602
TEL 706-542-3199 | FAX 706-542-5638
IRB@uga.edu
http://research.uga.edu/hso/irb/

Office of Research
Institutional Review Board

EXEMPT DETERMINATION

February 27, 2018

Dear Sheneka Williams:

On 2/27/2018, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Addressing Novice Teacher Retention in Special Education: Understanding the Relationship Between Teacher Mentoring and Teacher Efficacy Using Action Research
Investigator:	Sheneka Williams
Co-Investigator	[student of primary contact]
IRB ID:	STUDY00004722
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Review Category	Exempt 2

The IRB approved the protocol from 2/27/2018 to 2/26/2023.

Please close this study when it is complete.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

Angela Bain, CIP, CIM
University of Georgia

APPENDIX C

SCHOOL DISTRICT INSITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

GWINNETT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

June 8, 2018

Susan Potts-Datema
1412 Sever Creek Drive
Lawrenceville, Georgia 30043

Re: File ID 2018-44

Dear Ms. Potts-Datema:

This is to advise you that your revised research application, "Addressing Novice Teacher Retention in Special Education: Understanding the Relationship Between Teacher Mentoring and Teacher Efficacy Using Action Research," Study ID 2018-44, has satisfactorily met GCPS Research Standards and was approved by the Institutional Review Board. This approval is effective 06/15/2018 through 06/30/2019. Please note the following comments regarding your study:

- The proposed research focuses on an area of interest to the district, retaining special education teachers.
- The proposed research links induction program effectiveness via improved self-efficacy to actual teacher retention.
- Three to four hours of teacher time is required to participate.
- The researcher addressed previously noted concerns in her resubmission.

Please note the following requirements of you as a researcher in GCPS:

- A copy of this approval letter must be attached to any initial communication with a Gwinnett school or office.
- The above File ID number must be included in the subject line of any communication with a Gwinnett school or district office concerning this research study.
- If circumstances prevent you or any member of your research team from following these requirements, please let me know so that we can make alternative arrangements.

Note that schools and teachers may elect not to participate in your research study, even though the district has granted permission.

Please forward a copy of your results to me when they are completed.

437 Old Peachtree Road, NW
Suwanee, GA 30024-2978
678-301-6000
www.gwinnett.k12.ga.us

Best wishes for a successful research project. Please call me at (678) 301-7090 if I may be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

James J Appleton

Digitally signed by James J Appleton
Date: 2018.06.08 12:35:22 -04'00'

James Appleton, Ph.D., Executive Director
Research and Evaluation

cc: Dr. Sheneka Williams, UGA, smwill@uga.edu
Susan Potts-Datema, GCPS email or ssp44329@uga.edu

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM – NEW SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM
Addressing Novice Teacher Retention in Special Education: Understanding the Relationship between Teacher Mentoring and Teacher Efficacy Using Action Research

Researcher's Statement
I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Sheneka Williams, Associate Professor
Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy
The University of Georgia
2530 Sever Road (Gwinnett Campus)
Lawrenceville, Georgia 30024
Phone: 706-542-1615
Email: smwill@uga.edu

Co-Investigator: Susan Potts-Datema, Director of Instructional Services, UGA Doctoral Student
Department of Special Education and Psychological Services
437 Old Peachtree Road
Suwanee, GA 30024
Phone: 678-301-7143
Email: ssp44329@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to examine current induction and mentoring practices for new special education teachers and to possibly develop a redesigned induction model that

may lead to higher levels of job satisfaction and teacher retention rates. The action research team will explore components of mentor support and training that may influence the development of teacher-efficacy in new special education teachers. You are being asked to participate because you are in your first or second year teaching in a special education classroom and are considered a "novice" special education teacher.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate and you are a new special education teacher, you will be asked to …

- Complete a twenty-four item questionnaire entitled "Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale" two times, at both the beginning and end of the study
- Complete a forty-four item questionnaire entitled "The New Teacher Perception" survey two times, at both the beginning and end of the study
- Each survey takes less than 30 minutes to complete

- Possibly participate in a two-hour audio-recorded focus group interview. Topics will be as follows:
    - Your perceptions of New Special Education Teacher Induction
    - Your perceptions of your interactions with your mentor teacher
    - What supports were beneficial to you
    - Identifying areas of need for new special education teachers

Risks and discomforts
We do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research. No more than minimal discomfort is expected. While the researcher serves as the Director of Instructional Services in the district in which you teach, she is not your evaluator, and is not involved in your evaluation. All information gathered from participants in this study will be kept strictly confidential. No identifying information, such as your name or the name of the school where you teach, will be reported. As a new special education teacher, you may experience discomfort answering questions about your personal feelings about your job. If you do feel discomfort at any time, you may discontinue participation in an interview or a survey. Any data that you would not like to share will not be added to the research.

Benefits
Participants in this study may find benefit in the self-reflection that may occur during completion of the surveys and focus groups. This research is focused on benefitting all new teachers by identifying better ways of providing mentoring and support to improve job satisfaction and retention.

Incentives for participation
Snacks and bottle water will be provided at focus group interviews.

Audio/Video Recording
Focus group interviews will be audio recorded using a digital recording device. All recorded data will downloaded onto a laptop computer that is password protected. Once

downloaded, the recording on the digital recording device will be deleted. Recordings will be archived upon transcription in a password protected file and deleted after five years.

Privacy/Confidentiality
The data from the questionnaires will be collected anonymously, and will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Focus group interviews will be coded to identify trends that relate to the research questions. All participants will be given pseudonyms to protect their identities. Identifiable data will be stored in a password protected file. All identifiable data will be deleted after five years. Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking part is voluntary
Your involvement is the student is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be destroyed and not used as part of this study.

If you have questions
The main researcher conducting this study is Susan Potts-Datema, a graduate student at the University of Georgia, under the guidance of Dr. Sheneka Williams. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Susan Potts-Datema at ssp44329@uga.edu or at 678-301-7143 or you may contact Dr. Sheneka Williams at smwill@uga.edu or at 706-542-1615. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_____	_____	
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM – SPECIAL EDUCATION MENTOR

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM
Addressing Novice Teacher Retention in Special Education: Understanding the Relationship between Teacher Mentoring and Teacher Efficacy Using Action Research

Researcher's Statement
I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigators: Dr. Sheneka Williams, Associate Professor
Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy
The University of Georgia
2530 Sever Road (Gwinnett Campus)
Lawrenceville, Georgia 30024
Phone: 706-542-1615
Email: smwill@uga.edu

Co-Investigator: Susan Potts-Datema, Director of Instructional Services, UGA Doctoral Student
Department of Special Education and Psychological Services
437 Old Peachtree Road
Suwanee, GA 30024
Phone: 678-301-7143
Email: ssp44329@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to examine current induction and mentoring practices for new special education teachers and to possibly develop a redesigned induction model that

may lead to higher levels of job satisfaction and teacher retention rates. The action research team will explore components of mentor support and training that may influence the development of teacher-efficacy in new special education teachers. You are being asked to participate because you are Gwinnett County Public Schools special education mentor teacher.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to…

- Particpate in a two-hour audio-recorded focus group interview. Topics will be as follows:
    - Your perceptions of New Special Education Induction
    - Your perceptions of your interactions with your mentees
    - What supports are beneficial to you as a mentor
    - Mentor training and support
    - Identifying areas of need for new special education teachers
- Particpate in one audio-recorded interview with the researcher for thirty to forty-five minutes. Questions will cover:
    - Your perceptions of your interactions with your mentees
    - What supports are beneficial to you as a mentor
    - Mentor training and support
    - Identifying areas of need for new special education teachers

Risks and discomforts
We do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research. No more than minimal discomfort is expected. While the researcher is the Director of Instructional Services in the district in which you teach, she is not your evaluator, and is not involved in your evaluation. All information gathered from participants in this study will be kept strictly confidential. No identifying information, such as your name or the name of the school where you teach, will be reported. As a special education mentor, you may experience discomfort answering questions about your personal feelings about your job. If you do feel discomfort at any time, you may discontinue participation in an interview. Any data that you would not like to share will not be added to the research.

Benefits
Participants in this study may find benefit in the self-reflection that may occur during completion of the interviews and focus groups. This research is focused on benefitting all new teachers by identifying better ways of providing mentoring and support to improve job satisfaction and retention.

Incentives for participation
Snacks and bottle water will be provided at focus group and individual interviews.

Audio/Video Recording
Focus group and individual interviews will be audio recorded using a digital recording device. All recorded data will downloaded onto a laptop computer that is password

protected. Once downloaded, the recording on the digital recording device will be deleted. Recordings will be archived upon transcription in a password protected file and deleted after five years.

Privacy/Confidentiality
Focus group and individual interviews will be coded to identify trends that relate to the research questions. All participants will be given pseudonyms to protect their identities. Identifiable data will be stored in a password protected file. All identifiable data will be deleted after five years. Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking part is voluntary
Your involvement is the student is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be destroyed and not used as part of this study.

If you have questions
The main researcher conducting this study is Susan Potts-Datema, a graduate student at the University of Georgia, under the guidance of Dr. Sheneka Williams. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Susan Potts-Datema at ssp44329@uga.edu or at 678-301-7143 or Dr. Sheneka Williams at smwill@uga.edu or at 706-542-1615. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_____	_____	
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

APPENDIX F

TEACHER SENSE OF EFFICACY SCALE (TSES)

Teacher Beliefs - TSES

This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create challenges for teachers. Your answers are confidential.

Directions: Please indicate your opinion about each of the questions below by marking any one of the nine responses in the columns on the right side, ranging from (1) "None at all" to (9) "A Great Deal" as each represents a degree on the continuum.

Please respond to each of the questions by considering the combination of your *current* ability, resources, and opportunity to do each of the following in your present position.

	None at all		Very Little		Some Degree		Quite A Bit		A Great Deal
1. How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2. How much can you do to help your students think critically?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
4. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
5. To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behavior?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
6. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
7. How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
8. How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
9. How much can you do to help your students value learning?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10. How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
11. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
12. How much can you do to foster student creativity?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
13. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
14. How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
15. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
16. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
17. How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
18. How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
19. How well can you keep a few problem students form ruining an entire lesson?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
20. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
21. How well can you respond to defiant students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
22. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
23. How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
24. How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

APPENDIX G

NEW TEACHER PERCEPTION SURVEY

New Teacher Perception Survey

Your responses will remain anonymous. Please select responses based on your experiences with your mentor.

1. During the most recent month of teaching, did your mentor

	Yes	No
work with you to identify teaching challenges and possible solutions?	○	○
discuss with you instructional goals and ways to achieve them?	○	
give you suggestions to improve your practice?	○	○
provide guidance on teaching to meet district standards?	○	
provide guidance on how to assess your students?	○	○
share lesson plans, assessments, or other instructional activities?	○	
give you encouragement or moral support?	○	○
provide an opportunity for you to raise issues and/or discuss your individual concerns?	○	○
act on something you requested in the previous weeks?	○	○
provide guidance information on administrative and logistical issues?	○	○

2. During the school year, to what extent has your mentor provided you with guidance in the following areas:

	A lot	Moderate amount	Very little	None
accessing district resources?	○	○	○	○
handling paperwork?	○	○	○	○
teaching children with varying levels of English language acquisition?	○	○	○	○
reviewing and assessing student work?	○	○	○	○
implementing classroom management strategies?	○	○	○	○
managing student discipline and behavior?	○	○	○	○
using multiple instructional strategies?	○	○	○	○
selecting or adapting curriculum materials?	○	○	○	○
understanding and teaching toward district standards?	○	○	○	○
planning lessons?	○	○	○	○
using student assessments to inform your teaching?	○	○	○	○
motivating students?	○	○	○	○
understanding the school's culture?	○	○	○	○
working with other school staff such as administrators, counselors, and support teachers?	○	○	○	
working with parents?	○	○	○	○
reflecting on your instructional practices?	○	○	○	○

3. During the school year, to what extent has your mentor provided you with guidance in

	A lot	Moderate amount	Very little	None
teaching your content area?	○	○	○	○
teaching English language learners?	○	○	○	○
teaching students with special needs?	○	○	○	○
teaching students of varying ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds?	○	○	○	○

4. During this school year, to what extent have you adjusted your classroom practice in response to support you've received from your mentor in the following areas

	A lot	Moderate amount	Very little	None
teaching regarding your content area?				
teaching children with varying levels of achievement?				
reviewing and assessing student work?				
implementing classroom management strategies?				
using multiple instructional strategies/techniques?				
selecting or adapting curriculum materials?				
understanding and teaching toward district standards?				
planning lessons?				
using student assessment?				
motivating students?				
teaching English language learners?				
teaching students with special needs?				
teaching students of varying ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds?				
reflecting on your instructional practices?				