

Special Education Administrators' Perceptions of Responsibilities and Challenges

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Abstract. Special education administrators play a vital role in assuring the identification and provision of services to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE). This study examined the differences in responsibilities and challenges between special education administrators in rural, suburban, and urban school districts in the state of Texas. Quantitative data was collected through surveys from 152 special education administrators in the state of Texas. A comparative study was conducted using cross tabulation, frequency, and percentage tables. Results of this study indicate there are significant differences ($p < .05$) in the responsibilities and level of challenges between special education administrators in rural, suburban, and urban school districts in the areas of collaboration between general education and special education, contracting with outside providers for special services (i.e. OT, PT, music therapy), monitoring staff caseloads, providing access to appropriate materials needed for instruction, participating in the development of district goals and objectives, serving as a resource person in the design and equipping of facilities for students with disabilities, and demonstrating skill in conflict resolution with administrators, parents, teachers, staff, and community. The role of the special education administrator requires diversified skills to address responsibilities and challenges that are faced today.

Keywords: special education administrator; responsibilities; challenges; perceptions; descriptive statistics

Introduction

Researchers have attempted to define the role of the special education administrator over the past 50 years by looking at their responsibilities and the challenges they faced (Kohl & Marro, 1971; Marro & Kohl, 1972; Hebert & Miller, 1985; Arick & Krug, 1993; Wigle & Wilcox, 2002; Thompson & O'Brian, 2007). In 1971, Kohl and Marro conducted the first national study concerning special education administrators. This study provided a baseline of information regarding responsibilities and challenges of special education administrators in areas such as program administration and supervision, organizational characteristics and programming elements, and selected administrative opinions (Marro & Kohl, 1972). Have the responsibilities and challenges of special education administrators significantly changed since that time?

With the establishment of Public Law 94-142 (Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975), the responsibilities of special education administrators have evolved and expanded as the unique needs of students with disabilities are met in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act in 2004 (IDEIA 2004) brought about strengthened accountability for results, enhanced parent involvement, use of scientifically based instructional practices, the development and use of technology, and highly qualified staff to ensure that students with disabilities would benefit from such efforts (Wright, 2004).

Improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities requires a paradigm shift of the special education administrator's role toward more support of scientific and evidence-based instructional practices. Previously, the special education administrator was responsible for ensuring compliance with federal mandates and promoting individualized instructional programs. Now, the special education administrator must help facilitate collaboration between stakeholders so that all students have access to high quality educational programs. The special education administrator's effectiveness is determined by the ability to develop, guide, support and evaluate the use of evidence-based practices by teachers which should result in positive educational outcomes for students with disabilities (Boscardin, 2004; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003).

Lashley and Boscardin (2003) reported that the special education administrator's responsibilities have changed from focusing on effective interventions to concerns with litigation, accountability, inclusion, and school reform. The diverse responsibilities of special education administrators such as interpreting and implementing special education law, making program decisions, supervising provision of services, empowering teachers to use research-based strategies, and addressing parental demands make "special education administration a daunting challenge" (Palladino, 2008, p. 158).

Tate (2010) noted that special education administrators have faced the challenges of decreased funding, shortage of qualified staff, and increased litigation while trying to meet the needs of a complex student population. Thompson and O'Brian (2007) found the most difficult aspects of being a special education administrator were legal issues, issues with personnel, overwhelming paperwork, budget and finance, and multiple roles while Lashley and Boscardin (2003) reported retaining qualified staff in special education, professional development, and recruitment as major challenges for special education administrators.

Crockett, Becker, and Quinn (2009) reviewed 474 abstracts of articles from 1970-2009 that addressed special education leadership and administration. Several trends emerged that influence special education leaders: (a) collaboration between stakeholders, (b) school improvement through accountability measures, and (c) the use of technology. There were a disproportionate number of data-based research studies compared to professional commentaries (non-researched based information) in the area of leadership roles and responsibilities (Crockett, Becker, & Quinn, 2009). From 1970-2009, Crockett, Becker and Quinn (2009) identified a total of 49 professional commentaries and 19 data-based research studies that addressed special education administrators' roles and responsibilities. Interestingly, over half ($n =$

27) of the 49 professional v6) of the 19 data-based research studies occurred during the same time period. The greatest number of data-based research studies addressing roles and responsibilities occurred during the 1980s while the greatest number of professional commentaries occurred during the years from 2000-2009. As stated by Crockett, Becker, and Quinn (2009), there is “a gap in the empirical foundation that guides the implementation of effective special education leadership practice” (p. 65). Finkenbinder (1981) noted that action research was needed to address changes that have occurred in the responsibilities of special education administrators especially at various organizational levels such as rural and urban districts. This study examines current responsibilities and challenges of special education administrators in rural, suburban, and urban school districts in the state of Texas.

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- ◇ How have the responsibilities and challenges of special education administrators significantly changed over time?
- ◇ What are the significant differences in responsibilities in staffing, evaluation of staff, budget, policy development, and program development between special education administrators in rural, suburban, and urban school districts in the state of Texas?
- ◇ What are the most important challenges for special education administrators in rural, suburban, and urban school districts in the state of Texas?
- ◇ What is the relationship between each of the 39 responsibilities and the perceived level of challenge by special education administrators?

Methodology

The participants for this study included special education administrators from school districts in the state of Texas. The population sample came from the 2013-2014 Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education (TCASE) Directory consisting of special education administrators from rural, suburban, and urban districts. Additionally, the TCASE Directory includes twenty Regional Education Service Center (ESC) Directors who oversee staff development and provide support to special education administrators within their regions. The Regional ESC Directors were excluded from the population sample since they are not directly responsible to a school district or educational cooperative. A total of 515 special education administrators in the state of Texas were contacted in 2014 via e-mail to solicit input regarding the background characteristics, responsibilities and challenges of the special education administrator utilizing a survey.

A non-experimental research design was utilized through survey methodology to describe perceptions of special education administrators' responsibilities and challenges. A comparative study was conducted between special education administrators in rural, suburban, and urban districts.

The survey was modeled after the first national study of special education administrators in public schools conducted by Kohl and Marro (1971). In the final report by Kohl and Marro (1971), suggestions were made for further investigations to enhance the knowledge pool regarding special education

administrators. This information was used to create a survey with updated information concerning the responsibilities and challenges faced by special education administrators. Maintaining some of the constructs of the original survey allows longitudinal information to be obtained for comparison with the original survey. For validity purposes, the survey was reviewed by a committee which included individuals who had prior experience as public school administrators for content and clarity. Statements on the survey were generated from a collection of job descriptions that were used by school districts when posting for open positions of special education directors in the state of Texas. Thirty-nine statements addressing responsibilities and challenges of special education administrators in five separate categories: (a) staffing, (b) evaluation of staff, (c) budget, (d) policy development, and (e) program development were included in the survey.

For each statement, the participants were asked to respond to two separate Likert scales concerning the level of importance of the responsibility for effectively managing the special education program and the level of challenge for implementing that responsibility. The first Likert scale addressed the level of responsibility as: (a) not applicable, (b) not important, (c) somewhat important, (d) very important, or (e) essential. The choices were ranked from zero to five respectively. The second Likert scale addressed the level of challenge. The Likert scale choices were: (a) not a challenge, (b) a little bit of a challenge, (c) somewhat of a challenge, and (d) substantial challenge. The choices were ranked from one to four respectively. A determination of a mean (M) response for each responsibility statement was calculated.

Initial contact with the special education administrators was in the form of an e-mail that contained the following information: (a) explanation and purpose of the study, (b) participants in the study, (c) description of procedures, (d) instrumentation utilized, (e) potential risks, (f) participation and benefits (g) link to survey through PsychData, (h) contact information, (i) and an opportunity to contact the researcher if there were any questions. E-mails were grouped by region using the "blind cc" to protect confidentiality. Two follow-up e-mails were sent as reminders to complete the survey. The first reminder was sent two days after the initial contact e-mail with the final reminder being sent one week after the initial e-mail.

A total of 515 surveys were distributed to special education administrators across the state of Texas. A total of 176 surveys were returned with 24 surveys removed due to lack of completion and other factors leaving a total of 152. Though there was an initial 35% return of surveys, 29.5% were used in the evaluation of results. This accounts for roughly one out of three special education administrators in the state of Texas.

Using the Statistical Package of Social Scientists (SPSS) 18 program, results of the survey were analyzed. Frequency, percentage tables, and cross-tabulation were used for categorical data. A comparison of responsibilities and level of challenges was conducted through cross tabulation. The Chi-Square value was computed to determine the statistical significance of the relationship between each of the 39 responsibilities and the perceived level of challenge by special education administrators.

Results

Of the special education administrators responding to the survey, 61.2% were from rural school districts, 27.6% from suburban and 11.2% from urban. Of those, 73% listed employment as the local school district, while 23.7% showed an education cooperative unit. The remaining administrators indicated a shared services agreement, countywide school district, State School for the Deaf and State School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Approximately 91% of the special education administrators were non-Hispanic or Latino and White with 85.5% of the special education administrators being female. Those responding overwhelmingly held a master's degree and additional courses (65.1%) or a doctoral degree (18.4%). The majority of the individuals held mid-management/principal certification (77.6%) while the second most common certification was that of special education teacher (73.7%). Twenty-four special education administrators (15.8%) had no administrative certification. Seventy-five percent of special education administrators without administrative certification came from rural school districts, 16.7% came from suburban school districts, and 8.3% from urban school districts.

Responses from special education administrators were analyzed to determine the level of importance for 39 statements of responsibility using a 5-point Likert scale and the level of challenge for the same statements using a 4-point Likert scale. Table 1 identifies the special education administrators' mean average for the perceived level of importance for each responsibility statement to effectively manage the special education program. Table 2 identifies the mean average for the perceived level of challenge for implementing that responsibility. Standard deviations were included for each responsibility and level of challenge. Each table provides the category of each responsibility and the responsibility statement. The responsibility statements are ranked from the most essential to the least important in level of responsibility and from the most substantial to the least in level of challenge. Responsibilities and level of challenges that showed a significant difference between special education administrators in rural, suburban, and urban school districts in the state of Texas are noted in bold print and "starred."

Special Education Administrators' Level of Responsibility

The top three responsibilities considered most essential were in the area of policy development: (a) knowledge of federal and state special education law, (b) implements the policies established by federal and state law, State Board of Education rules, and the local board policy in the area of special education, and (c) knowledge of state level assessment procedures and requirements (Table 1).

The responsibilities that were considered the least important involved personally providing direct service to students with disabilities and evaluation of special education and general education staff. The majority of special education administrators (63.8%) did not consider the responsibility of personally providing direct service to students with disabilities as applicable to them. A higher percentage of special education administrators from rural (19.4%) and suburban (11.9%) school districts considered this very important to essential when compared to special education administrators from urban school districts (5.9%). This may imply that special education administrators do not consider personally providing direct services to students with disabilities a

significant responsibility unless the special education administrators are from smaller school districts where access to qualified staff might not be prevalent. Approximately 50% of special education administrators evaluated special education teachers on campuses. Greater responsibility was reported by special education administrators for evaluating general education teachers (65.8%) itinerant staff (84.2%), diagnostic staff (98.0%), secretarial and clerical staff (97.4%).

When comparing responses from special education administrators in rural, suburban, and urban school districts, significant differences were noted for six responsibility statements. Three responsibility statements from the program development category showed a significant difference: (a) serving as a resource person in the design and equipping of facilities for students with disabilities, (b) providing access to appropriate materials needed for instruction, and (c) collaboration between general education and special education. A higher percentage of special education administrators from suburban school districts (52.4%) considered the responsibility of serving as a resource person in the design and equipping of facilities for students with disabilities responsibility as essential compared to 32.3% from rural school districts and 35.3% from urban school districts. The majority of special education administrators considered the responsibility of providing access to appropriate materials needed for instruction as very important (35.5%) or essential (50.7%). Special education administrators from suburban school districts (83.3%) who considered the responsibility of collaboration between general education and special education as essential had a higher percentage than special education administrators from urban (64.7%) and rural (63.4%) school districts.

A significant difference was noted for two staffing responsibility statements: contracts with outside providers of special education services for students with disabilities (i.e. OT, PT, music therapy) and monitors staff caseloads. A higher percentage of special education administrators from rural school districts (63.4%) considered contracting with outside providers as an essential responsibility compared to 57.1% of special education administrators from suburban school districts and 52.9% from urban school districts. Special education administrators from urban school districts (23.5%) had a higher percentage than special education administrators from suburban (4.8%) and rural (1.1%) school districts that did not consider contracting with outside providers applicable to them. This may be due, in part, to larger school districts having the ability to hire full-time personnel to serve a large number of students. The majority of special education administrators chose either very important or essential for the level of responsibility for monitoring staff caseloads. A higher percentage of special education administrators from suburban school districts (59.5%) and urban school districts (58.8%) considered monitoring staff caseloads as an essential responsibility compared to special education administrators from rural school districts (43.0%).

The responsibility of participating in the development of district goals and objectives was significant in the area of policy development between special education administrators in rural, suburban, and urban school districts. A higher percentage of special education administrators from urban school districts (76.5%) considered the responsibility as essential compared to 47.6% of

special education administrators from suburban school districts and 28.0% from rural school districts.

Challenges Faced by Special Education Administrators

Of the 39 responsibilities special education administrators were asked to identify the level of challenge, collaboration between general education and special education from the program development category was considered the highest ranked level of challenge followed by two responsibilities in the budget category: compiling budgets and cost estimates based upon documented program needs and ensuring that programs are cost effective and funds are managed prudently. The lowest rated challenges were personally providing direct service to students with disabilities from the staffing category and two responsibility statements from the evaluation of staff category: evaluates secretarial and/or clerical staff and evaluates special education teachers on campuses through the designated teacher appraisal system.

Three responsibility statements showed a significant difference between rural, suburban, and urban school districts regarding the level of challenge as perceived by special education administrators. Two of the responsibility statements were from the program development category: collaboration between general education and special education and demonstrates skill in conflict resolution with administrators, parents, teachers, staff, and community. Special education administrators from suburban school districts (90.4%) considered collaborating between general education and special education as either somewhat of a challenge (45.2%) or a substantial challenge (45.2%) compared to special education administrators in rural (37.6%; 37.6%) or urban (35.3%; 17.6%) school districts. Special education administrators in suburban school districts (54.8%) considered demonstrating skill in conflict resolution with administrators, parents, teachers, staff, and community somewhat of a challenge (28.6%) or a substantial challenge (26.2%) compared to 51.6% of special education administrators in rural school districts (37.6%; 14.0%) and 29.4% of special education administrators in urban school districts (29.4%; .0%). This may be due to the level of experience portrayed by special education administrators in larger or urban school districts.

The final responsibility statement that showed a significant difference in level of challenge between rural, suburban, and urban school districts was contracting with outside providers of special services for students with disabilities in the staffing category. The majority of special education administrators from urban school districts (35.3%) did not consider contracting with outside providers of special services a challenge while 11.9% of special education administrators from suburban school districts and 7.5% of special education administrators from rural school districts did not consider the responsibility a challenge. The majority of special education administrators from suburban (42.9%) and rural (35.5%) school districts considered the responsibility somewhat of a challenge compared to only 23.5% of special education administrators from urban school districts. This may be due to the availability of contract providers in smaller districts. Related service personnel may be more difficult to acquire to provide services for students with disabilities in smaller districts without a substantial cost to the school district.

Table 1: Special Education Administrators' Perceptions of Responsibilities

Type	Responsibility	Level of Responsibility	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
POD	Knowledge of federal and state special education law	4.93	0.27
POD	Implements the policies established by federal and state law, State Board of Education rules, and the local board policy in the area of special education	4.84	0.49
POD	Knowledge of state level assessment procedures and requirements	4.74	0.54
BGT	Compiles budgets and cost estimates based upon documented program needs	4.67	0.73
PRD	Discusses special education programs, personnel, and students with building administrators	4.66	0.50
BGT	Ensures that programs are cost effective and funds are managed prudently	4.63	0.60
POD	Recommends and consults on policies to improve programs that impact students with disabilities	4.63	0.69
BGT	Administers the special education budget	4.62	0.79
PRD	Collaboration between general education and special education	4.52*	0.94
EOS	Evaluates diagnostic staff (i.e. educational diagnosticians, LSSPs)	4.50	0.78
PRD	Encourages the use of assessment to inform instruction	4.48	0.80
PRD	Ensures that student progress is evaluated on a regular, systematic basis, and the findings are used to make the special education program more effective	4.47	0.74
STA	Participates in recruitment, selection, and making sound recommendations relative to personnel placement and assignment	4.45	0.84
STA	Contracts with outside providers of special services for students with disabilities (i.e. OT, PT, music therapy)	4.43*	0.94
STA	Monitors staff caseloads	4.42*	0.66
BGT	Collaborates with business office on requisitions, purchase orders, contracts, etc.	4.41	0.67
PRD	Encourages the use of effective, research-based instructional strategies	4.41	0.77
EOS	Makes recommendations relative to retention, transfer, discipline, and dismissal of staff	4.34	0.86
PRD	Provides access to appropriate materials needed for instruction	4.33*	0.84
BGT	Develops and submits budgets and financial reports for central administration	4.31	0.99

Table 1: Continued.

Type	Responsibility	Level of Responsibility	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
PRD	Creates supportive and safe learning environments	4.24	1.17
EOS	Evaluates secretarial/clerical staff	4.16	0.91
PRD	Consults with parents regarding the evaluation and placement of their children	4.11	1.04
PRD	Monitors professional research and disseminates ideas and information to other professionals	4.07	0.83
PRD	Assists with alignment of student goals with standards-based goals	4.07	1.18
PRD	Articulates the district's mission and goals in the area of special education to the community and solicits its support in realizing the mission	4.07	1.02
POD	Participates in the development of district goals and objectives	4.05*	1.03
PRD	Selection of instructional materials used in special education program	4.02	0.99
PRD	Serves as a resource person in the design and equipping of facilities for students with disabilities	4.01*	1.09
PRD	Consults with teachers regarding the evaluation and placement of their students	3.97	1.07
BGT	Maintains a current inventory of supplies and equipment; recommends the replacement and disposal of equipment, when necessary	3.96	0.88
PRD	Facilitates/promotes the use of technology in the teaching-learning process	3.90	0.91
EOS	Evaluates itinerant staff (i.e. VI teacher, counselor, special education nurse)	3.81	1.39
PRD	Participates in committee meetings to ensure the appropriate placement and development of individual education plans for students with disabilities	3.71	1.14
PRD	Demonstrates skill in conflict resolution with administrators, parents, teachers, staff, and community	3.66	1.46
POD	Attends school board meetings regularly and makes presentations to the school board	3.45	1.22
EOS	Assists in general education walk-throughs and/or evaluations	2.84	1.46
EOS	Evaluates special education teachers on campuses through the designated teacher appraisal system	2.53	1.64
STA	Personally provides direct service to students with disabilities (including teaching and/or assessment)	1.89	1.35

* $p < .05$

Level of Responsibility:

1 = Not Applicable; 2 = Not Important; 3 = Somewhat Important; 4 = Very Important; 5 = Essential

BGT = Budget; EOS = Evaluation of Staff; POD = Policy Development; PRD = Professional Development; STA = Staffing

Table 2: Special Education Administrators' Perceptions of Level of Challenge

Type	Responsibility	Level of Challenge	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
PRD	Collaboration between general education and special education	3.09*	0.88
BGT	Compiles budgets and cost estimates based upon documented program needs	3.05	0.76
BGT	Ensures that programs are cost effective and funds are managed prudently	2.97	0.83
PRD	Ensures that student progress is evaluated on a regular, systematic basis, and the findings are used to make the special education program more effective	2.87	0.88
POD	Knowledge of federal and state special education law	2.85	0.88
POD	Implements the policies established by federal and state law, State Board of Education rules, and the local board policy in the area of special education	2.85	0.88
PRD	Encourages the use of assessment to inform instruction	2.84	0.82
POD	Knowledge of state level assessment procedures and requirements	2.82	0.85
POD	Recommends and consults on policies to improve programs that impact students with disabilities	2.82	0.81
BGT	Administers the special education budget	2.76	0.82
STA	Participates in recruitment, selection, and making sound recommendations relative to personnel placement and assignment	2.76	0.88
STA	Contracts with outside providers of special services for students with disabilities (i.e. OT, PT, music therapy)	2.76*	0.97
PRD	Encourages the use of effective, research-based instructional strategies	2.75	0.87
BGT	Develops and submits budgets and financial reports for central administration	2.72	0.85
STA	Monitors staff caseloads	2.66	0.89
EOS	Makes recommendations relative to retention, transfer, discipline, and dismissal of staff	2.61	0.92
PRD	Discusses special education programs, personnel, and students with building administrators	2.52	0.87
PRD	Assists with alignment of student goals with standards-based goals	2.49	0.92
PRD	Articulates the district's mission and goals in the area of special education to the community and solicits its support in realizing the mission	2.49	0.86
POD	Participates in the development of district goals and objectives	2.45	0.88
PRD	Facilitates/promotes the use of technology in the teaching-learning process	2.45	0.82

Table 2: Continued.

Type	Responsibility	Level of Challenge	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
PRD	Demonstrates skill in conflict resolution with administrators, parents, teachers, staff, and community	2.43*	1.01
BGT	Maintains a current inventory of supplies and equipment; recommends the replacement and disposal of equipment, when necessary	2.40	0.94
PRD	Selection of instructional materials used in special education program	2.36	0.84
PRD	Monitors professional research and disseminates ideas and information to other professionals	2.34	0.89
PRD	Provides access to appropriate materials needed for instruction	2.32	0.86
PRD	Serves as a resource person in the design and equipping of facilities for students with disabilities	2.28	0.90
PRD	Creates supportive and safe learning environments	2.28	0.86
BGT	Collaborates with business office on requisitions, purchase orders, contracts, etc.	2.26	0.93
PRD	Consults with teachers regarding the evaluation and placement of their students	2.21	0.85
PRD	Consults with parents regarding the evaluation and placement of their children	2.18	0.89
PRD	Participates in committee meetings to ensure the appropriate placement and development of individual education plans for students with disabilities	2.09	0.92
EOS	Evaluates diagnostic staff (i.e. educational diagnosticians, LSSPs)	2.05	0.87
EOS	Evaluates itinerant staff (i.e. VI teacher, counselor, special education nurse)	2.01	0.89
EOS	Assists in general education walk-throughs and/or evaluations	1.98	1.06
POD	Attends school board meetings regularly and makes presentations to the school board	1.82	0.85
EOS	Evaluates special education teachers on campuses through the designated teacher appraisal system	1.78	1.01
EOS	Evaluates secretarial/clerical staff	1.72	0.83
STA	Personally provides direct service to students with disabilities (including teaching and/or assessment)	1.49	0.85

* $p < .05$

Level of Challenge:

1 = Not a Challenge; 2 = A little bit of a Challenge; 3 = Somewhat of a Challenge; 4 = Substantial Challenge

BGT = Budget; EOS = Evaluation of Staff; POD = Policy Development; PRD = Professional Development; STA = Staffing

Special Education Administrators' Responsibilities vs. Challenges

A comparison of responsibilities and level of challenges was conducted through cross tabulation. The Chi-Square value was computed to determine the statistical significance of the relationship between each of the 39 responsibilities and the perceived level of challenge by special education administrators. Table 3 reports the results for Chi-Square, degrees of freedom, and the significance level for each responsibility statement. As noted in Table 3, the majority of comparisons between responsibilities and level of challenges were significant at the $p = < .05$.

The overall pattern suggests, as the importance of the responsibility increased, the level of the challenge increased. This was applicable to 28 of the 39 responsibilities (71.7%). The remaining responsibilities followed different patterns. The responsibility for providing direct services to students with disabilities (including teaching and assessment) in the staffing category was slightly different since it was only applicable to 36.2% of special education administrators in the study. A secondary pattern was seen for certain responsibilities in the evaluation of staff, budget, policy development, and the program development categories. The following responsibilities showed that special education administrators considered the responsibilities as very important to essential but considered the level of challenge as not a challenge to a little bit of a challenge. This pattern was applicable to the three responsibilities in evaluation of staff: (a) evaluates diagnostic staff (i.e. educational diagnosticians); (b) evaluates itinerant staff (i.e. VI teacher, counselor, special education nurse); and (c) evaluates secretarial and clerical staff. There was one responsibility in the budget category of collaborating with the business office on requisitions, purchase orders, contracts, etc. and one responsibility in policy development of attending school board meetings regularly and making presentations to the school board. The five remaining responsibilities were in the program development category: (a) consults with parents regarding the evaluation and placement of their children, (b) serves as a resource person in the design and equipping of facilities for students with disabilities, (c) monitors professional research and disseminates ideas and information to other professionals, (d) provides access to appropriate materials needed for instruction, and (e) selection of instructional materials used in special education program.

Table 3: Comparison between Special Education Administrators' Responsibilities and Challenges

Staffing	<i>X</i> ²	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Monitors staff caseloads	29.33	9	.001*
Participates in recruitment, selection, and making sound recommendations relative to personnel placement and assignment	66.70	12	.001*
Contracts with outside providers of special services for students with disabilities (i.e. OT, PT, music therapy)	63.63	9	.001*
Personally provides direct service to students with disabilities (including teaching and/or assessment)	116.82	12	.001*
Evaluation of Staff			
Evaluates special education teachers on campuses through the designated teacher appraisal system	97.54	12	.001*
Evaluates diagnostic staff (i.e. ed. diagnosticians, LSSPs)	18.30	12	.107
Evaluates itinerant staff (i.e. VI teacher, counselor)	68.02	12	.001*
Evaluates secretarial/clerical staff	25.74	12	.012*
Makes recommendations relative to retention, transfer, discipline, and dismissal of staff	53.35	12	.001*
Assists in general education walk-throughs and/or evaluations	94.65	12	.001*
Budget			
Compiles budgets and cost estimates based upon documented program needs	54.38	9	.001*
Develops and submits budgets and financial reports for central administration	63.02	9	.001*
Administers the special education budget	35.91	9	.001*
Maintains a current inventory of supplies and equipment; recommends the replacement and disposal of equipment, when necessary	33.95	12	.001*
Ensures that programs are cost effective and funds are managed prudently	37.28	9	.001*
Collaborates with Business Office on requisitions, purchase orders, contracts, etc.	15.71	9	.073
Policy Development			
Knowledge of federal and state special education law	7.61	6	.268
Knowledge of state level assessment procedures and requirements	9.70	6	.138
Implements the policies established by federal and state law, State Board of Education rules, and the local board policy in the area of special education	23.22	9	.006*
Recommends and consults on policies to improve programs that impact students with disabilities	50.55	12	.001*
Participates in the development of district goals and objectives	61.35	12	.001*
Attends school board meetings regularly and makes presentations to the school board	60.08	12	.001*

Table 3: Continued.

Program Development	<i>X</i> ²	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Consults with teachers regarding the evaluation and placement of their students	50.41	9	.001*
Consults with parents regarding the evaluation and placement of their children	39.07	12	.001*
Discusses special education programs, personnel, and students with building administrators	9.23	6	.161
Participates in committee meetings to ensure the appropriate placement and development of individual education plans for students with disabilities	53.33	12	.001*
Ensures that student progress is evaluated on a regular, systematic basis, and the findings are used to make the special education program more effective	45.21	9	.001*
Serves as a resource person in the design and equipping of facilities for students with disabilities	72.67	12	.001*
Monitors professional research and disseminates ideas and information to other professionals	24.93	12	.015*
Facilitates/promotes the use of technology in the teaching-learning process	70.59	9	.001*
Provides access to appropriate materials needed for instruction	27.50	9	.001*
Encourages the use of effective, research-based instructional strategies	38.30	9	.001*
Creates supportive and safe learning environments	69.71	12	.001*
Assists with alignment of student goals with standards-based goals	105.26	12	.001*
Collaboration between general education and special education	105.11	9	.001*
Encourages the use of assessment to inform instruction	75.51	9	.001*
Selection of instructional materials used in special education program	53.38	12	.001*
Articulates the district's mission and goals in the area of special education to the community and solicits its support in realizing the mission	59.08	12	.001*
Demonstrates skill in conflict resolution with administrators, parents, teachers, staff, and community	163.21	9	.001*

**p* < .05

Discussion

Findings from this study reveal minimal diversity in gender, ethnicity, and race among special education administrators with the majority of special education administrators being female, Non-Hispanic or Latino and White. Compared to previous studies there has been no change in ethnicity or racial composition of special education administrators yet there has been a significant change in gender from previous studies. In the study by Kohl and Marro (1971), 75% of special education administrators were male and 25% were female. Arick

and Krug (1993) reported a larger percentage of male (65.5%) special education directors than female (34.5%) as did Wigle and Wilcox (2002) with 53% of the special education directors being male and 47% female. There were an equal number of males and females as special education administrators in a study by Thompson and O'Brian (2007). Thompson and O'Brian (2007) identified no diversity in racial composition in their study since all participants were Non-Hispanic and White.

The minimal degree held by special education administrators in the current study was a master's degree with 18.4% of special education administrators holding a doctorate degree. Due to the mandatory legislation and the complexity of special education there is a need for highly competent and trained administrators in the areas of special education (Forgnone & Collings, 1975). In a study by Thompson and O'Brian (2007), 7.5% of 67 special education administrators had a master's degree, 55.2% had a master's degree with additional graduate credit, and 32.8% had a doctorate degree. Compared to the current study, a higher percentage of special education administrators held doctorate degrees in the Thompson and O'Brian (2007) study.

The current study reflects an increase in special education administrators with general education administrator certification and special education teacher certification compared to previous studies. Kohl and Marro (1971) identified 43.5% of special education administrators as having a general administrator certification, 32.0% having a special education administrator certification and 37.6% having a special education teacher certification. Arick and Krug (1993) reported 58.3% of special education administrators having certification in special education administration and 64.0% in special education teacher certification. Special education administrators in the state of Texas are not required to have a special education administration certification which may account for the increased number in general education administration certification. State certification requirements are one way to ensure that special education administrators are adequately prepared as their job responsibilities increase and become more diverse (Prillaman & Richardson, 1985).

Knowledge and implementation of federal and state special education law at the local level continues to be a top priority for special education administrators, as well as, a challenge. The findings in the current study support the work by Nevin (1979) who noted interpretation of state and federal laws was an essential competency and Prillaman and Richardson (1985) who espoused the importance of special education administrators being able to interpret outcomes of court cases and translating law into local policy and practice. As noted by Tate (2010) the importance of having a good background knowledge of special education law cannot be undermined. Thompson and O'Brian (2007) reported that legal issues were a difficult aspect of being a special education administrator, which reflects the importance of having knowledge of federal and state special education law, which was the highest rated challenge in the policy development category.

Interestingly, the responsibility that was considered the least essential and less of a challenge in the area of policy development was attending school board meetings regularly and making presentations to the school board. In the current study, 19.7% of special education administrators considered attending

school board meetings regularly and making presentations as essential with 34.9% of special education administrators considering it very important and 28.3% considering it somewhat important. Marro and Kohl (1972) noted that relationships with the school board and central administration are important for special education administrators. Kohl and Marro (1971) found 35.2% of special education administrators frequently attended school board meetings, 31% only attended school board meetings for special presentations, and special education administrators from small education systems usually did not attend school board meetings. Approximately 96% of special education administrators in the current study were involved in policy development compared to 63% of the special education administrators surveyed by Kohl and Marro (1971) who reported they felt encouraged to recommend new policies and present their viewpoint to the school board or through the superintendent.

The current study reflects limited involvement by special education administrators in providing direct services to students with disabilities and the evaluation of special education staff at the campus level was only somewhat important which is different from previous studies. Kohl and Marro (1971) reported that special education administrators desired to spend more time supervising and coordinating instruction, yet 37% of special education administrators did not formally evaluate beginning teachers and continuing teachers. In the study by Arick and Krug (1993), 85% of special education administrators were solely responsible for evaluating special education staff or shared the responsibility in their district. As noted previously, the current study showed greater responsibility toward evaluating staff that are not typically located at the campus level such as special education secretarial or clerical staff, diagnostic staff, and itinerant staff.

Even though special education administrators considered evaluation of special education staff at the campus level as somewhat important, approximately 98% of special education administrators rated discussing special education programs, personnel, and students with building administrators as very important (30.9%) or essential (67.8%). The results in the current study were higher than those reported by Kohl and Marro (1971) where 70% of special education administrators considered improving the special education program through supervision and instruction their primary responsibility.

The current study reflects the importance of collaboration between general education and special education administrators as well as a challenge for special education administrators. In a study by Arick and Krug (1993), special education administrators indicated a need for training to facilitate collaboration between general education and special education. Boscardin (2005) advocated the use of collaboration to develop professional bonds with teachers.

Compiling budgets and cost estimates based upon documented program needs and ensuring that programs are cost effective while funds are managed prudently continue to be a very important responsibility of special education administrators and somewhat of a challenge. This supports the findings of Thompson and O'Brian (2007), that budget and finance can be a difficult aspect of being a special education director.

Conclusion

Though the face of the special education administrator has changed from primarily male to female, there are some facets of being a special education administrator that has remained the same. Policy development which encompasses knowledge and implementation of federal and state law concerning special education continues to be the primary responsibility for special education administrators. However, there is an increased number of special education administrators who are involved in the development of policies at the local level.

The importance of collaboration between general education and special education continues to be a very important to essential responsibility but somewhat of a challenge for special education administrators. Interestingly, there appears to be a decrease in the evaluation of special education staff at the campus level by the special education administrator and personally providing direct service to students with disabilities as the importance of administrative responsibilities have increased such as compiling budgets and legal issues. Overall, as the level of responsibility has increased for special education administrators, the level of challenge has increased.

Differences were noted in level of responsibility and level of challenge for special education administrators in rural, suburban, and urban school districts. A higher percentage of special education administrators in suburban school districts considered collaboration between general education and special education an essential responsibility when compared to rural and urban school districts. Contracting with outside providers of special services was a greater responsibility and challenge for special education administrators from rural and suburban school districts than special education administrators from urban school districts. Special education administrators from suburban and urban school districts are more concerned about monitoring staff caseloads than special education administrators from rural school districts. Special education administrators from urban school districts were more involved in the development of district goals and objectives than rural and suburban school districts while a greater percentage of special education administrators from rural and suburban school districts had more responsibilities for program development than special education administrators from urban school districts. A higher percentage of special education administrators from suburban school districts considered demonstrating skill in conflict resolution with administrators, parents, teachers, staff, and the community as a substantial challenge when compared to rural and urban special education administrators.

It is clear that the role of the special education administrator requires diversified skills to meet the responsibilities and challenges that are faced today. It is essential for today's special education administrator to have a clear understanding of federal and state special education law for the implementation of special education programs. One of the challenges for the future will be to increase the diversity of special education administrators.

Limitations and Future Research

There were limited research studies that involved responsibilities and challenges of special education administrators. Reviews of literature noted the lack of research available (Finkenbinder, 1981; Crockett, Becker, & Quinn, 2009).

The length of data collection for survey responses covered a two week period. Most responses occurred within six hours of notification. This was applicable to the initial notification and the two reminders seeking participation in the study.

Use of an electronic survey may have excluded some special education administrators from participation in this study. Though all special education administrators on the TCASE list had access to e-mail, some may prefer a pencil and paper format as opposed to an electronic format. Establishing rapport with an individual is more difficult through an electronic format, which may have resulted in reduction of respondents.

The sample population was limited to special education administrators within the state of Texas. Therefore, results may not be generalized across other states but only representative of the population in the state of Texas.

Future research is needed to identify the difference between actual responsibilities of special education administrators and job descriptions. Are there factors that influence a special education administrator's contract days such as a difference between responsibilities during the school year and during the summer? Additionally, factors should be identified that influence a special education administrator's decision to remain in the field of special education or leave the field of education.

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