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# Primary Factors Impacting Burnout in Special Education Teachers

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**Primary Factors Impacting Burnout in Special Education Teachers**

by

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Teacher burnout is a genuine issue in today's world. Many factors can lead to burnout, and many teachers are not equipped to manage the daily stressors that come with the job. Young teachers enter the classroom excited and ready to take on all challenges that come their way. Little do they know of the stressors that may await them. Special education teachers work with students with special needs who often require additional support that general education teachers are not prepared or trained to confront.

Special education teachers have a distinctly different role than general education teachers. General education teachers are responsible for providing high-quality instruction of the core curriculum, consistent routines, and a safe environment for all learners. There are limits to the amount and type of individualized instruction they can provide. The general education teacher's primary responsibility is to facilitate the development of academic skills for the majority of students, those who function close to grade level, as efficiently as possible. Special education teachers provide interventions and support for those students who do not fit in with the majority of students and qualify for special education services after referral and evaluation are completed to determine meeting special education criteria.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018) provides a descriptive summary of the role of special educators. Special education teachers work with general education teachers, counselors/social workers, support staff, administrators, and parents. As a team, they develop Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) specific to each student's needs. IEPs outline the goals and services for each student, such as services with related service providers (i.e., adaptive physical education, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and transportation), counselors/school social workers, speech therapists, and special education teachers. Teachers also meet

with parents, administrators, and counselors to discuss updates and changes to the IEPs. Special education teachers are responsible for the writing of IEPs, staying in compliance with timelines, and ensuring IEPs are being followed.

Special education teachers' duties vary by the setting they work in, students' disabilities, and teachers' specialties. Some special education teachers work in classrooms or resource centers that include only students with disabilities. In these settings, teachers plan, adapt, and present lessons to meet each student's needs. They teach students in small groups or on a one-on-one basis. In inclusive classrooms, special education teachers teach students with disabilities who are in general education classrooms. They work with general education teachers to present information in a manner that students with disabilities can more easily understand. They also assist general education teachers in adapting lessons that will meet the needs of the students with disabilities in their classes (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

Special education teachers work with teacher assistants/paraprofessionals, psychologists, and social workers to provide accommodations for students with disabilities. Special education teachers must work closely with general education teachers to ensure continuity of instruction and expectations in inclusive classrooms, and typically have more direct and frequent contact with families, education specialists, paraprofessionals, and administrators than do general educators (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Managing these relationships so they are productive and collaborative adds an extra layer of complexity to the jobs of special education teachers. Special education teachers directly supervise paraprofessionals who work with students with disabilities. They ensure paraprofessionals are using effective techniques that are most beneficial when working with the students. They coordinate with them to provide

academic support, reteaching of skills, help with organizational/functional goals, behavior management, and following through on behavior intervention plans.

Special education teachers work with students who have a wide variety of intellectual, emotional, physical, and learning disabilities. The students may have academic needs in reading, math, or writing. Others need help developing organizational skills. Some special education teachers work with students who have physical disabilities, such as students who use wheelchairs. Others work with students who have sensory impairments, such as blindness and hard of hearing. Special education teachers also may work with those who have autism spectrum disorders and emotional disorders (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). There is an increasing number of students who have comorbid disabilities, where there are academic concerns in addition to behavior problems as well. In recent years, evidence has been accumulating regarding high levels of comorbidity of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder with several disorders, including mood and anxiety disorders as well as to conduct disorders (Kendall & Owen, 2015).

The descriptions of the special educator's responsibilities provide a framework from which special education teachers can base their practices, but the day-to-day duties required of special education teachers vary by school, district, and state; no single list of job responsibilities can fully encompass all the aspects of an individual special education teacher's actual job.

According to Santoro (2018), teacher burnout may not be an individual issue, but more of a systems problem. An assumption regarding burnout among teachers is that there is a problem with the teacher (individual), and it is their wrongdoing that causes the burnout. When in reality, there are so many layers of teaching, rules, regulations, politics, federal/state policies that script what teachers can and cannot do that it makes teachers feel unsupported and like they cannot

always do what is best for kids. The most committed teachers are at risk of burnout. “Burnout is a reward of overwork” (Sproles, 2018, p. 100).

### **Research Question**

One question guides this literature review: What are the primary factors leading to teacher burnout in special education and how can school districts provide support to address these concerns?

### **Focus of the Paper**

The focus of this paper was reviewing literature and studies related to teacher burnout and the causes associated with the reasons for burnout. Several studies that examined burnout among special education teachers found that teaching, rules, regulations, politics, and federal/state policies that script what teachers can and cannot do makes teachers feel unsupported and like they cannot always do what is best for kids. The following are specific factors that affect special education teachers:

- Failing to meet students’ learning needs due to a scripted curriculum or mandated textbook.
- Following school practices that increasingly focus on academic achievement, even though students arrive at school with profound emotional needs.
- Witnessing students feel worthless as schools are graded, ranked, and closed.
- Being pressured by school leaders to pass students so schools can improve publicly available graduation rates.
- Witnessing school leaders’ rejection of teacher expertise and supporting initiatives in favor of adopting expensive products and services that yield dubious results.

- Observing the increasing use of alternative and fast-track licensure programs that degrade and de-professionalize teaching. (Santoro, 2018, p. 12)

Understanding these factors can be used to assist in removing some of the obstacles that cause special education teacher stress and burnout. This understanding could support the development of improved resources for special education students, special education teachers, and others who have a vested interest in students with disabilities.

For this paper, burnout is defined as stress teachers encounter that overcomes resources and abilities to cope adequately, leading special education teachers to feel exhausted, cynical, or unaccomplished in their work (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leither, 2001). Teacher burnout in special education brings a variety of dynamics associated with the onset of teacher burnout (Pearson, Clavenna-Deane, & Carter, 2015). Pearson et al. identified the components to include a lack of administrative support (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007), excessive or volumes of paperwork (Billingsley, 2004), challenging student behaviors (Hastings & Bham, 2003), position overload, and expectation-reality mismatch, which occurs when expectations of teaching do not align with what the teacher experiences in the classroom (Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014).

### **Importance of the Topic**

The National Center of Education Statistics (2018) reports there are about 6.7 million students, ages 3-21, in the United States receiving special education services. This number had increased from 6.3 million back in 2000. The percentage of students receiving services has remained the same at 13% of the total public school enrollment.

Every year, schools in the United States hire more than 200,000 new teachers, of which approximately 12,000 are special education teachers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

Unfortunately, by the end of the first year, more than 10% or at least 22,000 have moved within or left the profession, while 30% move or leave after 3 years and 45% move or leave after 5 years (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Teacher attrition has held steady over the past 15 years at 6% while special education teacher attrition has remained at 12.5% during the same period. Donne and Lin (2013) found that approximately 50% of special education teachers left their position during the first 5 years. The Minnesota Department of Education ([MDE], 2017) reported that the number of teachers leaving their jobs has increased by 34% since 2008-2009.

According to the Minnesota Teacher Supply and Demand Report 2017, the Expected Level of Difficulty in Hiring Teachers within the Next Five Years chart shows that special education will be an area that will be increasingly more difficult to hire for and is predicted not to be able to hire for all positions. From 2014 to 2016, there has been a 20% decrease in initial licenses issued to new special education teachers. There is also an increase in the amount of non-licensed persons in these positions under a variance or community expert (i.e., temporary) license. Districts are unable to find highly qualified teachers for the jobs and are having to turn to people who do not hold teaching licenses but can be hired based on their educational backgrounds (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017).

The shortage of special education teachers and increased levels of turnover result in an additional strain being placed on general education, creating a dire need for quality teachers. Since the access to a free and appropriate public education is a right guaranteed under federal law, students with special needs are entitled to additional supports and services that allow them to experience education at an equal level as their peers (Fossey, Eckes, & DeMitchell., 2017). The need for licensed special education teachers who can provide the required supports and services to students with disabilities are currently limited. This shortage, as well as high rates of

turnover, indicates that students with disabilities are not receiving their right to a free and appropriate public education (Krainz, 2013).

### **Historical Background**

The mindset of exclusion of students with disabilities from public school education can be traced back in legal history to 1893 when the Massachusetts Supreme Court upheld the expulsion of a student solely due to poor academic ability (Esteves & Rao, 2008). Thirty years later, the Wisconsin Supreme Court denied education to a student with cerebral palsy because he “produced a depressing and nauseating effect upon the teachers and school children” (Esteves & Rao, 2008, p. 1). These were just two examples of the widely accepted beliefs around that time that students with disabilities were not worth educating.

The special education movement can be characterized as having three major phases, exclusion and isolation, access and inclusion, and accountability and empowerment (Dray, 2008). In the past, individuals with disabilities were viewed as second class citizens, and some were institutionalized in less than humane conditions. Often, the states would take custody of the children, disempowering families to have little say or rights regarding their children.

The case of *Brown vs. The Board of Education* paved the way for all students. The primary contention of the *Brown* case that segregation by race was a denial of equal educational opportunity became the gateway for the disability movement because children with disabilities were experiencing total exclusion. There were two important cases in 1972 that began to shift access for students with disabilities. One of the rulings stated that individuals with mental retardation between the ages of 6 and 21 must be provided with free public education in programs comparable to their nondisabled peers (Dray, 2008). The other secured the right to due process and procedural safeguards such as the right to a hearing with representation, a record,

and an impartial officer; the right to appeal; the right to have access to records; and the requirement of written notice during all phases of the process (Dray, 2008). There continued to be a struggle to secure these rights from state to state resulting in the federal government increasing its role in special education through the Education of All Handicapped Children Action (EAHCA) or P.L. 94-142, which was passed into law in 1975, currently known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This act mandated the provision of a free and appropriate public school education for eligible students ages 3–21 (Dray, 2008). However, while the Education for All Handicapped Children Act focused on access to educational programs for students with disabilities, it did not address the degree of educational opportunity (Esteves & Rao, 2008). Eligible students were those identified by a team of professionals as having a disability that adversely affects academic performance and as needing special education and related services. Data collection activities to monitor compliance with IDEA began in 1976.

In the 1980s, there continued to be hesitation on including individuals with varying disabilities. Some of this was due to lack of training and education for teachers on how to provide education in an inclusive classroom and also the lack of resources for inclusion curriculum. At the end of the 1980s, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was introduced in Congress. This momentous act brought the disability community together to advocate further for civil rights (Dray, 2008).

The Americans with Disabilities Act incorporated people-first language which significantly impacted the reauthorization of IDEA in the 1990s. The word ‘handicap’ was replaced with ‘disability,’ people-first language was integrated, and a transition component for students 16 years and older was added (Dray, 2008). In 1997, IDEA was reauthorized, mandating schools to provide services in the least restrictive environment and the shift from a

segregated model began to shift to a more inclusionary model for students. The idea of inclusion would bring the special education teachers into the general education classroom to provide services, including consultation, collaboration, and co-teaching, and assist the general education teacher in developing modifications and accommodations of the curriculum for students with special needs (Dray, 2008). Accountability and empowerment continued with the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, focusing on the use of a standards-based curriculum and scientifically based instruction, ensuring and defining highly-qualified teachers, and mandating the use of the response to instruction model to determine appropriate interventions and referrals to special education (Dray, 2008). In 2015, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, which addressed student achievement by requiring students with disabilities to participate in statewide assessments with identified disabilities, was replaced with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The switchover continues to progress in school districts across the nation. The Every Student Succeeds Act hopes to move away from federal oversights and pave the way for a more supportive approach, giving states and districts flexibility and decision-making powers. The law requires states to develop plans that address standards, assessments, school and district accountability, support for struggling schools, support for educators, and ensuring a well-rounded education for all students that prepares them for career and college (MDE, 2017).

As the trend continues to move more toward including students with disabilities with their general education peers, some fear the lines between general education and special education are being blurred and that we are losing track of the most fundamental piece of special education—individualization (Kavale & Forness, 2000). The complex history of special education significantly impacts the profession today. As history shows the advancement of rights and laws for children with disabilities, school districts around the nation are facing a

significant lack of resources when it comes to supporting these students. There are higher mental health needs in schools today and helping these children comes at a high cost. Access to a free and appropriate public education falls short of fulfilling its promises. The federal law included a commitment to pay 40% of the average per student cost for every special education student (NEA, 2019). The current average per student cost is \$7,552, and the average cost per special education student is an additional \$9,369 per student, or \$16,921 (NEA, 2019). In 2004, the federal government was providing local school districts with just under 20% of its commitment rather than the 40% specified by the law, resulting in a \$10.6 billion shortfall for states and local school districts that continues to grow (NEA, 2019). This shortfall creates a burden on local communities and denies full opportunities to all students, with and without disabilities. The financial dilemma districts are facing directly correlates to special education teacher burnout as they cannot provide enough resources for teachers and adequate supports for students with disabilities. While the laws have brought it a long way over the past 50 years, progress is still needed to meet the needs of all students.

### **Summary**

As discussed in the previously read information, many factors may lead to burnout of special education teachers. Many teachers are faced with overwhelming caseloads, student behaviors, job duties, and a history that has been inconsistent with appropriate supports for students with special needs. In Chapter 2, the studies that will be reviewed will offer information that directly correlates with burnout. There is much focus on the three areas addressed by the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator Survey (MBI-ES). The three areas of burnout according to this survey are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishments. Studies completed show tendencies towards the emotional exhaustion being directly related to the

highest rate of reasons for burnout among special education teachers. Some of the articles provide ideas for ways to combat the feelings and reality of burnout. These suggestions will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This review of literature looked at 12 studies completed over the course of the last 24 years related to special education teachers, burnout, and the primary factors that impact burnout. Many of the studies also included suggestions on what could be done to combat these growing concerns and specifically gave suggestions to school districts on actions to be taken to retain special education teachers.

One of the measures that was used in the majority of the studies reviewed was the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator Survey (MBI-ES). Due to the number of studies it was used in, a description of the inventory is made, and in each of the studies it was used, it will be referenced without the description. The Maslach Burnout Inventory consisted of 22 items comprising three subscales: Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP), and Personal Accomplishment (PA). Participants rated the frequency of the feelings addressed through each of the statements on a 7-point continuum (0 = never, 6 = every day). The EE subscale assessed feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work. The DP subscale measured negative feelings, impersonal response, and an unfeeling toward one's students. The PA subscale measured the contentment and satisfaction one has relative to their accomplishments with their students (Coman et al., 2012). The studies are ordered in chronological order from most recent to oldest completed.

De Stasio, Fiorilli, and Benevene (2017) completed a study looking at burnout in special education teachers at the kindergarten and primary school levels. The purpose of this study was designed to increase understanding of the protective factors for burnout syndrome with a view to informing training programs designed to enhance teachers' resilience and prevent professional dropout. Specifically, the aims of the study were to explore the relationships among

demographic variables, personal resources, and teachers' work well-being. The authors stated there was a lack of information regarding burnout impacting teachers at the kindergarten and primary levels and want to explore teachers at this age group more in-depth (De Stasio et al., 2017). The researchers hypothesized that teachers' happiness at school and job satisfaction would incrementally predict a significant proportion of variance in all dimensions of burnout, even after controlling for the effect of demographic factors and personal resources. They also expected that teachers coming from different school contexts (kindergarten vs. primary school) might express different levels of burnout (De Stasio et al., 2017).

The research was conducted with special education teachers at preschools in Italy. A cross-sectional survey-based study with a sample of 194 kindergarten and primary school teachers was conducted. The sample was composed of 194 full-time in-service special education teachers (96.4 female) from Rome, Italy. Ages ranged from 26 to 52. In terms of marital status, 59.5% were married, 33.0% were single, 7.0 % were separated/divorced, and 5.5% were widowed. Sixty-nine percent of the participants had children. Length of teaching experience ranged from 1 to 30 years. With regard to the level of the school, 58.2% of participants taught in primary schools (for children aged 6–11 years), and 41.8% in kindergartens (for children aged 3–5 years) (De Stasio et al., 2017).

The measures used for the study were a series of rating scales, inventories, and surveys that look at teacher happiness and feelings toward their job. The following list gives a short description of each measure used:

- Copenhagen Burnout Inventory: comprised 19 items evaluating three subdimensions of burnout. The first subscale assessed personal burnout and comprised six items concerning the physical and psychological fatigue, and

overall exhaustion experienced by an individual. The second subscale, entitled work-related burnout, was made up of seven items concerning the physical and psychological fatigue experienced by respondents due to their teaching work. Finally, the third subscale termed client-related burnout was composed of six items evaluating the physical and psychological fatigue experienced by people in relation to their work with students. All items were rated on a 5-point scale with: 1 = almost never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = often; 5 = always.

- **Teacher Self-Efficacy:** Used to evaluate self-efficacy based on five components, assessing mastery expectations based on self-perceived personal competence. Each statement referred to one of the five core components of teacher's self-efficacy: management of difficult students; use of new technology; coping with educational challenges; collaboration with colleagues; meeting teaching objectives and targets. Responses were given on a 5-point scale ranging from not at all certain (1) to absolutely certain (5).
- **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES):** comprised 10 statements and is commonly adopted as an empirical measure of global self-esteem. The scale used a 4-point Likert-like scale response format (from: absolutely disagree to absolutely agree). Five items were positively worded and five negatively worded. Negatively worded items were reverse scored.
- **Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS):** measured respondents' perceived satisfaction with their job situation. It comprised 36 items divided into nine subscales, namely: pay, promotion, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards (satisfaction with rewards given for good performance), operating procedures (satisfaction with

rules and procedures), co-workers, nature of work (satisfaction with one's type of work), and communication (satisfaction with communication within the organization). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = almost never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = often; 5 = always.

- **Teacher's Happiness at School:** a scale designed primarily to assess teachers' happiness at school. The questionnaire comprised 31 items and offered a simple response format with 18 positive items and 12 negative items (e.g., "I felt relaxed," or "I wanted to give up"). Participants were asked to rate their thoughts and feelings over the past week at school. Each response was scored from 1 to 4, with four indicating a high level of happiness. The negative items were reverse scored to yield a total happiness score. The composite score was computed by averaging all the items.
- **Data Analyses:** Bivariate correlations between the study variables were assessed by calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient, with a number of significant correlations identified. To gain further understanding of the relationships between the independent and dependent variables, multiple regressions were used. Three separate multiple regression analyses were conducted by regressing each of the dimensions of burnout in turn onto the correlated independent variables. These multiple regressions were hierarchical, with sociodemographic variables (namely age, seniority, marital status, and children) entered first, followed by personal resources (namely self-efficacy and self-esteem), and finally by work well-being (namely teacher happiness, job satisfaction, and school). (De Stasio et al., 2017, pp. 476-477)

The results of the student found that in the kindergarten teachers subsample, personal burnout was significantly correlated with teacher's happiness at school ( $r = -.63$ ), with self-esteem ( $r = -.44$ ) and job satisfaction ( $r = -.41$ ). Work-related burnout was significantly correlated with teachers' happiness at school ( $r = -.56$ ) and job satisfaction ( $r = -.52$ ). The third dimension of burnout, or student-related burnout, was significantly correlated with a large number of variables, most notably teacher happiness at school ( $r = -.48$ ) and self-esteem ( $r = -.41$ ). In the primary school teachers' subsample, personal burnout was significantly correlated with several variables, especially the teacher's happiness at school ( $r = -.62$ ) and self-esteem ( $r = -.47$ ). Working burnout was significantly correlated with personal resources and teachers' work well-being, most notably teachers' happiness at school ( $r = -.59$ ), self-esteem ( $r = -.46$ ), and job satisfaction ( $r = -.40$ ). The third dimension of burnout, or student-related burnout, was also significantly correlated with a large number of variables, most notably teacher happiness at school ( $r = -.56$ ), self-esteem ( $r = -.46$ ), and job satisfaction ( $r = -.40$ ) (De Stasio et al., 2017).

The results confirmed what previous research evidenced as explored by the authors. Teachers' personal resources, happiness at school, and job satisfaction were inversely correlated to all levels of burnout in both school contexts. Furthermore, the results of the study showed that both teachers' happiness at school and their job satisfaction incrementally predicted variance in the levels of burnout, even when controlling for the effect of socio-demographic factors and personal resources. Also, teachers coming from different school contexts (kindergarten vs. primary school) did not express a different level of burnout (De Stasio et al., 2017).

Limitations of the study as stated by De Stasio et al. (2017), included the participants as only being from central Italy, and not representative of the entire Italian teacher population. The

authors also stated that teachers from other countries should be included in future research to explore whether and to what extent the present findings also pertain to other educational systems, especially those in which children with special needs were not included in mainstream classes. The second limitation found in this study was the use of the Teacher Happiness Scale. This was adapted from another inventory for the purpose of this study and was not a validated instrument (De Stasio et al.,2017).

Malik (2017) completed a study focusing on the effect of five big personality traits on burnout among special education staff. The main focus of this study was to discover the effect of the five main personality traits on job burnout among special education employees. The personality traits were openness, extroversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, and conscientiousness. The following points were hypothesized by Malik (2017):

- Certain personality traits lead to job burnout among special education employees
- A significant difference in score of big five personality traits among special education employees
- A major difference in score of burnout among special education employees.
- Males are more extroverted, agreeable and open to experiences than women
- Special education employees experienced high burnout in their institutes, especially female employees.
- Contract employees have higher levels of burnout than regular employees
- Job status and responsibilities are strongly related to burnout experience

The participants in this study consisted of N=193 out of 234 employees from 32 schools and with 98 being female and 95 being male teachers. The mean age for males was 34, while the mean age for females was 26. The purposive convenience sampling method was used to select

the participants. Participants filled out demographic information and were given two additional scales for determining personality traits. The two measures that were used were the Big Five Personality Traits Inventory, developed by Finch and Rhodes (1999), to assess personality types and the Maslach Burnout Inventory to assess the feelings related to burnout.

The results of this study showed that neuroticism led to burnout more significantly. The other traits were listed in order as leading toward burnout: conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experience, and extroversion. There were no significant score differences in the five big traits of personality. The study also indicated a high significance of burnout among special education teachers due to the varying needs of the special education students. The study found that female teachers were more extroverted, agreeable, open to experiences and conscientious than male teachers, rejecting the hypothesis proposed by the researcher. Another result found female teachers experienced a higher level of depersonalization and lower personal accomplishment than male teachers. This study also demonstrated that teachers experienced lower burnout rates than principals, psychologists, and school social workers (Malik, 2017).

The limitation discussed for this study was the sample size not being representative of a larger population. Also, the time allotted for the study was limited. The researcher also stated that participants' answers may have been incorrect when it came to psychological aspects of the surveys and scales. There were many other psychological aspects that could impact if a person would experience burnout or not, and not all were included in this study (Malik, 2017).

Williams and Dikes (2015) completed a study discussing the implications of demographic variables relating to burnout among special education teachers. The focus of this study was to explore special education teacher emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment as related to ten demographic variables. There were 10 questions

posed in this study as related to the ten demographic variables. The questions were: Do special education teachers' perceptions of burnout differ substantially with respect to (1) gender, (2) age, (3) marital status, (4) degree attainment, (5) years of teaching experience, (6) caseload number, (7) grade level taught, (8) number of students taught daily, (9) additional hours spent completing paperwork, and (10) teaching assignment?

The measures used in this study were the third edition of the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey and a demographic questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire was a forced choice format addressing each of the 10 demographic variables included in the study as related to burnout. The participants were from the Alabama public school system. Surveys were sent to 215 special education teachers, with a sample size of 65 participants. Participation was on a voluntary basis and the packets were collected for a three-week period (Williams & Dikes, 2015).

The results of the study were divided into 10 demographic variables and shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Results Related to Demographic Variables (Williams & Dikes, 2015)*

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES	RESULTS
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Females (49%) were more prone to high EE than males (33%).</li> <li>● Males (33%) indicated a high DP as compared to females (12%).</li> <li>● Female subgroup indicated low DP levels (76%)</li> <li>● Both males and females reported similar numbers with regard to positive perceptions of workplace PA.</li> </ul>
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teachers 21-31 years old had the greatest percentage of low EE (57%)</li> <li>● Teachers 42-51 years old had the greatest percentage of high EE (59%) as well as the greatest percentage of high DP (23%).</li> <li>● Teachers 52-61 years old reported the greatest percentage of low DP (91%).</li> </ul>

Table 1 (continued)

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES	RESULTS
Marital Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>t</i>-test analysis implies that there was no statistically significant difference among the sample regarding marital status and perceptions of EE [<math>t(63) = .721, /? = .474</math>].</li> <li>● No statistically significant difference was calculated for the DP subscale [<math>t(63) = .863, /? = .391</math>].</li> <li>● No statistically significant difference was found regarding marital status related to PA among the participants [<math>t(63) = 1.111, p = .244</math>].</li> </ul>
Degree Attainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Specialist degree-high emotional exhaustion (75%).</li> <li>● Master's degree- the greatest number of individuals with a high sense of PA (64%) compared to those holding Specialist degrees (25%).</li> </ul>
Years of Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Participants with &gt; 22 years of teaching experience were feeling the greatest amount of high EE (50%)</li> <li>● Teachers with 5-10 years of experience reported the greatest percentage of low EE (36%)</li> <li>● Teachers with 1-4 years teaching experience indicated 100% low DP while those with 5-10 years teaching experience reported the largest percentage for high DP (23%).</li> <li>● All had a sense of PA</li> </ul>
Caseload Number	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teachers with 11-15 case files had the greatest number with low EE (33%).</li> <li>● Teachers with a caseload of &gt; 26 indicate the greatest percentage of high EE (67%)</li> <li>● All had a high sense of PA</li> </ul>
Grade level taught	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Participants teaching prekindergarten through third-grade students reported the greatest percentage of low EE (50%) and low DP (90%), coupled with the highest percentage of perceived high PA (90%).</li> <li>● Participants who indicated teaching at the middle school level (grades 6-8) ranked highest for high EE (62%) and lowest in terms of perceived PA (34%).</li> <li>● High school teachers (grades 9-12) reported the greatest percentage of high DP (22%).</li> </ul>
Number of students taught daily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Participants teaching 21-30 students daily indicated the greatest percentage of high EE (66%)</li> <li>● Participants teaching &gt;31 students daily obtained the greatest percentage of high DP scores (25%).</li> <li>● Participants teaching 11-20 students daily indicated the greatest percentage of low DP (83%).</li> <li>● Participants teaching 1-10 students daily reported the greatest percentage of low EE (35%), the second greatest percentage for low DP (70%), and 53% for a strong sense of PA.</li> </ul>
Additional hours spent completing paperwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Participants who spent 4-6 hours on paperwork had the greatest percentage of high EE (46%)</li> <li>● Participants who spent 7-10 hours on paperwork had the second greatest EE percentage (62%). This group also indicated the greatest number of respondents who were experiencing high DP (21%) as well as the greatest number experiencing a feeling of low PA (31%).</li> <li>● Participants who 1-3 hours weekly completing paperwork had the greatest number scoring low for EE (40%) and low for DP (84%). This group had the second largest amount of individuals with high PA (68%).</li> </ul>

Table 1 (continued)

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES	RESULTS
Teaching assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Participants teaching a combination of inclusion and resource reported the greatest percentage of high EE (57%).</li> <li>● Teachers who reported teaching resource classes indicated 100% of respondents experiencing low DP.</li> <li>● Teachers in inclusion-only settings had the greatest percentage of high DP scores (40%).</li> <li>● Participants teaching a self-contained, multi-disabled class indicated having the greatest percentage of low EE (67%). This group had the greatest percentage of low DP (67%), and the second greatest percentage for strong PA (67%).</li> </ul>

In summary, male teachers had a higher susceptibility toward depersonalization and may benefit from supportive networks. Female teachers who were more prone toward exhaustion may benefit from wellness programs and learn/practice strategies for reducing stress. Older teachers were more likely to experience burnout. Special education teachers who were single were also more prone to burnout. Results also supported that teachers with a higher level of education may lean towards burnout. Also, the more years a teacher was teaching, the higher the chances of burnout. Caseload numbers were also found to be positively associated with burnout, with findings supporting that 15 or fewer students were a manageable number. Both middle and high school teachers were more likely to experience stress as well as teachers with a higher student to teacher ratios. In addition, the more hours teachers spend on paperwork in addition to their work day, the higher levels of burnout are experienced. Special education teachers in both inclusion and resource settings experienced higher levels of stress (Williams & Dikes, 2015).

Irvin, Hume, Boyd, McBee, and Odom, (2013) completed a study looking at child and classroom characteristics associated with adult language provided to preschoolers with Autism. An ample, supportive language environment correlates with gains in the social and communication competencies typically developing children need for success in the preschool classroom and beyond. Therefore, a strong language environment may be even more beneficial

for preschoolers with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Irvin et al., 2013). The overall focus of this study was to examine the association between the Language Environment Analysis (LENA) variable of adult word count (AWC) and the characteristics of classrooms and preschoolers with ASD. The specific research questions were: (1) how does the number of adult words directed at children with ASD vary by severity of children's symptoms; and (2) what is the association between certain characteristics of classrooms (i.e., teacher burnout, adult to child ratio and adult-student with ASD ratio) and AWC? (Irvin et. al, 2013).

Sixty-seven children, ages 3–5, were included in this study. All participating children were served in self-contained classrooms in a southeastern school district in the United States. Of the 67 participants, 79% were male ( $n = 54$ ) and 7% ( $n = 5$ ) were Asian, 17% Black ( $n = 12$ ), and 73% White ( $n = 50$ ). A total of 21 high-quality preschool classrooms were included in the study. All classrooms had to meet an “average” rating (score of 3 out of 5) on four subscales of the Professional Development in Autism Program Assessment during an initial classroom visit. These subscales included classroom structure, classroom environment, curriculum and instruction, and positive instructional climate. Classroom teachers were female and White ( $n = 21$ ) and certified to teach in preschool classrooms. Twelve of the teachers had bachelor's degrees and nine teachers had master's degrees. The mean teaching experience for the sample was 11.02 years ( $SD = 8.67$ ) (Irvin et. al, 2013).

One of the measures used in this study was the LENA System. The LENA yields three language-related variables: Adult Word Count (AWC), Child Vocalizations (CV), and Conversational Turns (CT). Another measure looked at the child characteristics, specifically the severity and autistic symptoms measures. A series of assessments and rating scales were used to gather data about the children and included the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule

(ADOS), Childhood Autism Rating Scale (CARS), Social Responsiveness Scale (SRS), and the Repetitive Behavior Scale-Revised (RBS-R). Irvin et al. (2013) also looked at the behavior and developmental child characteristics using the Mullen Scales of Early Learning, Caregiver-Teacher Rating Form (C-TRF), and Preschool Language Scale (PLS-4). The overall classroom features were measured with the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES) and Professional Development in Autism Program Assessment (PDA).

Irvin et al. (2013) used correlations and OLS regression to examine the relationships between AWC and teacher burnout, adult to child ratio (i.e., the total number of children in the classroom relative to adults) and adult to student with ASD ratio. There were significant negative correlations between the AWC LENA variable and classrooms features, using a cut-off of  $p = 0.05$ . Specifically, the AWC rates were negatively correlated with teacher burnout ( $r = 0.28$ ) and adult to student with ASD ratio ( $r = 0.39$ ). In other words, increased levels of teacher burnout (MBI-ES measure) and lower adult to student with ASD ratios were associated with children with this disorder receiving fewer words from adults (Irvin et al., 2013).

Results indicated that adult word count was positively associated with children's cognitive ability and negatively associated teacher burnout and adult to student with ASD ratio. Lower adult to children with ASD ratio (i.e., fewer adults relative to students with ASD) resulted in preschoolers receiving less adult language. The researchers' findings indicated that teachers who were experiencing burnout provided children with ASD with fewer words. They stated it was unknown if the teacher was first experiencing burnout, then demonstrating withdrawal, indicated by reduced language and verbal interaction, or if the difficulty in verbally interacting with students who may often be unresponsive then contributed to burnout and a reduction of words (Irvin et al., 2013).

Some of the limitations stated were the adult word count provided only a count of adult verbalizations, so information on the type or quality of verbalization was not captured. Also, since these were all high-quality self-contained classrooms, generalizations to inclusive and/or lower quality classrooms serving preschoolers with ASD could not be made. The final limitation stated the LENA data came from one time period so whether the adult language was similar at other times during the school year was unknown (Irvin et al, 2013).

A study looking at the commitment to classroom model philosophy and burnout symptoms among high fidelity teachers for preschoolers with Autism was completed by Coman et al. (2012). Burnout was prevalent and of primary concern within the field of special education. Researchers had determined that levels of burnout among special educators were higher relative to teachers in general education (Boe, Bobbit, Cook, Whitener, & Weber, 1997). The focus of this study was to investigate dimensions of teacher burnout and teacher commitment in educators implementing three different preschool programs at high levels of fidelity: Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH); Learning Experiences and Alternative Program for Preschoolers and Their Parents (LEAP); and a non-ASD specific, but high-quality special education program (HQSEP) (Coman et al., 2012). Teacher burnout was defined for the study as a unique stress syndrome that results from coping unsuccessfully with chronic stress in the classroom (Coman et al., 2012).

The exploration of the levels of burnout experienced by these three groups of high-fidelity teachers was conducted. Analyses were conducted to assess whether teacher commitment to an individual's respective treatment model was associated with levels of experienced burnout during the school year. From this, Coman et al. (2012) hypothesized a TEACCH teacher's level of commitment to the theoretical underpinnings of TEACCH, a LEAP

teacher's level of commitment to the theoretical underpinnings of LEAP, and the HQSEP teachers' overall commitment to both the TEACCH and LEAP tenets would be: (1) negatively associated with the Emotional Exhaustion (EE) domain of burnout; (2) negatively associated with the Depersonalization (DP) domain; and (3) positively associated with the feelings of Personal Accomplishment (PA) domain.

According to Coman et al. (2012), the inclusion criteria for all participants included the following: (a) teachers had to be working within a public school system, (b) had to be certified in special education, and (c) had to be screened-in based on an acceptable level of fidelity of implementation of their respective treatment models. Three groups (TEACCH, LEAP, and HQSEP) of preschool teachers of students with ASD were screened and then recruited as part of the larger study. All teachers were identified based on the classroom model they were implemented within a public school district. A total of 53 teachers were recruited for participation including 17 TEACCH, 15 LEAP, and 21 HQSEP. This included 14 teachers (25.5%) from North Carolina, 14 (25.5 %) from Colorado, 16 (29.1 %) from Florida, and 9 (16.4%) from Minnesota (Coman et al., 2012).

The measures used in this study included a questionnaire, inventory and demographics survey. The Autism Treatment Philosophy Questionnaire-Adapted (ATPQ-A) was used to assess participants' commitment to TEACCH and LEAP model philosophy. The questionnaire was 27 items rated on a 6-point continuum (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree) relative to how well that item fits their commitment to that teaching approach. The Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES) was administered to assess levels of burnout (Maslach et al., 1996). The final measure was a demographic survey participants completed including the following: gender, ethnicity, race, total number of years teaching, total number of years teaching

children with ASD, types of formal training, highest degree earned, classroom type, class size (e.g., number of students with ASD and DD; number of TD students), number of full-time classroom staff, length of instructional day, duration/time of school day, and classroom model (Coman et al., 2012).

Results of the one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) indicated that there were no significant (n.s.) differences between the three groups on the Emotional Exhaustion subscale,  $F(2, 50) = 1.02$ ,  $p = n.s.$ , the Depersonalization subscale,  $F(2, 50) = 1.28$ ,  $p = n.s.$ , or the Personal Accomplishment subscale,  $F(2, 50) = 1.26$ ,  $p = n.s.$  (Coman et al., 2012).

Coman et al. (2012) examined the levels of burnout experienced by three groups of high-fidelity teachers, including an analysis of group differences on the levels of the burnout domains (i.e., EE, DP, and PA). The results indicated that the groups did not differ on their experienced levels of burnout across the year. This finding suggested that the level of experienced burnout across the year did not differ among the three groups. These high-fidelity teachers reported substantially lower levels of Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization and higher levels of Personal Accomplishment. The researchers noted that other studies investigating teachers working within special education had reported substantially higher levels of experienced burnout. It was possible teachers (in other studies) may be more at risk for experiencing higher levels of burnout due to the fact that they were not using helpful philosophies, such as TEACCH or LEAP, or they had not received extensive training in such classroom approaches. It was made clear that the teachers in this study were very experienced, highly motivated, and well trained. In addition, the teachers within this study were also implementing their respective programs at high levels (i.e., “above average”) of fidelity (Coman et al., 2012). “It is plausible that there was no relationship between commitment and burnout found here because high fidelity teachers are

simply less ‘burned out’ due to their high levels of training and commitment” (Coman et al., 2012, p. 357).

There were several limitations to this study. First, the discriminant validity of the TEACCH subscale of the ATPQ-A was not supported, thus, a re-evaluation of the TEACCH items and psychometrics is needed. In addition, the generalizability of the results was unknown due to the fact that the sample of preschool teachers were implementing three specific programs at high levels of fidelity. Future investigations should be geared toward longitudinal studies comprising assessments of commitment, burnout, fidelity, and direct measures of teacher attrition. Also, future research should include randomly sampled groups of teachers, involving teachers that are implementing their programs at both high and low levels of fidelity and from varying theoretical orientations (Coman et al., 2012).

Ruble, Usher, and McGrew (2011) conducted a preliminary investigation of the sources of self-efficacy among teachers of students with Autism. Teacher self-efficacy was related to the beliefs teachers held regarding their ability to bring about wanted instructional outcomes and may be beneficial for understanding and addressing critical issues such as teacher attrition and teacher use of research-supported practices (Ruble et al., 2011). Understanding the potential sources of self-efficacy for teachers of students with disabilities, such as autism, could help identify factors to target in professional development activities and ongoing teacher support initiatives. Bandura (1997) proposed the following four sources of self-efficacy: (1) mastery experience, (2) vicarious experience, (3) social persuasions, and (4) physiological and affective states. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between three out of four factors hypothesized to be related to self-efficacy and the efficacy beliefs reported by teachers of students with autism.

Ruble et al. (2011) hypothesized that a sense of mastery, as measured by the number of years teaching, would be positively correlated with self-efficacy. It was expected that social persuasions, as measured by perceived principal leadership and support, would directly correlate with self-efficacy. Lastly, it was expected that physiological and affective sources, as measured by self-reported levels of burnout, would be negatively associated with self-efficacy.

Teachers of students with autism were recruited from one midwestern and one southern state. There were 35 teachers selected for the study. All were case managers for at least one child with autism (children's ages ranged from 3 to 9 years,  $M = 6.1$ ,  $SD = 1.7$ ). According to Ruble et al. (2011), 94% of the teachers were female ( $n = 33$ ) and reported that they had formal autism training such as coursework, supervised field work, workshops, and in-services. Thirteen teachers held a bachelor's degree (37.1%) and 19 (51.4%) had a master's degree (three responses were missing). All teachers were certified, and one held an alternative certificate. A total of 34% of the teachers reported that in addition to teaching, they also had skills for assessing students with autism. Another 25% of teachers reported that they had served as a consultant or trainer to other teachers. Two of the school systems (represented by 15 teachers) were located in large cities and 14 (represented by 20 teachers) were located in small cities or in rural areas (Ruble et al., 2011).

The measures that were used in this study were filled out by the participants. The first one was the Teacher Interpersonal Self-Efficacy Scale (TISES). This scale consisted of 24 self-report measures that tapped into teachers' perceptions of their abilities to maintain classroom management, elicit support from colleagues, and elicit support from the principal. Items were measured with a 6-point response scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The second measure that was used was a background form that specifically asked about years of

teaching experience (directly relating to the mastery experience category). Ruble et al. (2011) also used the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) assessed teachers' perceptions of support from school leaders and was used as a proxy for social persuasions. This measure had a 5-point response scale and short answer responses. The final measure used was the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), which was used to assess physiological and affective states (Ruble et al., 2011).

Relating to the three hypotheses made by the researchers, the results indicated that the number of years of teaching was not associated with any of the subscales representing self-efficacy. In the area of social persuasions, as measured by MLQ, there was no association with any of the sub-scales of self-efficacy. The third hypothesis stated physiological and effective sources, as measured by self-reported levels of burnout, would be negatively associated with self-efficacy (Ruble et al., 2011). Examination of the correlations supported this hypothesis and showed a significant correlation between self-efficacy for classroom management and all three subscales of the MBI representing teacher burnout (i.e., personal accomplishments, emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization). The other two subscales of the TISES, self-efficacy for obtaining principal support and colleague support, were not associated with any of the physiological measures represented by the MBI (Ruble et al., 2011).

As the results showed, significant associations were observed between physiological/affective states and self-efficacy, but no associations were observed for the other sources. Teachers who reported more confidence in their classroom management abilities reported lower levels of burnout. The area of burnout was significant for only one area out of the three self-efficacy subscales, more relating to the classroom management. These findings suggested that

burnout was most closely related to what happened in the classroom and by teachers' beliefs in their ability to handle it (Ruble et al., 2011)

The first limitation of this study completed by Ruble et al. (2011) was the measure used for evaluating self-efficacy. The researchers felt that self-efficacy was a task-specific judgment, and the tasks reflected in the measure used may not appropriately represent instructional tasks most important for teachers of students with autism. The second limitation was that these results were based on concurrent correlations. More research would be needed to clarify the relationships between these variables. A final limitation was the sample size of the participants being small, increasing the possibility of a Type II error (Ruble, et al., 2011)

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) completed a study relating to teacher self-efficacy and teacher burnout. The purpose of this study was 2-part. The first part was to test the factor structure of a recently developed Norwegian scale for measuring teacher self-efficacy and the second part was to explore relations between teachers' perception of the school context, teacher self-efficacy, collective teacher efficacy, teacher burnout, teacher job satisfaction, and teachers' beliefs that factors external to teaching puts limitations to what they can accomplish (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

Participants consisted of 2,249 Norwegian teachers in from 113 elementary and middle schools who taught grades 1-10. Selection of the participants was fairly random with a system ensuring variety. Norway was divided into five geographical regions. In each region between 20 and 25 schools were drawn from one large city, one smaller town and two rural areas by a stratified random procedure (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). The sample consisted of 68% females. The age of the teachers ranged from 24-69 years old. The average number of years in the teaching profession was 16. The schools varied with respect to size from schools with five

teachers to schools with 60 teachers. The average number of students in the schools was 352. About half of the teachers in the sample (45%) worked in elementary schools (grade 1-7), whereas 37% worked in middle schools (grade 8-10) and 18% in combined elementary schools and middle schools. Forty-five percent of the teachers worked in schools with traditional classes of students, whereas, 47% worked in schools where a team of teachers shared responsibility for all students at a given grade level (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

The measures used in this study were as follows:

- Norwegian Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (NTSES): the multi-dimensional 24-item scale that looked at instruction, adapting education to individual students' needs, motivating students, keeping discipline, cooperating with colleagues and parents, and coping with changes and challenges.
- Perceived collective teacher efficacy: 7-item scale focused on instruction, motivation, controlling student behavior, addressing students' needs, and creating a safe environment.
- External Control: a 5-item scale stating limitations as what can be achieved through education concerning students' learning, achievement, motivation, or behavior. The limitations were described as students' abilities or home environment.
- Maslach Burnout Inventory Educators Survey (MBI-ES): rated statements indicating that their work makes them feel emotionally drained or exhausted (emotional exhaustion) and that they do not care about some students (depersonalization). The participants used a modified scale based on previous

feedback from a 2007 study. Responses were given on a 6-point scale from “False” (1) to “True” (6).

- Teacher Job Satisfaction: measured on a 5-point scale ranging from “All the time” to “Never.”
- Perceived school context: five dimensions of teachers' perception of the school context:
  - discipline problems and disrupted student behavior (discipline),
  - teachers' feeling of having a heavy workload, having to prepare for teaching in the evenings and weekends, and having a hectic school-day with little time for rest and recovery (time pressure),
  - teachers' experience of being trusted by the parents, of communicating well with parents, and that cooperation with parents were easy and adaptive (parents),
  - teachers' feeling of having autonomy regarding the choice of teaching methods, educational strategies and content within the limit set by the national curriculum (autonomy), and teachers' feeling of having cognitive and emotional support from the school leadership, that they could ask the school leadership for advice, and that their relation to the school leadership was one of mutual trust and respect (supervisory support). (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010, pp. 1061-1062)

The data were analyzed by means of structural equation modeling using the AMOS 7 program. The relation between teacher self-efficacy and teacher burnout were explored by means of a confirmatory factor analysis. The researchers tested a model specifying three

correlated latent variables; a second order teacher self-efficacy variable, and two primary burnout variables; emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Teacher self-efficacy correlated negatively with both emotional exhaustion (.29) and depersonalization (.41). The two dimensions of teacher burnout were positively, but weakly correlated (.23). Teacher self-efficacy, collective efficacy and two dimensions of burnout were differently related both to school context variables and to teacher job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

Overall, parent-teacher relationships were the strongest predictor of both teacher self-efficacy and the depersonalization dimension of burnout, whereas time pressure was the strongest predictor of emotional exhaustion. Teachers' job satisfaction was strongly related to emotional exhaustion and weakly, but directly related to self-efficacy, depersonalization, autonomy, and time pressure. In addition, all five school context variables in this study were indirectly related to job satisfaction, through self-efficacy and burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

The two limitations discussed by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) were that only five dimensions of the school context were measured. The other limitation was that the Norwegian Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale had not been tested in other environments other than in that region.

Another study looking at the commitment to philosophy, teacher efficacy, and burnout among teachers of students with autism was conducted by Jennett, Harris, and Mesibov (2003). In this study, it was proposed that commitments to the philosophy of either Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) or Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) for teaching students with autism support avoiding burnout. More so, the philosophy underlying each teaching approach for students with autism provides the teacher with the tools to cope with the stressors of being a special education teacher (Jennett

et al., 2003). It was hypothesized that teachers with a greater commitment to the philosophy underlying their teaching approach would have a greater sense of efficacy in teaching and would, therefore, experience less burnout than teachers with less commitment to the philosophy (Jennett et al., 2003).

Two groups of lead classroom teachers were solicited for participation in this study: an ABA group and a TEACCH group. For the ABA teacher groups, a total of 116 survey packets were reported to be distributed to the lead teachers in these programs, and 39 (34%) were returned. These teachers were from the New Jersey education system. The TEACCH teachers were from North Carolina and a total of 47 survey packets were returned (26 from the public schools and 21 from the advanced training), for a 55% return rate (43% and 84%, respectively) (Jennett et al., 2003). Participants completed the Autism Treatment Philosophy Questionnaire, developed by the authors to differentiate between the philosophy of the approaches; Teacher Efficacy Scale, and Maslach Burnout Inventory (Jennett et al., 2003).

Teachers who identified themselves as having an ABA teaching orientation ( $M = 31.5$ ) had a significantly higher ABA score than teachers who identified with a TEACCH orientation [ $M = 26.6$ ,  $t(59) = 4.74$ ,  $p < .001$ ] (Jennett et al., 2003). Similarly, teachers who identified themselves as having a TEACCH orientation ( $M = 29.7$ ) had a significantly higher TEACCH score than teachers who identified with an ABA orientation [ $M = 26.6$ ,  $t(60) = -3.55$ ,  $p = .001$ ]. On the shared dimension, teachers in the ABA group ( $M = 56.2$ ) had significantly higher scores than teachers in the TEACCH group [ $M = 54.0$ ,  $t(60) = 2.69$ ,  $p < .01$ ] (Jennett et al., 2003).

The ABA and TEACCH groups were compared for differences in the level of teaching efficacy and burnout between the groups. To compare the groups on sense of efficacy, two

t-tests were conducted, one for the personal efficacy score and one for the general efficacy score. The groups differed neither on their level of personal efficacy [ $t(62) = .07$ , n.s.] nor on their level of general efficacy [ $t(62) = .03$ , n.s.] (Jennett et al., 2003). Three additional t-tests were used to compare the two groups on the three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. There was no significant difference between the groups on their emotional exhaustion score [ $t(61) = .06$ , n.s.], depersonalization score [ $t(60) = -.81$ , n.s.], or their personal accomplishment score [ $t(61) = .23$ , n.s.] (Jennett et al., 2003).

Results from the study demonstrated a significant difference in philosophical commitment between the groups, but no differences in teaching efficacy or burnout. The relationship between commitment to one's teaching approach and certain dimensions of teaching efficacy and burnout was found to be significant (Jennett et al., 2003). Teachers were more satisfied with the work they were doing when they were using strategies that increased their feelings of personal accomplishment and tended to move away from the clinically significant range of experienced burnout. In looking at the depersonalization dimension of burnout, commitment to philosophy was not significantly correlated for either group. Both groups reported very low depersonalization and fell within the healthy range of experienced burnout caused by depersonalization. The emotional exhaustion dimension results were more mixed. Commitment to the underlying philosophy was significantly negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion in the TEACCH group, but not the ABA group (Jennett et al., 2003).

Overall, the findings of this study indicated that, for teachers of students with autism, a commitment to a theoretical orientation is related to higher professional self-efficacy and lower experienced burnout. The limitations mentioned by Jennett et al. (2003) included that a tool was developed to screen teachers identifying with either ABA or TEACCH for their level of

commitment to the underlying philosophy of their teaching approach, posing validity issues. Another limitation was that this study was done completely anonymously, requiring teachers to complete and return surveys with no identifying information. It was possible that these samples were biased in favor of higher efficacy and less burnout (Jennett et al., 2003).

Nichols and Sosnowsky (2002) completed a study looking at burnout among special education teachers in self-contained cross-categorical classrooms. This study was completed in Michigan at the intermediate/middle school level, examining special education teacher burnout and the impact of three separate classroom conditions (a) the number of heterogeneous student disability categories, (b) caseload size, and (c) the proportion of students with emotional/behavioral disorders to the total class composition in self-contained classrooms (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002). The research questions posed by Nichols and Sosnowsky were:

1. Will the number of heterogeneous student disabilities in self-contained classrooms affect special education teacher burnout?
2. Will the current number of students per caseload affect special education teacher burnout?
3. Will the proportion of emotionally impaired students to the total class composition in self-contained classrooms affect special education teacher burnout?

The participants for the study were recruited from the state database and included 77 teachers working students with learning disabilities, assigned to self-contained classrooms at the intermediate/middle school levels. The average age of the participants was 41 years old, the average years of teaching experience was 9.5 years. Eighty-seven percent of the subjects held full certification approval while less than three percent held emergency approval. Subjects represented 39 of 57 regions in the state. Thirty-two percent of the subjects were employed in

districts having less than 2,000 students, 57% in districts ranging from 2,000-9,999 students, and 11% in districts ranging in size from 10,000 to more than 15,000 (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002).

The two measures used in this study were the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES) and the Student Diversity and Organizational Satisfaction Survey (SDOSS). Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1996) conceptualized burnout as a continuous variable ranging from low to average to high degrees of experienced feelings. Degrees of burnout were expressed as;

- high degree: high scores on the EE and DP subscales; low scores on the PA scale
- moderate degree: average scores on all three subscales
- low degree: low scores on the EE and DP subscales; high scores on the PA scale

(Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002, p. 76).

The Student Diversity and Organizational Satisfaction Survey (SDOSS) was the second measure that was used. The first part collected data based on (a) the current number of students per caseload, (b) the reported number of disability categories represented within a self-contained class, (c) the reported number of students per disability category, and (d) the total number of years teaching special education. The second part measured degrees of satisfaction regarding career selection and specific organizational factors researched and reported to influence special educator stress, burnout, and/or attrition. These organizational factors included

(a) administrative support-special education, (b) administrative support-building principal, (c) decision-making, (d) professional development opportunities, (e) student caseload, (f) role conflict, (g) social support networks, (h) university preparation, and (i) time to individualize instruction. A 5- point Likert scale measured responses from *very satisfied* (1) to *not at all satisfied* (5) (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002).

The results of the study showed number of heterogeneous disability categories did not statistically impact degrees of EE (F-ratio = 1.00,  $p < .32$ ), DP (F-ratio = .03,  $p < .86$ ) or PA (F-ratio = .03,  $p < .86$ ) for special education teachers in self-contained classrooms, while simultaneously accounting for background and organizational variables (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002). For the second research question, results revealed that caseload size did not statistically impact EE (F-ratio = .53,  $p < .47$ ), DP (F-ratio = .18,  $p < .68$ ), or PA (F-ratio = 1.62,  $p < .21$ ) for this sample, while simultaneously accounting for background and organizational variables (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002). The third question posed by researchers focused on in the inclusion of students with emotional disturbances. The findings were more significant in relation to burnout than the other facts already addressed. As the proportion of students with emotional/behavioral disorders increased, educators developed impersonal, distant attitudes and feelings toward students. Statistical analysis revealed no significance for emotional exhaustion, while degrees of depersonalization increased as teachers felt increasingly dissatisfied with social support. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) revealed that dissatisfaction with professional development opportunities and university preparation increased degrees of emotional exhaustion resulting in feelings of emotional fatigue and the depletion of emotional reserves (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002).

Overall, the findings of the study revealed neither the number of heterogeneous disability categories nor caseload size statistically increased degrees of burnout. The study did suggest special education teachers did not feel college adequately prepared them for their actual assignment nor were professional development opportunities provided, available or paid for to support their teaching assignment, resulting in emotional exhaustion. Also, as students with

emotional/behavioral disorders increased, special education teachers experienced higher levels of depersonalization and distant attitudes towards students (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002).

The implications of this study were that Michigan should closely monitor and regulate caseload numbers to ensure teachers are well supported. Also, district level monitoring should exist so that special education teachers in self-contained classrooms do not feel “dumped on” due to administrative conveniences (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002). It is recommended to create special education support groups to help minimize social isolation, encourage professional collaboration, and provide an avenue for stress release. Providing both district-wide and individually selected professional development opportunities geared specifically toward special education needs and mental health is also important to reduce levels of burnout and attrition (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002).

Zabel and Zabel (2001) completed a study addressing burnout among special education teachers, looking specifically at age, experience, and preparation. The authors of this study replicated a study they completed back in 1982. The original study consisted of 600 special education and looked at a variety of factors potentially leading to burnout. In 2001, these same researchers finished another study with a sample of 301 teachers to examine changes that may have occurred due to the evolution of the field. Specifically, the relationships of participants’ age, amount of regular and special education teaching experience, certification status, and amount of professional preparation to three dimensions of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) were examined (Zabel & Zabel, 2001). The reason behind this new study was to determine if there were any changes in special educator burnout due to the many changes in the field of special education, including several revisions of federal legislation, tremendous growth, increased concern over documenting outcomes, increases

in funding, development of professional standards, and increased use of multi-categorical and non-categorical and inclusionary service delivery models (Zabel & Zabel, 2001).

Participants were asked demographic questions relating to their age, amount of education, certification status, amount of experience in general and special education, and characteristics of their jobs. They were asked about their administrative service delivery model, the age level, number, and classifications of their students, the average amount of time spent working each week, the amount of time spent directly teaching students each week, the amount of time allotted for non-instructional tasks, whether they work with paraprofessionals and/or team teachers, and to identify their school location as urban, suburban, or rural. They also were asked to rate the support provided by their school administrators, special education administrators, other teachers, and students' parent (Zabel & Zabel, 2001). In addition to the demographic information, the teachers also completed the Maslach Burnout Inventory Educators Survey (MBI-ES). This inventory was a reliable and valid measure of three dimensions of professional burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) that had been widely used by researchers in education and other fields (Maslach et al., 1996).

Results of the study were reported, analyzed, and compared to those of the earlier study. Zabel and Zabel (2001) found that teachers' age, amount of special education experience, and amount of preparation have markedly increased in the 20 years between the two studies. A second major finding was that age, experience, certification status, and preparation was not as significantly related to the experience of professional burnout as in the past, although older, more experienced teachers did appear to find more personal accomplishment in their work. The study also addressed concerns for the average age of special education teachers being in the 40s and fewer under the age of 30, leading to a greater shortage of special education teachers impacted

by retirements of a larger sum of special education teachers. This study indicated significant job-related stressors for special education teachers. Some teachers expressed concerns about working with challenging students, difficult family situations, and lack of support from colleagues and administrators, while some expressed their satisfaction in these areas. Paperwork related to the legal and regulatory requirements in special education was found to be the greatest area of dissatisfaction for the teachers in this study (Zabel & Zabel, 2001).

The limitations of the study were discussed in more detail. The first one being that the sample size of teachers in Kansas (in both studies) was not representative of a larger special education teacher population. Another limitation was that this study only included teachers who were currently teaching, not taking into account teachers who may have already left the field due to dissatisfaction. The other limitation mentioned was the reliability and accuracy of self-reported items on the questionnaire and inventory. The responses may be subjective, as was with any research that relied on self-reporting (Zabel & Zabel, 2001).

Brouwers and Tomic (2000) completed a longitudinal study of teacher burnout and perceived self-efficacy in classroom management. This study examined the direction and time-frame of relationships between perceived self-efficacy in classroom management and the three dimensions of burnout among 243 secondary school teachers. The participants were teachers in the province of Limburg in the Netherlands. The participants consisted of 179 male (74%) and 64 female (26%) teachers. The average age was 46 years old ( $SD=8.20$ ) with a range of 24-63 years. The average teaching experience in years was 21 ( $SD=8.92$ ) with a range of 1-39 years (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000).

Burnout was measured using the Dutch version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory for teachers (MBI-NL-Ed). The questionnaire included 20 items divided into three subscales:

Emotional Exhaustion (EE; 8 items), Depersonalization (D; 5 items), and Personal Accomplishment (PA; 7 items). The items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 'never' to 'every day.' Scores on the scales were added separately. High scores on the scales of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and low scores on the personal accomplishment scale were indicative of burnout (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000). Perceived self-efficacy in classroom management was measured using the Self-Efficacy Scale for Classroom Management and Discipline designed by Emmer and Hickman (1991). The questionnaire included 14 items measured on a 6-point Likert scale and had a strongly agree/strongly disagree response format.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) analyses showed that perceived self-efficacy had a longitudinal effect on depersonalization and a synchronous effect on personal accomplishment. The direction was reversed for the relationship between perceived self-efficacy and emotional exhaustion; the time frame was synchronous (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000). Based on this data, it was concluded that perceived self-efficacy in classroom management must be taken into consideration when devising interventions both to prevent and to treat burnout among secondary education teachers. Emotional exhaustion is not likely directly influenced by interventions, so it would be beneficial for interventions to target all three dimensions of burnout and focus on increasing self-efficacy in classroom management and on other implications of teacher burnout (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000).

Brouwers and Tomic (2000) discussed a few limitations of the study. The first was there was not previous research available to estimate the time lag for perceived self-efficacy and burnout influence each other. Another limitation was that the data was only collected at two points in time. The third limitation brought up was the fact that a number of teachers was

relatively low in comparison to the number of teachers asked to participate. This study did address this issue to some extent as it had two groups of teachers and the researchers analyzed the differences between both groups on all measured variables (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000).

Carlson and Thompson (1995) completed a study that looked at job burnout and leaving positions in public school teachers. Due to negative trends in the attrition rates of special education teachers being greater than regular education teachers, the researchers hoped to identify the variables impacting special education teacher “burnout” and special education teachers' intentions to leave the teaching field (Carlson & Thompson, 1995). Two questions were posed by Carlson and Thompson to be addressed within this study:

1. Is there a set of variables (teacher demographics, teacher need satisfaction, organization) which would describe significant amounts of variance in each of the components of burnout--emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment?
2. Is there a set of variables (teacher demographics, teacher need satisfaction, organization) which would produce a non-chance classification of special education teachers into "Yes-Leaving Special Education Teaching" or "No-Leaving Special Education" groups? (p. 17).

The study was conducted in Hawaii and all special education teachers in the state of Hawaii (N = 1096) were sent the paper and pencil surveys for this study. Six hundred and eighty-eight (62.8%) of the teachers responded to the surveys, any teachers who marked “Uncertain” to the question “Are you considering leaving special education teaching?” were excluded from the analyses; an additional 18 teachers with three or more missing discriminating variables were also excluded from the pool. A total of 490 teachers were used in the data

analyses. Of these 490 participants, 300 (61.2%) responded “Yes,” and 190 (38.8%) responded “No” to the question “Are you considering leaving special education teaching?” (Carlson & Thompson, 1995). The instruments used in this study were the Maslach Burnout Inventory, the Porter Need Satisfaction Questionnaire, and the Special Education Teacher Survey. The Porter Need Satisfaction Questionnaire looked specifically at five areas of need satisfaction, including security, social, esteem, autonomy, and self-actualization. Need deficiency was determined by assessing the level of satisfaction teachers actually experienced through their work, as well as the level of satisfaction they would like to be experiencing, then by the difference between the actual and desired levels of need satisfaction and measured by a discrepancy score. The larger the need deficiency, or discrepancy score, the greater the level of unsatisfied need. The Special Education Teacher Survey addressed five categories: demographic information, identification of factors which special education teachers felt hindered their ability to provide effective services to students, teachers’ intentions to remain in special education teaching, use of computers to accomplish teachers’ instructional task, and identification of teachers' major concerns about the provision of special education services in Hawaii (Carlson & Thompson, 1995).

Results of multiple regression analyses showed that for the burnout components of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization relatively significant amounts of variance could be identified by a set of predictor variables. For the third burnout component, personal accomplishment, the variance was identified by a set of predictor variables with a smaller significance. Stepwise discriminant function analysis was used to distinguish between teachers who stated they did or did not intend to leave special education teaching. Carlson and Thompson (1995) found that eight variables were identified as predictors of “Intention to leave special education teaching,” correctly classifying 73% of teachers into the appropriate “Yes-Leaving”

and “No-Leaving” groups. Emotional exhaustion was found to be the greatest indicator for teachers to leave the special education field. This component was described as a reflection of feelings of emotional depletion, a sense of having “nothing left to give” in the day-to-day performance of a teacher’s work. The burnout component, depersonalization, was also found to be correlated with teachers' intentions to change career paths. Depersonalization had been labeled as a protective “detachment” from one’s students, an emotional withdrawal or distancing in order to preserve one’s own well-being and psychological health. The final component of burnout, personal accomplishment, did not seem to have a relationship with teachers’ intentions to make career changes but did seem to have a positive effect with higher job satisfaction (Carlson & Thompson, 1995).

Overall, this study supports that the factors and variables that lead to special education teacher burnout are completely under the control of real people in real positions within the education system (Carlson & Thompson, 1995). With that being said, the authors stated that because of that, there can be lessons learned from these findings and people can make appropriate changes within school districts to address the concerns and create interventions to promote teacher well-being. There were no limitations discussed in this study.

### **Summary of Chapter 2 Research to be Reviewed**

Twelve studies were reviewed in relation to the prevalence of burnout among special education teachers. Table 2 summarizes the findings of these studies which are in chronological order from oldest to most recent.

Table 2

*Summary of Chapter 2 Findings*

AUTHORS	STUDY DESIGN	PARTICIPANTS	PROCEDURE	FINDINGS
De Stasio et al. (2017)	Correlational	The sample was composed of 194 full-time in-service special education teachers (96.4 female) from Rome, Italy.	The following questionnaires were given participants: Copenhagen Burnout Inventory, Teacher Self-Efficacy, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Job Satisfaction Survey, Teacher's Happiness at School	The results confirmed what previous research evidenced: teachers' personal resources, happiness at school, and job satisfaction were inversely correlated to all dimensions of burnout in both school contexts.
Malik (2017)	Qualitative	193 teachers (95 female and 98 male) selected from 32 schools and centers of special education with age range of 24-60 years.	Big Five Personality Inventory developed by Finch and Rhodes (1991), was used to measure personality traits and Maslach Burnout Inventory was also used to measure burnout level.	Personality traits-neuroticism and conscientiousness-significantly lead towards burnout.
Williams & Dikes (2015)	Correlational	65 Special Education Teachers	Teachers were mailed a self-report survey. Participation was voluntary. Survey packets were collected for a three-week period.	Findings suggested an association between all of the demographic variables and burnout. However, inferential analysis of gender and marital status related to the three subscales indicated that the differences were not statistically significant.
Irvin et al. (2013)	Correlational	Participants were 21 classroom teachers of students with ASD in pre-schools in the Southeast	Adult Word Count Child Vocalizations Conversational Turns	Burnout correlated significantly with the ratio of adults to students with ASD present and correlated negatively with adult word count. The ratio of adults to students with ASD had a suppression effect on burnout in predicting adult word count.

Table 2 (continued)

AUTHORS	STUDY DESIGN	PARTICIPANTS	PROCEDURE	FINDINGS
Coman et al. (2012)	Correlational	Participants were 53 preschool teachers of students with ASD from North Carolina, Colorado, Florida, and Minnesota	Commitment to model Students in class # with Autism Spectrum Disability # Typically developing students Teacher Experience	No differences in burnout found for type of model implemented. Teacher Experience, Experience Teaching Students with ASD, and Number of typically developing students in class correlated negatively with burnout. Number of students with ASD correlated with burnout.
Ruble et al. (2011)	Correlational	Participants were 35 special education teachers of children with ASD	Admin. Support Mastery Experience Self-Efficacy	Self-efficacy for classroom management was significantly inversely correlated with burnout.
Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2010)	Correlational	Participants in this study were 2249 teachers from 113 elementary schools and middle schools (1st-10th grade) in Norway.	Using the Maslach Burnout Inventory - Educators Survey, participants rated statements indicating that their work makes them feel emotionally drained or exhausted (emotional exhaustion) and that they do not care about some students (depersonalization).	Teacher self-efficacy was negatively related to both dimensions of teacher burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization)  Teachers' job satisfaction was strongly related to emotional exhaustion and weakly, but directly related to self-efficacy, depersonalization, autonomy, and time pressure.
Jennett et al. (2003)	Correlational	Participants were 64 special education teachers working with students with ASD	Autism Philosophy Level of Commitment Teacher Efficacy	Teacher commitment to TEACCH philosophy was inversely correlated with both emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment. Commitment to a philosophy predicted an increase in personal accomplishment.
Nichols & Sosnowsky (2002)	Correlational	Participants were 77 special education teachers in self-contained classrooms in Michigan	Caseload Disabilities Served % of Students with ED	The proportions of students with emotional disturbance in a teacher's classroom was associated with a significant increase in burnout.

Table 2 (continued)

AUTHORS	STUDY DESIGN	PARTICIPANTS	PROCEDURE	FINDINGS
Zabel & Zabel (2001)	Correlational and Cross Sectional	Participants were 301 special education teachers of varying licensures.	Questionnaire gathering demographic information and the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES).	General education teaching experience was correlated with personal accomplishment. Special education teachers with a Masters degree reported higher personal accomplishment than those who only had a Bachelor's.
Brouwers & Tomic (2000)	Longitudinal	Participants were teachers working in secondary schools in the province of Limburg in the Netherlands.	Burnout was measured using the Dutch version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory for teachers.	The more emotionally exhausted teachers are, the poorer their performances will generally be.  They found an effect of perceived self-efficacy on personal accomplishment as well, mediated by the core of burnout, i.e. emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.
Carlson & Thompson (1995)	Correlational	490 Special Education Teachers in Hawaii	Needs Satisfaction Special Education Teacher Survey	Needs satisfaction, lack of resources, busywork, class composition, and teacher age predicted variance in teacher burnout. Emotional exhaustion was the strongest predictor of intention to leave teaching.

### Summary

Special education teachers suffer from emotional exhaustion as it related to teacher burnout. Many of the studies found that this was highest indicator of burnout and that many variables also impacted the onset of burnout. The one area measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory that least impacted burnout was the personal accomplishment category. Typically, the higher the education, the higher the sense of personal accomplishment, resulting in lower feelings of burnout. Depersonalization was more a direct result of the emotional exhaustion felt

by teachers. The variables that most greatly lead to burnout were that of caseload numbers, student disabilities (higher needs, greater burnout), additional hours spent on due process paperwork, and lack of adequate supports within the school systems. Chapter 3 further discusses what can be done to provide supports for teachers and make changes to reduce burnout in special education.

### **Chapter 3: Conclusions and Recommendations**

The purpose of this research paper was to explore what the primary factors leading to teacher burnout in special education were and how school districts could provide support to address these concerns. Chapter 1 provided background information on the topic, and Chapter 2 presented a review of the research literature. In this chapter, I discuss the findings, recommendations, and implications of the twelve research studies reviewed.

#### **Conclusions**

I reviewed 12 studies related to the causes of teacher burnout in special education. Out of those 12 studies, 11 of them used the Maslach Burnout Inventory to measure burnout rates among the participants. The study that did not use the Maslach Burnout Inventory used a similar tool, the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (De Stasio et al., 2017). This inventory also divided burnout into three categories, potentially leading to burnout. Many of the studies also included other more information questionnaires, demographic surveys, and other rating scales. The results of the studies varied, and some contradicted the findings of other studies. Based on these findings, there are many areas that could be researched and explored with future research.

The study using the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory found that teachers' personal resources, happiness at school, and job satisfaction were inversely correlated to all levels of burnout in both school contexts. There was also no difference in the levels of burnout in kindergarten teachers versus primary teachers (De Stasio et al., 2017). Two studies found a high significance of burnout due to the varying needs of special education students (Malik, 2017; Williams & Dikes, 2015). Nichols and Sosnowsky (2002) found neither heterogenous disabilities or caseload size increased burnout among special education teachers. Williams and Dikes (2015) found that higher caseload numbers led to burnout, recommending an average

caseload of approximately 15, depending on setting and disability. They also found that teachers more prone to burnout were older teachers, single teachers, teachers with higher education, and more experienced teachers. In looking at teachers in various settings, they found that both inclusive settings and resource settings led to burnout. Teachers who spent additional time on paperwork outside of the work day also experienced higher rates of burnout (Williams & Dikes, 2015). Zabel and Zabel (2001) also found paperwork requirements related to dissatisfaction among special education teachers. In addition, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) also found time pressures in special education contributed to emotional exhaustion. Zabel and Zabel noted that older teachers demonstrated a higher sense of personal accomplishment, contradicting the results found in the study by Williams and Dikes. Compared to a study completed 20 years prior, they expressed concerns about the growing average age of special education teachers and the impending teacher shortage that will become even more impactful when these teachers reach retirement age (Zabel & Zabel, 2001).

When teachers use research-based strategies with high fidelity (e.g., TEACCH, LEAP, and ABA), they are less prone to experiencing burnout (Coman et al., 2012; Jennett et al., 2003). These teachers are more satisfied and have increased feelings of personal accomplishment. According to Jennett et al. (2003), the TEACCH group was negatively correlated to emotional exhaustion and teachers of students with autism with a commitment to theoretical orientation had a higher professional self-efficacy and lower burnout.

Having perceived self-efficacy in classroom management skills leads to lower levels of burnout in special education teachers (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Ruble et al., 2011). The level of skills in this area should be taken into consideration when developing interventions to prevent and/or treat burnout among special education teachers with a focus on increasing classroom

management skills (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000). Similarly, Nichols and Sosnowsky (2002) found that the higher number of students with Emotional Behavior Disorders, the higher levels of depersonalization among special education teachers. These teachers felt that college courses did not provide adequate learning to prepare them for the reality of the job.

The oldest study reviewed found that factors and variables relating to the causes of burnout among special education teachers are completely under the control of people who have the ability to make changes. Carlson and Thompson (1995) found that emotional exhaustion was the greatest indicator of teachers leaving the field, with depersonalization correlating to burnout as well. As with the study conducted by Jennett et al. (2003) and Zabel and Zabel (2001), personal accomplishment did not lead to burnout, but a higher sense of job satisfaction (Carlson & Thompson, 1995).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Many of the studies reviewed stated limitations in their sample sizes as they were not representative of a larger number of special education teachers (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; De Stasio et al., 2017; Malik, 2017; Ruble et al., 2011; Zabel & Zabel 2001). Zabel and Zabel (2001) reported their study only included current teachers, not reaching those who may have already left the special education field due to dissatisfaction. There were also studies limitations with the tools used for research. The questionnaires used in some of the studies were not validated measures, were only used in those studies, or were unreliable due to the self-reporting (Coman et al., 2012; De Stasio et al., 2017; Jennett, et al., 2003; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010; Zabel & Zabel, 2001).

Other limitations were the lack of longitudinal studies as there were no studies that looked at the time lag between the perceived self-efficacy and burnout to influence each other

(Brouwers & Tomic, 2000). Coman et al., (2012) suggested future research be geared toward longitudinal assessment of commitment, burnout, teaching fidelity, and direct measures of teacher attrition. This study also suggested including randomly sampled teachers with both high and low levels of fidelity for future research. Irvin et al. (2013) looked only at high-quality self-contained classrooms and the limitation in that study related to the lack of generalization to inclusive settings or other special education settings could not be made.

### **Implications for Current Practice**

Overall, I found the findings in the research to support what I see happening in the special education field today. I feel there needs to be more research on elementary special education teachers. Much of what I found was early childhood or secondary education. Another area to look at is how administrative/building support is tied to burnout in special education. With the huge financial strain districts are facing, research on burnout and the financial resources available to schools would be another area of interest related to the causes of burnout. Some of the resources that are impacted by finances are paraprofessional support, size of caseloads, and the numbers of students being placed in outside district settings/programs. It may also be beneficial for research to look specifically at each disability category and compare which categories can lead to the highest rate of burnout. These findings may help to support the need for more specific training and implementation of research-based strategies and skills.

Based on the research findings supporting that burnout is a growing issue among special education teachers, there are things that I feel can be done in my own district to help combat these feelings. It is important to seek support and resources to address issues that are larger than one teacher can manage independently. According to the research conducted by Zabel and Zabel (2001), special education teachers are rarely as segregated from their colleagues as they were in

the past. It is beneficial for teachers to have support systems within their teams and in their buildings. Due to the teacher shortage that is already showing with lower numbers of licensed special education teachers in the field and dropping rates of special education teachers in teaching programs, it is very important to provide adequate mentorship programs for new special education teachers. Mentorship programs provide opportunities for new teachers to learn from and work with experienced teachers who have been in the district for more than 5 years. The creation of support systems within and between schools, even between districts, among special education teachers may also be beneficial in providing supports to decrease feelings of burnout. These supports will provide teachers with a group of people to share strategies and provide opportunities for problem-solving various issues that arise with student situations.

Within my school, there is a great need for creating a more supportive Tier 1 intervention level for both academic and behavior needs. Having a more supportive Tier 1 system will help prevent the over-identification of students with disabilities and provide general education teachers with more supports in their classrooms. Special education teachers and staff should not be seen as the primary source to manage behaviors and be expected to fix the problems. The mindset of general education teachers needs to shift to an overall acceptance of students with special needs as their students first, with the special education teacher seen as a support and advocate for the student.

### **Summary**

Special education teachers suffer from emotional exhaustion as it relates to teacher burnout. Many of the studies found that was the highest indicator of burnout and that many variables also impacted the onset of burnout. Depersonalization was more a direct result of the emotional exhaustion felt by teachers. The variables that most greatly lead to burnout were that

of caseload numbers, student disabilities (higher needs, greater burnout), additional hours spent on due process paperwork, and lack of adequate supports within the school systems. The one area measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory that least impacted burnout was the personal accomplishment category. Typically, the higher the education, the higher the sense of personal accomplishment, resulting in lower feelings of burnout.

The biggest take away for me with the research reviewed is how I am continuing to see things that will lead to burnout among special education teachers happening in my school district and in the state of Minnesota. The financial implications of what is available for special education is going to continue to negatively impact services and supports. I am fearful that people will have a negative viewpoint on special education due to the strain of its costs which are creating huge deficits in school budgets.

The answer to what primary factors leads to burnout among special education teachers is not an easy one to narrow down. The studies reviewed show there are a multitude of factors that cause teachers to feel burned out. The recommendations for districts are to closely monitor and regulate caseload numbers to ensure teachers are well supported. Also, district level monitoring should exist so that special education teachers in self-contained classrooms do not feel “dumped on” due to administrative conveniences (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002, p. 83). The creation of support groups for special education teachers is another recommendation, as doing so will help minimize social isolation, encourage professional collaboration, and provide an avenue for stress release. Providing both district-wide and individually selected professional development opportunities geared specifically towards special education needs and mental health is also important to reduce levels of burnout and attrition (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002).

Student needs continue to increase, even within the general education population. With the research from over 20 years all supporting the concerns regarding special education teacher burnout, school districts need to take a look at the support systems in place. There are a multitude of solutions districts can implement to alleviate the burdens special education teachers are facing.

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