

***In Theory...*****Predictors of Burnout and Self-Efficacy  
Among Special Education Teachers**

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**Abstract**

Burnout and decreased levels of self-efficacy are contributors to the high attrition rate and increasing demand for highly qualified special educators nationwide. This study investigated factors that impact special education teacher burnout and self-efficacy. The results indicated that teacher stressors, emotional demands, quality of leadership, and quantitative demands were the best set of predictors of emotional exhaustion in special educators. Secondly, it was found that quantitative demands, quality of leadership, administrative support and coworker support were the best set of predictors of personal accomplishment. Finally, learning disability, school level, number of meetings with an administrator, emotional demands, role conflict, and quality of leadership were the best set of predictors of self-efficacy among special educators.

*Keywords:* Special education, Burnout, Self-efficacy, Attrition, Teacher retention

**Predictors of Burnout and Self-Efficacy  
Among Special Education Teachers**

One of the most significant predicaments in special education as a whole in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the retention of well-trained, capable, and experienced special education teachers. Special education teachers across the country are leaving the profession in greater numbers when compared to regular education teachers (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008; Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002; Prather-Jones, 2011). Research suggests that 98% of schools in the United States are struggling to fill special education positions with qualified educators (Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007), and 10.1% of special educators across the country abandon the field each year (Boe, et. al., 2008). Therefore, the shortage affects teacher quality, as teachers with emergency

certifications are hired without being highly qualified, lacking the appropriate course work and related work experience (Connelly & Graham, 2009; Nougaret, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 2005; Thornton, Peltier, et. al., 2007). Decreasing special education teacher burnout and increasing the retention of those just entering the field must become a national priority (Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996; Major, 2012; Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002).

**Burnout and Self-Efficacy**

The research on burnout, job stress and self-efficacy provides a range of varying definitions. Burnout has been defined as a condition of low levels of energy, often accompanied by diminishing (job related) self-confidence as well as depleted feelings of enthusiasm for a person's career (Espeland, 2006). According to Maslach and Leiter (1997) professionals who begin to experience burnout are spiraling in the

wrong direction, frequently feel out of control and have little strength left to restore their emotional and physical well-being. "Maslach described burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with people on a daily basis" (Espeland, 2006, p. 179). Job stress can result in overwhelming feelings, excessive amounts of strain, and a sense of being weighed down and/or overburdened (Abate, 2002). While job-related burnout and stress often go hand and hand, they do display differing characteristics. Burnout is often the result of unrelenting stress, but it is not the same as too much stress. Stress usually involves overwhelming pressures that demand too much of an individual physically and psychologically. Burnout means feeling empty, devoid of motivation, and beyond caring. People experiencing burnout often do not see any hope of positive change in their situations. If excessive stress is like drowning in responsibilities, burnout is like being all dried up, which may be the end result of excessive stress.

Job stress and self-efficacy generally evolve from a number of contributing factors, and it is often the combination of these factors over time that can lead to burnout for special educators. Self-efficacy can be defined as a feeling that an individual has the knowledge and power to affect positive change in their environment. According to Bandura (1994), self-efficacy is beliefs about one's capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect one's life. Self-efficacy determines how a person thinks, feels, and motivates oneself to behave in certain ways. Teachers' self-efficacy is reflective of their ability to have

an impact on and manipulate their students' progress, behavior and enthusiasm to learn. Some components that can trigger these low levels of self-efficacy and burnout include: large caseloads, profusion of meetings, intense amounts of paperwork, parental relations, administrative support or lack thereof (Center & Steventon, 2001; Kaff, 2004; Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005), curriculum expectations, behavioral issues, legal and political matters, and role ambiguity (Billingsley, Carlson, & Klein, 2004; Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996; Kaff, 2004; Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005). Furthermore, factors associated with stress among special education teachers include low teacher salaries, lack of respect and/or support, and feelings of isolation from colleagues (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997), insufficient planning periods to modify curriculum and collaborate with team members, and substantial variations in student needs and abilities (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Kaff, 2004).

### **Role Ambiguity**

According to Plash and Piotrowski (2006), role ambiguity is one of the major causal factors in special educator burnout. Special education teachers are frequently uncertain about the nature of their job requirements, purpose, rights, and expectations. Therefore, these misconceptions and lack of clarity regarding their job descriptions factor into a general sense of fatigue, lack of motivation, and overall low job satisfaction (Plash & Piotrowski, 2006). Similarly, Gersten et al. (2001) noted that the discrepancy between what special educators perceived their jobs to be and what their jobs are in actuality were major sources of the stress felt by special educators. First year special

education teachers, upon entering their careers, felt that their purpose was to educate students with varying disabilities. However, they soon learned that the act of teaching is only a small facet of their multifarious profession (Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996; Gersten et al., 2001). Kaff's (2004) study of 341 special education teachers in Kansas reported that teachers struggled with handling multiple roles and responsibilities. They were asked to manage "inclusive, resource, and consultative models within one service delivery system" (Kaff, 2004, p. 12). The special educators involved in Kaff's (2004) study also expressed their distress with being expected to direct self-contained and resource environments, while being simultaneously involved with students who require full inclusion programs. As a result, special education teachers are set up for failure, as it is impossible for them to run any of the aforementioned programs well. Fore, Martin, and Bender (2002) concurred with Kaff's (2004) results adding that the dissonance between what special educators perceived their job requirements to be and what they were in actuality caused increased levels of job stress and dissatisfaction.

#### **Lack of Support**

Provision of support seems to be a critical variable that affects the stress levels of special educators. Schnorr (1995) found that out of 1500 special education teachers in Alaska, 88% listed administrative support as a determining factor in their decision to continue teaching. Brownell and Smith (1993) examined attrition rates of special education teachers working with various disability groups. They found that beginning, as well as, experienced special educators across different disability groups are too often not provided with the

appropriate psychological and instructional support from administrators, parents and colleagues needed to promote their levels of success and confidence (Brownell & Smith, 1993). These findings are consistent with a recent study conducted by Berry (2012). In this study it was found that teacher satisfaction and effectiveness were significantly impacted by the helpfulness of support from administrators.

#### **Perceived Lack of Respect**

According to research by Kaff (2004), special educators not only suffer from a lack of support, but they also lack respect and appreciation from administrators, parents, and general education colleagues. In Kaff's (2004) study a large sample of special educators were surveyed to determine how the relationship between the educators' roles and responsibilities and their working environments impacted the attrition and retention rates of special education teachers. In addition to providing demographic information, participants were asked about their future career plans, reasons why they may or may not leave the education field, and factors needed to persuade them to stay. Almost half of the special educators in this study reported they planned to leave the education profession all together. Many of the participants in Kaff's (2004) study noted that the lack of support and respect from administration and regular education teachers were among the major contributors towards their reasons for wanting to leave the field. Many participants also noted this lack of support and respect was due to a lack of understanding in regards to the overwhelming roles and responsibilities of special education teachers.

The amount of emotional support, defined as caring relationships, direct communication, an interest in the special educator's work, and understanding of special educators' multi-faceted roles have been found to be the most deficient areas of special education teachers' experiences (Gersten et al., 2001). Nichols and Sosnowsky (2002) found that increased social supports can decrease the social isolation and high incidences of stress often felt by special educators. First year special education teachers, realizing the complexities of their profession, often experience feelings of social isolation and alienation from their co-workers. Schlichte et al. (2005) conducted a study including five first-year special educators. The participants were each interviewed from a pre-made script of open-ended questions regarding their first-year experiences as special educators. Based on the participants' interview data, Schlichte et al. (2005) found that dealing with excessive paperwork, behavior problems, and varying student disabilities can all lead to loneliness. The subjects expressed that collegiality is one of the most critical factors to creating positive experiences for beginning special educators. Isolation from the school community is associated with burnout.

While there is a growing body of research related to burnout of special education teachers as well as increased research pertaining to self-efficacy of special education teachers, research examining how certain factors impact both burnout and self-efficacy is limited. Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to investigate the correlation and predictive validity of the following variables on burnout and self-efficacy levels of special educators: teacher stressors, administrative

support, support from colleagues, role clarity, role conflict, quality of leadership, quantitative demands, emotional demands, cognitive demands and demographic/job specific characteristics. Determining the most significant variables associated with special education teacher burnout and negative self-efficacy is critical to creating future resolutions to begin to solve this overwhelming problem.

The current study was designed to investigate four key research questions: 1) What are the constructs that correlate with burnout in special education teachers? 2) What are the constructs that correlate with self-efficacy in special education teachers? 3) What is the best set of predictors of burnout among special education teachers? 4) What is the best set of predictors of self-efficacy among special education teachers?

### **Methodology**

In response to the continued need for research on burnout and self-efficacy among special education teachers, the current study applied a quantitative design to investigate correlations among variables, as well as to establish predictors of burnout and self-efficacy of special education teachers through hierarchical regression analysis. The quantitative data were collected using five adapted valid and reliable surveys, in addition to a researcher designed demographic questionnaire.

### **Participants**

One hundred and five elementary, middle, and high school special education teachers from four public school districts in Connecticut participated in this study. All participants had a special education teaching certificate and most were employed as full time special education teachers. The participants ranged in their teaching environments including self

contained classrooms, resource rooms, inclusion settings, and combinations of these environments. All of the participants worked with students with varying degrees and categories of disabilities.

**Demographic characteristics.** With the assistance of district administrators, the researchers compiled a list of email addresses of all of the special education teachers from the four participating school districts and delivered 236 surveys via email. Informed consent was included in the link as part of the survey completion process. Of the 105 participants, ninety-three (88.6%) were female, while twelve participants (11.4%) were male. Forty-nine participants (46.6%) were employed as

special education teachers at public elementary schools, twenty-one (20.0%) worked at public middle schools, twenty-eight participants (26.2%) taught at public high schools, and seven (6.7%) participants listed themselves as working in other environments for the public school district (e.g., preschool, transitional setting). Ninety-four participants (89.5%) indicated that they held a Master's degree at the time of completing the survey. Three participants (2.9%) held a Bachelors degree, and eight participants (7.6%) indicated that they were currently working towards a degree. Demographic characteristics can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics**

	<i>f</i>	%
Gender		
Female	93	88.6
Male	12	11.4
School Type		
Elementary	49	46.6
Middle	21	20.0
High School	28	26.7
Other	7	6.7
Age		
21-26	2	1.9
27-32	34	32.4
33-38	12	11.4
39-44	11	10.5
45-49	15	14.3
50-55	13	12.4
≥56	18	17.1
Level of Education		
Master's Degree	94	89.5
Bachelor's Degree	3	2.9
Working Toward Degree	8	7.6

**Job-specific characteristics.** Of the 105 participants, 96 (91.4%) worked as full time special education teachers, while nine participants (8.6%) indicated that they worked part time as special educators. The job titles ranged from resource room

teacher, self-contained teacher, inclusion teacher, and other. Sixty-five participants (62.0%) identified themselves as resource room teachers, 10 (9.5%) taught in self contained classrooms, 10 (9.5%) worked as inclusion teachers, and 20 participants

(19.0%) identified themselves in the ‘other’ category (e.g., early intervention, multiple titles, co-taught classroom).

With regard to the number of years working in the special education field, 23 participants (21.9%) have been working in the field between 1 and 5 years. Thirty-eight (36.2%) said they have been in the field between 6 and 15 years, 16 participants (15.2%) have been special educators between 16 and 25 years, and 28 (26.7%) have been working in the field for more than 25 years. The number of years

the participants have been working in their current positions ranges from 1 to 38 years. Forty-six (43.8%) of the participants have been employed in their position from 1 to 5 years, 38 (36.2%) have been in their current job between 6 and 15 years, 13 (12.4%) participants have been working in their present job from 16 to 25 years, and eight (7.6%) indicated that they have been employed in their current position for more than 25 years. Job specific characteristics can be found in Table 2.

**Table 2. Job-Specific Characteristics**

	<i>f</i>	%
Job Title		
Resource	65	62.0
Self-Contained	10	9.5
Inclusion	10	9.5
Other	20	19.0
Total Years in Special Education		
1-5	23	21.9
6-15	38	36.2
16-25	16	15.2
< 25	28	26.7
Time in Current Position		
1-5	46	43.8
6-15	38	36.2
16-25	13	12.4
< 25	8	7.6

**Student-specific characteristics.** Of the 105 participants, three (2.9%) have 1-5 students on their caseload, 19 (18.1%) work with 6-10 students on their caseload, 52 (49.5%) participants have 11-15 students on their caseload, 23 (21.9%) work with 16-20 students on their caseload, and eight (7.6%) participants have more than 20 students on their caseload. The participants were asked to identify all of the disability categories that they currently work with defined as autism, intellectual disability, emotional disability, learning disability, physical disability, and other disabilities. Ninety-three of the 105 participants (88.6%) work

with students with autism, 57 of the 105 participants (54.3%) work with students with intellectual disabilities, 97 of the 105 (92.4%) have students with learning disabilities on their caseload, 45 of the 105 participants (42.9%) work with students with physical disabilities, 50 of the 105 (47.6%) have students on their caseload with emotional disabilities, and 97 of the 105 participants (92.4%) work with students with other varying disabilities (such as: developmental delays, hearing impairments, visual impairments, language impairments, or ADHD). The functioning level of students’ disabilities was

categorized as severe, moderate, mild, or high functioning. Fifty-one of the 105 participants (48.6%) indicated working with students with severe disabilities, 91 of the 105 (86.7%) work with students with moderate disabilities, 77 of the 105 (73.3%) participants work with students with mild disabilities, and 50 of the 105 (47.6%) indicated working with high functioning students with disabilities. Furthermore, the

students ranged in age from 4-18 years old. Twenty-eight participants (26.7%) work with students between 4 and 7 years of age, 35 (33.3%) stated that they work with students between 8 and 12 years of age, and 42 participants (40.0%) work with students between 13 and 18 years of age. A summary of the student specific characteristics is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Student -Specific Characteristics**

	<i>f</i>	%
# of Students on Caseload**		
1-5	3	2.9
6-10	19	18.1
11-15	52	49.5
16-20	23	21.9
>20	8	7.6
Type of Student Disability**		
Autism	93	88.6
Intellectual Disability	57	54.3
Learning Disability	97	92.4
Physical Disabilities	45	42.9
Emotional Disability	50	47.6
Other Disabilities	97	92.4
Severity of Disability**		
Severe	51	48.6
Moderate	91	86.7
Mild	77	73.3
High Functioning	50	47.6
Student Age		
4-7 years	28	26.7
8-12 years	35	33.3
13-18 years	42	40.0

\*\* Percentages do not add up to 100% because of multiple answers for these questions

### Independent and Dependent Variables

The dependent variables in this study were burnout and self-efficacy. Burnout was measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The MBI is a twenty-two item reliable measure (Aluja, Blanch, & Garcia, 2005) that consists of three subscales: Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP) and Personal Accomplishment (PA). Emotional

exhaustion refers to the distancing one engages in as a way of dealing with the overload of work. Depersonalization is the negative feelings one has towards work and co-workers; it can also be referred to as cynicism. Personal Accomplishment is viewed as the feeling of success a person experiences in their work. According to a study conducted by Aluja, Blanch, and Garcia (2005) the reliability of the nine-item Emotional Exhaustion scale as measured by

Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was  $\alpha = .90$ , the reliability of the five-item Depersonalization scale was  $\alpha = .79$ , and the reliability of the eight-item Personal Accomplishment scale was  $\alpha = .71$  suggesting moderate to high reliability for all three scales.

Self-efficacy was measured using the 12 item short form of the Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001). The short version of this questionnaire measures three aspects of teacher efficacy including student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk-Hoy (2001) observed strong reliability ( $\alpha = .90$ ) in the short form of the TSES. Minor changes in wording were made for some items, such as *student(s)* instead of *classroom*, in order to make this measurement more meaningful for participants of the current study. As a result of changes in wording, the reliability of the 12 item self-efficacy scale was determined to be  $\alpha = .76$ .

The collection of independent variables included teacher stressors, administrative support, collegial support, role conflict, quality of leadership, emotional demands, quantitative demands, cognitive demands and demographic/job specific information. A variety of questionnaires were utilized to measure these variables.

Teacher stressors were measured using the EBD (Emotional and Behavioral Disorders) Teacher Stressor Questionnaire (EBD-TSQ) (Center & Callaway, 1996). Center and Steventon (2001) reported that the EBD-TSQ has a test-retest reliability of  $r = .91$ . No significant difference was found between the scores of EBD teachers and other types of special education teachers on the EBD-TSQ. This suggests that the instrument is assessing stressors common

and applicable to all special education teachers in general. This measure has not been adapted in any way for this study. For this study the reliability of the 31-item EBD-TSQ scale was found to be  $\alpha = .72$ .

The Supervisor Social Support subscale from the Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ) (Karasek, 1985) was used to measure administrative support and the Coworker Social Support subscale from the JCQ was used to measure collegial support. For this study the reliability of the five-item Supervisor Social Support scale was  $\alpha = .74$  and the reliability of the six-item Coworker Social Support scale was  $\alpha = .70$ .

The Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire COPSOQ (short form) was used to measure role conflict, quality of leadership, and emotional, quantitative and cognitive demands. Specifically, the Role Conflict Subscale, the Quality of Leadership Subscale, and the subscales Emotional Demands, Quantitative Demands, and Cognitive Demands were utilized.

Kristensen, Hannerz, Hogh, & Borg (2005) reported that the COPSOQ is a reliable and valid measurement. Of the 22 subscales of the COPSOQ, 17 were found to be reliable using  $\alpha = > 0.70$  threshold; this is true of the long, medium and short forms of this instrument (Nubling, Stobel, Hasselhorn, Michaelis, & Hoffman, 2006). For this study the reliability of the four-item Quantitative Demand scale was  $\alpha = .83$ , the reliability of the four-item Cognitive Demand scale was  $\alpha = .85$ , and the reliability of the three-item Emotional Demand scale was  $\alpha = .89$ . For this study the reliability of the four-item Role Conflict scale was  $\alpha = .92$  and the reliability of the seven-item Quality of Leadership scale was found to be  $\alpha = .95$ .

A demographic questionnaire designed by the researcher was utilized to gain relevant personal and job specific



information for each subject. The demographic questionnaire was comprised of questions pertaining to age, gender, educational setting, years in current position, years of experience, degrees held/in progress, current job title, caseload

numbers, student disabilities, and student ages. A summary of all potential dependent and independent variables as well as their source and range of scores can be found in Table 4.

**Table 4. Summary of Measures, Score Ranges, and Variables**

Measure	Score Range	# of items	Variable
Maslach Burnout Inventory			
Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	0-54	9	Burnout (EE): DV
Depersonalization (DP)	0-30	5	Burnout (DP): DV
Personal Accomplishment (PA)	0-48	8	Burnout (PA): DV
Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale	0-72	12	Self-Efficacy: DV
Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire			
Quantitative Demands (QD)	0-100	4	QD: IV
Cognitive Demands (CD)	0-100	4	CD: IV
Emotional Demands (ED)	0-100	3	ED: IV
Role Conflict	0-100	4	Role Conflict: IV
Quality of Leadership	0-100	7	Admin. Support: IV
Job Content Questionnaire			
Administrative Support	5-40	5	Admin. Support: IV
Coworker Support	6-24	6	Peer Support: IV
EBD Teacher Stressors Questionnaire	0-62	31	Teacher Stressors: IV
Demographic Questionnaire		20	IV

\*\*\*IV- Independent Variable; DV- Dependent Variable; Admin.- Administrative

### Data Analysis

A quantitative study design was utilized to investigate relationships among measures. Correlations and predictive values were explored through hierarchical regressive analysis. Multi-level models observed the best fit of hierarchical and nested independent predictor models from the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (e.g., Quantitative Demands, Cognitive Demands, Emotional Demands, Role Conflict, Quality of Leadership), Job Content Questionnaire (e.g., Administrative Support, Coworker Support), and EBD Teacher Stressors Questionnaire on burnout (e.g., Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, Personal Accomplishment) and self-efficacy dependent measures. The independent variables were separated into two

categories: constructs and demographic/job specific characteristics. The independent variables that were significantly correlated with the dependent variables were entered into the hierarchical regression analysis, with the strongest independent variable entered into the model first. Hierarchical regression was particularly useful for investigating relationships among variables of the current study because this analytical procedure takes into account interdependence among measures.

### Results

This study surveyed special education teachers in public schools to investigate the dependent variables of emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment, depersonalization and self-efficacy, in relation to the independent

variables of (1) quantitative demands, (2) cognitive demands, (3) emotional demands, (4) role conflict, (5) quality of leadership, (6) administrative support, (7) coworker support, (8) teacher stressors and, (9) demographic/job-specific characteristics. To begin, preliminary analyses are reported. These analyses include frequencies, means, ranges, and standard deviations for all independent and dependent variables. Next, the main analyses are reported in relation to the research questions, including correlations and hierarchical regression for all dependent variables.

**Preliminary Analyses of Dependent Variables**

Of the 105 participants, 14 participants (13.3%) indicated that their level of Emotional Exhaustion was Very High, 48 participants (45.7%) indicated that their level of Emotional Exhaustion was High, 34 participants (32.4%) indicated that their level of Emotional Exhaustion was Moderate, and 9 participants (8.6%)

indicated that their level of Emotional Exhaustion was Low. The mean score was 24.01, with a standard deviation (SD) of 12.07. The total possible score was 54.

With respect to Depersonalization, none of the participants rated their levels to be Very High or High, 6 (5.7%) participants rated their levels to be in the Moderate range, and 99 participants (94.3%) rated their levels in the Low range. The mean score was 2.86, with an SD of 3.68. The total possible score was 30. Due to little variability on the Depersonalization measure, it was not included in any further analyses.

In regard to Personal Accomplishment, 27 participants (25.7%) scored in the Very High range, 64 participants (61.0%) scored in the High range, 14 participants (13.3%) scored in the moderate range, and none of the participants scored in the Low range. The

**Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for the Dependent Variables of Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, Personal Accomplishment, and Self-Efficacy**

Variable	<i>f</i>	%	Range	Mean	SD
Emotional Exhaustion			3-54	24.01	12.07
Very High	14	13.3			
High	48	45.7			
Moderate	34	32.4			
Low	9	8.6			
Depersonalization			0-17	2.86	3.68
Very High	0	0			
High	0	0			
Moderate	6	5.7			
Low	99	94.3			
Personal Accomplishment			18-48	33.65	6.33
Very High	27	25.7			
High	64	61.0			
Moderate	14	13.3			
Low	0	0			
Self-Efficacy			28-66	52.13	7.62
High	55	52.4			
Moderate	45	42.9			
Low	5	4.7			

mean score was 33.65, with a SD of 6.33. The total possible score was 48. Of the 105 participants, 55 (52.4%) indicated that their level of Self-Efficacy was High, 45 participants (42.9%) indicated that their level of Self-Efficacy was Moderate, and 5 (4.7%) indicated that their level of Self-Efficacy was Low. The mean score was 52.13, with a SD of 7.62. The total possible score was 72. A summary of dependent variable frequencies and distributions is presented in Table 5.

### **Preliminary Analyses of Independent Variables**

With regard to Quantitative Demand, 35 participants (33.3%) indicated high levels; 48 participants (45.7%) indicated notable levels; 17 participants (16.2%) indicated moderate levels; and 5 participants (4.8%) indicated low levels. With regard to Cognitive Demand, 76 participants (72.3%) indicated high levels; 24 participants (22.9%) indicated notable levels; 5 participants (4.8%) indicated moderate levels; and 0 participants indicated low levels. With regard to Emotional Demand, 35 participants (33.3%) indicated high levels; 47 participants (44.8%) indicating notable levels; 22 participants (21.0%) indicating moderate levels; and 1 participant (.9%) indicating a low level.

For Role Conflict, 16 participants (15.2%) indicated high levels; 42 participants (40.0%) indicated notable levels; 36 participants (34.3%) indicated moderate levels; 11 participants (10.5%) indicated low levels.

With respect to Quality of Leadership, 16 participants (15.2%) indicated high quality of leadership; 53 participants (50.5%) indicated notable

quality of leadership; 24 participants (22.9%) indicated moderate quality of leadership; 12 participants (11.4%) indicated low quality of leadership.

Of the 105 participants, 34 participants (32.4%) rated high levels of Administrative Support, 61 (58.1%) rated moderate levels of Administrative Support, and 10 participants (9.5%) rated low levels of Administrative Support. The mean score was 13.39, with a SD of 2.59. The maximum score was 40 on the Administrative Support scale. In regard to Coworker Support, 46 participants (43.8%) rated high levels of Coworker Support, 48 (55.3%) rated moderate levels of Coworker Support, and 1 participant (0.9%) rated a low level of Coworker Support.

With respect to Teacher Stressors, 12 participants (11.4%) rated very high levels of stress, 73 (69.5%) rated high levels of stressors, 20 participants (19.1%) rated moderate levels of stressors, and none of the participants rated low levels of stressors. A complete summary of independent variable frequencies and distributions is presented in Table 6.

### **Main Analyses**

**Research question #1.** What are the constructs that correlate with burnout in special education teachers, as measured by:

- A) Emotional Exhaustion
- B) Personal Accomplishment

Depersonalization was dropped from this analysis because of overall low scores and low variability in the preliminary analyses. Pearson correlations among the dependent and independent variables were computed and can be found in Tables 7 and 8. The independent variables were separated into two categories: constructs and demographic/job specific characteristics

**Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for the Potential Independent Variables**

Variable	<i>f</i>	%	Range	Mean	SD
COPSOQ:					
Quantitative Demand			0-100	31.79	20.07
High	35	33.3			
Notable	48	45.7			
Moderate	17	16.2			
Low	5	4.8			
Cognitive Demand			0-68.75	15.50	14.53
High	76	72.3			
Notable	24	22.9			
Moderate	5	4.8			
Emotional Demand			0-75	30.87	17.82
High	35	33.3			
Notable	47	44.8			
Moderate	22	21.0			
Low	1	0.9			
Role Conflict			0-93.75	42.56	19.63
High	16	15.2			
Notable	42	40.0			
Moderate	36	34.3			
Low	11	10.5			
Quality of Leadership			0-92.86	42.48	21.75
High	16	15.2			
Notable	53	50.5			
Moderate	24	22.9			
Low	12	11.4			
JCQ:					
Administrative Support			7-18	13.39	2.59
High	34	32.4			
Moderate	61	58.1			
Low	10	9.5			
Coworker Support			11-22	17.46	2.01
High	46	43.8			
Moderate	58	55.3			
Low	1	.9			
EBD-TSQ:					
Teacher Stressors			17-54	36.39	7.73
Very High	12	11.4			
High	73	69.5			
Moderate	20	19.1			

The independent variables that were significantly correlated with the dependent variables were entered into the hierarchical regression analysis. The construct independent variables that were significantly correlated with the dependent variable Emotional Exhaustion were Quantitative Demand ( $r = .610$ ;  $p < .01$ ),

Cognitive Demand ( $r = .485$ ;  $p < .01$ ), Emotional Demand ( $r = .620$ ;  $p < .01$ ), Role Conflict ( $r = .595$ ;  $p < .01$ ), Quality of Leadership ( $r = -.544$ ;  $p < .01$ ), Administrative Support ( $r = -.524$ ;  $p < .01$ ), Coworker Support ( $r = -.362$ ;  $p < .01$ ) (note: negative correlations are due to lower levels of Quality of Leadership, Administrative

**Table 7. Correlation Matrix for Dependent Variables and Constructs**

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<b>1. EE</b>	1										
<b>2. PA</b>	-.441**	1									
<b>3. SE</b>	-.233*	.455**	1								
4. QD	.610**	-.312**	.181	1							
5. CD	.485**	.081	-.061	.626**	1						
6. ED	.620**	-.260**	-.198*	.460**	.501**	1					
7. CON	.595**	-.292**	-.406**	.328**	.226*	.557**	1				
8. QL	-.544**	.490**	.471**	-.353**	-.162	-.361**	-.572**	1			
9. AS	-.524**	.509**	.343**	-.304**	-.237*	-.405**	-.492**	.810**	1		
10. CO	-.362**	.476**	.211*	-.244*	.099	-.255**	-.351**	.510**	.534**	1	
11. TS	.625**	-.247**	-.188	.567**	.376**	.432**	.515**	-.376**	-.351**	-.263*	1

\* = p < .05; \*\* = p < .01

Note: Dependent variables are bolded

**KEY:**

- 1. EE = EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION**
- 2. PA = PERSONAL ACCOMPLISHMENT**
- 3. SE = SELF EFFICACY**

- 4. QD = QUANTITATIVE DEMANDS
- 5. CD = COGNITIVE DEMANDS
- 6. ED = EMOTIONAL DEMANDS
- 7. CON = ROLE CONFLICT

- 8. QL = QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP
- 9. AS = ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT
- 10. CO = COWORKER SUPPORT
- 11. TS = TEACHER STRESSORS

Support and Coworker Support being correlated to higher levels of Emotional Exhaustion) and Teacher Stressors (r = .625; p<.01).

Significant correlations were found among the dependent variable Personal Accomplishment and several of the independent variables, including Quantitative Demands (construct variable) (r = -.312; p<.01), Emotional Demands (construct variable) (r = -.260; p<.01), Role

Conflict (construct variable) (r = -.292; p<.01), Quality of Leadership (construct variable) (r = .490; p<.01), Administrative Support (construct variable) (r = .509; p<.01), Coworker Support (r = .476; p<.01), Teacher Stressors (construct variable) (r = -.247; p<.01), Years in Special Education (demographic/job specific variable) (r = -.139 p<.01), and Type of Administrator (demographic/job specific variable) (r = -.314; p<.01)

**Table 8. Correlation Matrix for Dependent Variables and Demographic/Job Specific Characteristic**

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>1. SE</b>	1									
<b>2. EE</b>	-.233**	1								
<b>3. PA</b>	.455**	-.441**	1							
4. SL	-.217*	-.155	.073	1						
5. YS	.039	-.139	.186	.237*	1					
6. YR	.066	-.300**	.179	-.085	-.147	1				
7. NS	.073	.018	.170	.224*	.121	-.147	1			
8. MA	.198*	.169	-.282*	-.054	.017	-.121	-.030	1		
9. TA	-.003	-.314**	.135	.496**	.012	.118	.131	-.085	1	
10. LD	-.209*	-.136	-.012	.097	.067	.096	-.404**	.019	.083	1

\* = p < .05; \*\* = p < .01

Note: Dependent variables are bolded

**KEY:**

- 1. SE = SELF EFFICACY**
- 2. EE = EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION**
- 3. PA = PERSONAL ACCOMPLISHMENT**

- 4. SL = SCHOOL LEVEL
- 5. YS = YEARS IN SPED
- 6. YR = YEARS REMAINING IN SPED
- 7. NS = NUMBER OF STUDENTS

- 8. MA = # OF MEETINGS WITH ADMINISTRATOR
- 9. TA = TYPE OF ADMINISTRATOR
- 10. LD = LEARNING DISABILITY

**Research question #2.** What are the constructs that correlate with self-efficacy

in special education teachers? Significant correlations were found among the

dependent variable Self-Efficacy and several of the independent variables, including Emotional Demand (construct variable) ( $r = -.198$ ;  $p < .05$ ), Role Conflict (construct variable) ( $r = -.406$ ;  $p < .01$ ) (note: negative correlations due to lower levels of self-efficacy being correlated to higher levels of emotional demand and role conflict), Quality of Leadership (construct variable) ( $r = .471$ ;  $p < .01$ ), Administrative Support (construct variable) ( $r = .343$ ;  $p < .01$ ), Coworker Support (construct variable) ( $r = .211$ ;  $p < .05$ ), Learning Disability (demographic/job specific variable) ( $r = -.209$ ;  $p < .05$ ), Number of Meetings with an Administrator (demographic/job specific variable) ( $r = .198$ ;  $p < .05$ ) and School Level (demographic/job specific variable) ( $r = -.217$ ;  $p < .05$ ).

Furthermore, the dependent variables of Emotional Exhaustion and Self-Efficacy were significantly correlated with each other ( $r = -.233$ ;  $p < .05$ ). This negative correlation indicates that lowered levels of self-efficacy are indicative of heightened levels of emotional exhaustion among special education teachers.

**Research question #3.** What is the best set of predictors of burnout among special education teachers, as measured by:

- A) Emotional Exhaustion
- B) Personal Accomplishment

Depersonalization was dropped from this research question because preliminary analyses indicated overall low levels of this construct for all subjects. To establish the set of predictors to be entered into the full model for Emotional Exhaustion of special education teachers, the independent variables that were significantly correlated with Emotional Exhaustion were entered into a hierarchical regression analysis. Nine variables in all were entered into the regression analysis.

**Table 9. Hierarchical Regression for Emotional Exhaustion**

Source	$r^2$	$r^2\Delta$	df	F
Teacher Stressors	.390		1	65.910
Teacher Stressors, Emotional Demands	.541	.150	2	60.013***
Teacher Stressors, Emotional Demands, Quality of Leadership	.602	.062	3	50.970***
Teacher Stressors, Emotional Demands, Quality of Leadership, Quantitative Demands	.634	.031	4	43.244**

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

When entering variables into the hierarchical regression, first the demographic/job specific variables were entered followed by the construct variables. The hierarchical regression analysis determined that the variables to be entered into the full model included Quantitative Demands, Emotional Demands, Quality of Leadership, and Teacher Stressors. Results of the hierarchical multiple regression indicated that 63.4% of the variance was accounted for ( $r^2 = .634$ ;  $p < .01$ ), with Teacher Stressors alone accounting for 39.0% of the variance, Emotional Demands accounting for 15.0% of the variance ( $r^2\Delta = .150$ ;  $p < .001$ ), Quality of Leadership accounting for 6.2% of the variance ( $r^2\Delta = .062$ ;  $p < .001$ ), and Quantitative Demands accounting for 3.1% of the variance ( $r^2\Delta = .031$ ;  $p < .01$ ). A summary of the hierarchical regression analysis for Emotional Exhaustion can be seen in Table 9.

Next, the independent variables that were significantly correlated with Personal Accomplishment were entered into a hierarchical regression analysis. The analysis determined that the variables that made up the full model included Quality of Leadership, Quantitative Demands, Administrative Support, and Coworker Support. Results of the hierarchical multiple regression indicated that 34.2% of the variance was accounted for ( $r^2 = .342$ ;

$p < .01$ ), with Quality of Leadership alone accounting for 16.5% of the variance ( $r^2\Delta = .165$ ;  $p < .001$ ), Quantitative Demands accounting for 9.7% of the variance, Administrative Support accounting for 3.5% of the variance ( $r^2\Delta = .035$ ;  $p < .05$ ), and Coworker Support accounting for 4.6% of the variance ( $r^2\Delta = .046$ ;  $p < .005$ ). A summary of the hierarchical regression analysis for Personal Accomplishment can be seen in Table 10.

**Table 10. Hierarchical Regression for Personal Accomplishment**

Source	$r^2$	$r^2\Delta$	df	F
Quantitative Demands	.097		1	11.099
Quantitative Demands, Quality of Leadership	.262	.165	2	18.110***
Quantitative Demands, Quality of Leadership, Administrative Support	.297	.035	3	14.198*
Quantitative Demands, Quality of Leadership, Administrative Support, Coworker Support	.342	.046	4	13.022**

\* $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Research question #4.** What is the best set of predictors of self-efficacy among special education teachers? A hierarchical regression analysis was run to determine the best set of predictors to be entered into the full model for Self-Efficacy of special education teachers. The demographic variables were entered first, and the construct variables were entered next. The hierarchical regression analysis determined that the variables to be entered into the full model included (Specific) Learning Disability, School Level, Number of Meetings with Administrator, Emotional Demands, Role Conflict, and Quality of Leadership. Results of the hierarchical

multiple regression indicated that 31.9% of the variance was accounted for ( $r^2 = .319$ ;  $p < .01$ ), with Learning Disability alone accounting for 4.4% of the variance, School Level accounting for 4.5% of the variance ( $r^2\Delta = .045$ ;  $p < .05$ ), Number of Meetings with Administrator accounting for 3.6% of the variance ( $r^2\Delta = .036$ ;  $p < .05$ ), Emotional Demands accounting for 5.2% of the variance ( $r^2\Delta = .052$ ;  $p < .01$ ), Role Conflict accounting for 8.5% of the variance ( $r^2\Delta = .085$ ;  $p < .001$ ), and Quality of Leadership accounting for 5.8% of the variance ( $r^2\Delta = .058$ ;  $p < .01$ ). A summary of the hierarchical regression analysis for Self-Efficacy can be seen in Table 11.

**Table 11. Hierarchical Regression for Self-Efficacy**

Source	$r^2$	$r^2\Delta$	df	F
Learning Disability (LD)	.044		1	4.689
LD, School Level	.089	.045	2	4.971*
LD, School Level, # of Meetings w/Adm.	.125	.036	3	4.804*
LD, School Level, # of Meetings w/Adm., Emotional Demands	.177	.052	4	5.366**
LD, School Level, # of Meetings w/Adm., Emotional Demands, Role Conflict	.262	.085	5	7.017**
LD, School Level, # of Meetings w/Adm., Emotional Demands, Role Conflict, Quality of Leadership	.319	.058	6	7.665**

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

### Discussion

This study was designed to identify the factors that predict special education teacher burnout. Specifically, emotional exhaustion, level of personal accomplishment, and lowered levels of self-efficacy were examined. The variables in this study included the role of teacher stressors, emotional, quantitative, and cognitive demands, as well as administrative support, collegial support, quality of leadership, role conflict and demographic/job specific factors as potential predictors of special educators' levels of burnout and self-efficacy.

### Emotional Exhaustion

Of the 105 participants, roughly 90% reported moderate to very high overall levels of emotional exhaustion. The results of this study indicated that the best predictors of high levels of emotional exhaustion are high levels of teacher stressors, emotional demands, and quantitative demands, as well as low levels

of quality leadership. It was found that teacher stressors accounted for the most variance (39%) in the full model for emotional exhaustion. This seems like a logical result as stress and emotional exhaustion are highly correlated. Teacher stressors accounted for more than double the amount of variance accounted for by emotional demands. One explanation for this is that the measurement used to assess teacher stressors (EBD-TSQ) addressed very specific stressors that are directly related to the field of special education. For example, some of the stressors included substantial amounts of paperwork to complete, high number of meetings to attend, lack of support from parents, administrators and general education teachers, the need to instruct in many subjects, and working with many students with varying disabilities. This is consistent with the research conducted by Center and Steventon (2001) and Kaff (2004) in which they found some of the most frequent stressors of special



educators to be large caseload numbers, numerous meetings, extreme quantities of paperwork, parental support and interactions, and lack of administrative support. The measurement used to assess emotional demand (COPSOQ) was more general and limited to emotional stressors in the work place not specific to special education teachers. For example, some questions were, 'Does your work put you in emotionally disturbing situations?' and 'Is your work emotionally demanding?'

Emotional demand did account for 15% of the variance of the full model for emotional exhaustion. This also seems logical in that special education teachers' main objective is to educate students with special needs, therefore they are likely to invest a significant amount of emotion into their students' well being. They are likely to feel emotional exhaustion as a result of taking full responsibility for their students' overall academic, social and behavioral progress. This pattern is consistent with the effort-reward imbalance model suggesting that special education teachers may perceive an imbalance between the high effort they put into their jobs and the low rewards they receive in return (Siegrist, 1996). This imbalance is stressful and can lead to negative feelings, decreased self-efficacy and emotional exhaustion. The emotional demands that special educators experience range from external pressure to meet increasing government-imposed standards, administrators, parents, advocates, coworkers and the need to coordinate students' educational services including regular education. In addition, special educators must deal with self-induced internal pressures. These internal pressures may include ensuring that students are making meaningful progress towards their personal goals and objectives,

meeting curriculum standards, reporting feeling happy, making meaningful social connections, and guaranteeing that all team members, including parents, are on the same page and have the students' best interests in mind.

Quantitative demands were also found to play a role in special education teachers' feelings of emotional exhaustion accounting for roughly 3% of the variance from the regression analysis. This also appears to be a logical finding as special education teachers are challenged by increasing responsibilities and tasks. Quantitative demands may include paperwork completion, data collection, curriculum modification, coordination of services, and attendance at meetings. This finding is consistent with the job demand-control model, which proposes that an imbalance exists between the demands on the worker (special educator) and the level of control he/she can exert over those demands (Sale & Kerr, 2002). Therefore, job strain leading to emotional exhaustion is a result of the combination of demands with insufficient ability to take control and make decisions affecting their job. The results of this study indicate that quantitative demands are positively correlated with emotional demands. Therefore, the higher the quantitative demands, the greater the emotional demands.

It is important to note that emotional demands accounted for nearly five times the amount of variance in the full model as quantitative demands. According to Winwood and Lushington (2006), emotional demands are difficult to "turn off;" those demands often have a "spillover" effect for special education teachers after the workday is done into other aspects of their lives. Unlike physical demands, which can usually be terminated

by rest, emotional demands often interfere with rest, which can lead to increased levels of stress and long-term negative effects. Conversely, quantitative demands are more in line with tasks that can be accomplished or checked off of a to-do list and may end when the work day ends. Therefore, while special education teachers often take work home to complete, it is plausible to surmise the emotional stress they are taking home far outweighs the quantitative tasks and negatively impacts their emotional well being. It is probable that this emotional strain will persist throughout the career of a special education teacher, affording slight possibility for relief. These findings are reflective of the review of literature done by Wisniewski and Gargiulo (1997) concluding that feelings of emotional exhaustion and burnout are the result of a combination of stressful aspects involved in the job requirements of a special educator.

Quality of leadership was also a variable that accounted for 6.2% of the variance of the full model for emotional exhaustion and 34% of the participants' reported moderate to low quality of leadership. It was also found that quality of leadership and emotional exhaustion were negatively correlated signifying that the lower the quality of leadership the greater the emotional exhaustion. While the results did not find quality of leadership to be the most significant predictor of emotional exhaustion, it is important to consider the critical role administrators play in the career of a special educator. Administrators have the power to create a positive and supportive environment for all educators. An administrator can be the deciding factor as to whether special educators remain in their current position. If special educators feel well supported, listened to, and have a sense of trust for the administrator,

emotional stress and quantitative stress will most likely lessen. It appears that high levels of teacher stressors, emotional and quantitative demands paired with low quality of leadership creates a recipe for stress, leading towards feelings of emotional exhaustion and burnout for special education teachers.

### **Personal Accomplishment**

In this study, 87% of the participants reported very high to high levels of personal accomplishment. The results of the hierarchical regression indicated that low levels of quantitative demands, as well as high levels of quality of leadership, administrative and coworker support were found to be the best set of predictors of personal accomplishment. It is reasonable to consider that increased quantitative demands are indicative of lower feelings of personal accomplishment. Special education teachers have very limited amounts of time in the school day to complete their increasing number of duties. Planning and collaboration often get pushed aside in order to complete necessary paperwork, data collection, and/or to attend meetings. This leads to extended work hours after the school day is done. Special education teachers may not have adequate time and resources needed to complete their responsibilities within the school day. Therefore, more job-related demands placed on special educators lower feelings of personal accomplishment as teachers are left feeling ineffective and unproductive.

In contrast, quality of leadership and administrative and coworker support were positively correlated with personal accomplishment. The importance of quality of leadership and administrative and coworker support in predicting personal accomplishment appears to be a logical

finding. The better the leadership and the greater the emotional support from administration and coworkers, the more probable that special education teachers will experience greater feelings of personal accomplishment. Quality of leadership was the most substantial predictor of personal accomplishment with 16.5% variance of the full model.

There is a wide body of research concluding that support from administration and district leaders can minimize the levels of stress and burnout experienced by special educators (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013; Fore, et al., 2002; Gersten et al., 2001; Kaff, 2004; Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994; Moses, 2005; Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002; Plash & Piotrowski, 2006; Schnorr, 1995; Schwab, Jackson, & Schuler, 1986). Littrell et al. (1994) found that teachers who received appropriate levels of emotional and informational support from their principals were more satisfied with their jobs and that emotional support (e.g., showing appreciation, taking an interest in teachers' work, maintaining open communication) was perceived as most important to special educators. Special educators who experience high levels of administrative support are more likely to be less stressed, more satisfied with their jobs, and more committed to their career. Schnorr (1995) found that the highest incentive for special educators to remain in their position was a supportive administrator.

Furthermore, Kaff (2004) found that lack of support and respect from administration and regular education teachers were among the major contributors towards their reasons for wanting to leave the field. Therefore, support and respect from administrators and coworkers can positively affect not only

teachers' levels of personal accomplishment, but also their motivation to remain in the field of special education.

### **Self-Efficacy**

Of the 105 participants, only about 50% reported moderate to low levels of self-efficacy. The final hierarchical regression analysis found that high numbers of students with learning disabilities, higher school level (middle and high school), large number of meetings with an administrator, high levels of emotional demand and role conflict were the best set of predictors of lowered levels of self-efficacy. While the full model accounted for 31.9% of the variance, each individual variable only accounted for between 4%-9%. Not one of the variables alone was a strong predictor of self-efficacy among special education teachers. This finding could be reflective of the fact that the participants in this study felt that they have the ability to control, motivate, and help their students in a variety of ways. However, their ability to control, motivate, and help their students is often negatively impacted by a number of variables such as paperwork, meetings, high caseloads, insufficient support from administrators and coworkers, pressure from parents and outside agencies, and new government standards.

In this study, 95% of the participants did report moderate to high levels of self-efficacy. Nevertheless, emotional demands and role conflict were negatively correlated to self-efficacy suggesting that the higher the emotional demands and role conflict, the lower the levels of self-efficacy. Additionally, self-efficacy was negatively correlated with the dependent variable emotional exhaustion, while positively correlated with personal accomplishment. These findings seem to be logical in that the more special educators can relate to

feelings of emotional exhaustion, the more they will experience lower feelings of self-efficacy. Conversely, elevated feelings of personal accomplishment may cause heightened levels of self-efficacy. The research corresponds with this finding, stating that teachers' self-efficacy is negatively correlated to teacher symptoms of stress and burnout (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). Teacher self-efficacy is the belief that one is capable of bringing out preferred outcomes of student learning, progress, and achievement. Furthermore, special educators with higher levels of self-efficacy are more likely to set high goals for students and themselves as teachers (Armor, et al., 1976; Bandura, 1997).

### **Limitations**

There are some limitations in the design of the current study that are worth mentioning. First, the research was conducted in four school districts that were similar in socioeconomic status, ranging from middle to upper class and lacking a diverse population of citizens from a variety of urban, suburban and rural contexts. While the teachers may not live in the towns where they work, this sample is reflective of the budget, supports and resources the participants receive in middle to upper-class school districts. Secondly, respondents may have felt pressure to answer questions in a particular way out of concern that their opinions might be exposed. While the consent form guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, respondents may keep administrative censure in mind, possibly resulting in biased answers. Third, because the measure was a self-report, there is always a concern that responses are answered accurately and truthfully. Some of the responses may be

based on the participants' perceptions of their work environments. Given the lack of conditions controlling for responses, the design inherently applies a risk of dishonest or inaccurate measures.

Also, surveys are used in most studies addressing special education teacher burnout, but few researchers have given special educators an opportunity to discuss the issues that they are faced with in their careers and how these issues play a part in their decisions to leave the field. Qualitative analysis of interviews and focus groups of special education teachers to hear their perspective on the challenges they encounter would provide greater insight into why some special educators burnout and leave the field. Despite the limitations, it is believed that the results of this study will not only increase understanding of the predictors of burnout and self-efficacy for special education teachers, but it will also be useful for school districts, school boards and teacher preparation programs to begin to address these issues.

### **Implications for Future Research**

While there is considerable research on theories and potential causes of burnout and self-efficacy among varying occupations, including regular and special educators, the research is lacking in the interaction of these two concepts. There is also considerably more research on predictors of burnout and stress than research targeting interventions that help to reduce these issues among special educators. This leaves the door open to many possibilities for future research in this area.

To begin, more research should explore burnout and self-efficacy of special educators in more diverse school districts

and communities. This will help to solidify the current research that focuses on special educators who are predominantly White, represent similar educational backgrounds and training, and work in middle to upper class areas. In addition, increased attention should be paid to the education and training pre-service special educators receive. There is limited research dissecting the coursework, materials, resources, and hands-on experiences available to prospective special educators. Research in this arena would allow for changes to be made prior to entering the field to reduce the stress and burnout encountered by many new special education teachers. It would be beneficial for future researchers to utilize the significant predictors of burnout and self-efficacy among special educators to create training methods and professional development opportunities for prospective, as well as current special educators. Doing so may help to alleviate some of the feelings of emotional exhaustion experienced by seasoned special educators, as well as provide incoming special educators with the tools and knowledge needed to manage the stress that the job entails.

Additionally, it would be beneficial for a qualitative analysis to be added to the current research. This would provide an opportunity to examine the specific stressors faced by special educators that foster feelings of emotional exhaustion leading to burnout. Many of the measurements used in the current study are general scales that can be used for a number of occupations, not specific to the field of special education.

Because quality of leadership and administrative support were found to be significant predictors of emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment in

the current study, and are also supported in the literature, further research should focus on the relationship and interaction between administration and special education teachers. It may also be worthwhile for future research to address levels of stress and burnout of special educators experience beyond the school environment in conjunction with the levels of stress and burnout they experience in the school environment.

### **Implications for Practice**

The results of this study offer a basis for educational leaders, teacher preparation programs, and government officials to begin to implement strategies and policies to decrease special education teacher burnout and attrition rates. The most important finding of this study was that the teacher stressor variable was the most significant predictor of emotional exhaustion among the special education teachers who participated in this survey. The teacher stressor variable provides concrete information about the aspects of being a special educator that cause the most stress leading to emotional exhaustion. It might be beneficial for administrators and district leaders to use the results of this study to address issues such as increasing special education teacher responsibilities and pressures, role conflict, time for collaboration with colleagues, the need for administrative and coworker support, and, most importantly, time to educate their students.

In addition, the findings suggest that it might be valuable for administrators to use this information to work on building unified educational communities including general educators, special educators, parents, and other professionals. It would be beneficial for the segregation of general

education and special education to become past practice and for these two educational communities to join together to most appropriately educate all students with special needs. This would help to create supportive, collaborative and effective working environments for special educators. The results of this study have shown that administrative support is a significant predictor of emotional exhaustion and self-efficacy as well as a most substantial predictor of personal accomplishment. These areas must be addressed to ensure that teachers can be effective in their work and provide the best education for their students.

The results of this study should also be considered when designing special educator training programs. Currently, there are few, if any, components of training programs that address the challenges and stress that come with the career. It would be beneficial for these programs to focus on teaching special educators how to manage issues such as daily stressors, emotional exhaustion, role conflict, and lack of support from administrators and colleagues.

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